

Cherchez la Femme

Franz Rheinhardt Wise

"CHERCHEZ LA FEMME"

FADE IN:

The SOUNDS of a bustling city FADE IN.

TITLES BEGIN

LOUIS (V.O.)

Numb to life and to dreams and with
nothing more to hope for and no
desires, I have finally come to make my
confession.

EXT. BALTIMORE (2009) – DAY

The hustle and the bustle of the city FADES IN -- people,
dressed in vividly colored clothing, move about like
automatons, oblivious to their surroundings.
The CAMERA ZOOMS OUT.

LOUIS (V.O.)

But why did you not speak up earlier?
you ask.

(beat)

My defense was untenable. Besides, I
was left so shattered by the events in
which I found myself, that the prospect
of living a cloistered life seemed like
a pleasant one.

(beat)

I neither denied nor confessed to the
charges filed against me and I quickly
learned that silence gives consent.

(beat)

When you have endured the worst
suffering, nothing can ever make you
suffer again.

And when you know the most intense of
feelings, nothing can ever make you
feel again.

The fact is that very few people have
experienced such a culminating moment.
And those who have either join the
ranks of the living dead or become one
of the disenchanting persons who all too
often end it all by taking their own
lives.

The CAMERA ZOOMS through a window and into a starkly lit room shelved with books. LOUIS, a man in his late 30's, comes into view. He is motionless, sitting at a table, a pencil in his hand.

LOUIS (V.O.)

And the truth is -- everyone hopes for such a moment of enlightenment.

(beat)

But enough of these speculations.

Slowly, Louis looks up and at the CAMERA.

LOUIS

I will say it again, on my word of honor, that what I set down here is the truth. Whether you believe my story is unimportant.

The SCREEN FADES to BLACK

LOUIS (V.O.)

My confession is merely a statement of fact.

TITLES END

EXT. NEW YORK CITY (1998) -- EVENING -- CAFÉ

The CAMERA tilts down from a midnight blue sky to the New York skyline to an inviting Manhattan café.

Conversations FADE IN.

Several people, including Louis and GERARD, an attractive man in his late 20's, sit at an outside table. Gerard turns to Louis.

GERARD

You know Louis... I never possess my lovers... they possess me.

Louis looks at Gerard.

INT. LOUIS'S KITCHEN -- MORNING

Louis sits at the kitchen table. The table is blanketed with dictionaries, rough drafts of screenplays, and loose papers -- all meticulously organized.

Louis, lost in thought, stares out the window.

Suddenly, the silence is broken by the sound of the door BUZZER. Louis, torn from his solitude, gets up and walks over to the intercom and BUZZES open the door. Louis unlocks the door, walks back to the kitchen, and pours himself another cup of coffee. The apartment door opens.

GERARD (O.S.)

Louis?

LOUIS

I'm in the kitchen.

Gerard appears in the doorway to the kitchen; Gerard is smiling.

LOUIS

You're 'on' this morning.

GERARD

Nothing more than usual.

(beat)

Well, maybe so.

LOUIS

A cup of coffee?

GERARD

Sure... Thank you.

Louis pours a cup of coffee and hands it to Gerard. Gerard takes a sip.

GERARD

Well, aren't you going to ask me?

LOUIS

Ask you what?

GERARD

Why I am so 'on'?

LOUIS

(smiling)

No.

(beat)

All right.

(beat)

Well?

GERARD

Oh, Louis. I met the most interesting woman last night. She's wealthy, lives in a loft of her own design in SoHo, and has a cottage on Fire Island.

Louis, not impressed, takes a sip of coffee.

LOUIS

Oh, Gerard, come on. You're a good-looking man living in New York. Of course you're going to meet interesting women.

GERARD

Louis, you don't understand.

(beat)

She's enchanting.

(beat)

And the man who introduced us was that artist with the yellow-tinted spectacles.

Gerard pauses and looks at Louis.

GERARD

You know who I mean?

(beat)

Shit, I can't remember his name. I think it begins with a 'J.'

Louis shrugs his shoulders.

LOUIS

I don't know.

GERARD

Anyway, the enchantress can be seen every afternoon at the Russian Tea Room.

(beat)

And I'd like you to meet her. You'll see what I mean -- she is one fascinating woman.

What are your plans tomorrow?

EXT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT BUILDING — DAY

It's a clear, sunny, beautiful day. Gerard arrives in front of the building and RINGS the buzzer.

LOUIS (O.S.)

Hello?

GERARD

Louis, it's Gerard.

LOUIS (O.S.)

I'll be down in a minute.

Gerard turns around to catch the sunlight.
Louis walks out of the building.

LOUIS

Hello Gerard -- it's certainly a beautiful day.

GERARD

Yes, yes it is and it's going to get more beautiful.

(beat)

Are you ready to meet destiny?

LOUIS

(shrugging his shoulders)

Destiny?

(beat)

Sure, why not?

Gerard hails a taxi, a taxi pulls over, and the two men climb inside. The taxi drives off and mixes in with the New York traffic.

EXT. RUSSIAN TEA ROOM -- DAY -- ESTABLISHING

The taxi pulls up and Gerard and Louis step out and enter the restaurant.

INT. RUSSIAN TEA ROOM -- DAY

The restaurant is busy. A waiter, carrying a tray of two teapots, approaches Gerard and Louis, who are sitting at a two-top table, and places the teapots in front of the two men. Gerard and Louis begin to pour their tea when Gerard notices a group of people walk into the restaurant. Gerard nudges Louis's arm and the two men look at the group -- three women and two men. Of the women, two are identical twins and the third, RADHA, is tall and thin, with a long face and extraordinary red hair. Louis, on seeing Radha, is intrigued and fearful -- her beauty is breathtaking and dangerous.

The twins and the two men -- JULES, the man with yellow-tinted glasses, and EMIL -- follow Radha to a "Reserved" table. Radha, before sitting down, recognizes Gerard and saunters over to greet him.

RADHA

(arms outstretched)

Hey honey, it's so good to see you.

(beat)

Why only yesterday, someone was singing your praises.

(thinking)

Ah... that provocative poet.

(beat)

Richard Lovegrove.

GERARD

Oh! I didn't know that he was in New York.

Gerard looks at Louis. Louis notices that Radha is looking at him -- there is an obvious sexual tension between Louis and Radha.

GERARD

(to Louis)

Do you know him?

(beat)

He wrote the poem, *Cinders*.

LOUIS

Yes, I know of Richard Lovegrove but I have never met him.

Which is a bit strange considering we're both from Baltimore.

(beat)

I certainly admire his writing.

GERARD

(jealously)

I'm sure you do. But as you know, I find his style of writing distinctly passé. It holds no interest to me. Give me post, post modern any day.

LOUIS

You can have your post, post dribble -- I'll stick with the classics.

RADHA

Oh, gentlemen... What have I started?

(beat)

Let's continue this conversation at my table.

(beat)

What do you say?

GERARD

What a lovely idea.

Gerard looks at Louis; Louis gives an affirming nod.

GERARD

Thank you, Radha.

RADHA

(looking at Louis)

And who's this?

GERARD

Oh, how rude of me. I'm sorry. This is Louis, a dear friend of mine.

(to Louis)

Louis, this is Radha.

Louis and Radha shake hands.

LOUIS

Pleased to meet you.

RADHA

The pleasure is all mine.

Radha turns to walk towards her table and then stops and looks back at Gerard and Louis.

RADHA

Well?

GERARD

We'll be right over.

Gerard makes a sweeping 'pay the bill' gesture with his hand.

GERARD

(continuing)

We have to settle up first.

Radha walks back to her table; Louis and Gerard watch her.

INT. RUSSIAN TEA ROOM – DAY (LATER)

Radha sits next to the twins, Jules and Emil sit next to each other and Louis and Gerard complete the circle. Gerard is monopolizing the conversation.

GERARD

Don't take my word for it -- read Zizek's analysis of *The Matrix*.

Gerard looks over at Louis; the table is silent.

GERARD

You know, Louis, some have said that going around with me is an art in itself -- a difficult, exhausting art.

(beat)

And I know the reason -- it's because I'm always thinking.

LOUIS

Yeah, and talking about thinking.

GERARD

Touché, touché.

INT. RUSSIAN TEA ROOM – DAY (LATER)

The table is focused on Gerard.

GERARD

Actors, even the greatest actors, are nothing more than flesh covered puppets -- mere intellectuals who have learned their parts. True art exists only among acrobats -- cold, calculating movements devoid of sensuality.

Jules looks at Radha; Radha is losing patience.

JULES

Oh, you're so wrong.

(beat)

What do you think, Emil?

EMIL

How can we talk about art without discussing sensuality?

Radha stands up to address the table.

GERARD

I will tell you.

RADHA

Sensuality, my dear Gerard, is an art.

(beat)

Possibly the most beautiful of all the arts.

Gerard succumbs to Radha's power.

RADHA

Imagine trembling with waves of
pleasure,
Ecstasies of fire, aflame with longing.
The senses: the same for all, all are
pure;
Wet kisses, moist caresses, flesh
tingling.
What wonderful works could be created
With sensuality as raw matter.
Fire, light, air, water: all beings
tended;
Unexplored desires becoming greater.
I would be proud to be that new artist.
Your flesh would feel the air, the
light, the fire;
Your soul would sense the magic, the
bliss.
Gaze upon the flames and feel the
desire.
A feeling of sexual excitement.
A knowing of the true abandonment.

The group is awestruck.

RADHA

Believe me, my friends, however
refined, however complicated and
however much the artist you all pretend
to be, you are, in fact, mere savages.

GERARD

Savages?

(beat)

You almost had me with your eloquence
but I must stand firm -- sensuality is
not an art.

(beat)

Asceticism and self-denial, yes, but
sensuality raised to the level of an
art form? That's truly a banal idea.

A swooning couple enters the restaurant, breaking the tension at the table. Radha looks at her entourage and gives a signal -- her entourage stands up and follows her to the door. Radha stops, bows to Louis and Gerard, and walks out of the restaurant. Louis notices that Radha is wearing Indian sandals and that her toenails are painted gold.

LOUIS

(under his breath)

Wow!

(to Gerard)

What was that all about?

GERARD

Nothing really.

(beat)

Radha and I have been carrying on like this for years.

(beat)

Actually, I agree with her for the most part but for the sake of keeping the conversation moving along, I play devil's advocate.

LOUIS

I'd say.

(beat)

You certainly moved it along.

(beat)

Oh, by the way, did you notice her toes? They were painted gold.

GERARD

Yes, I noticed -- she's gold through and through.

EXT. SUBWAY ENTRANCE -- DAY

Louis and Gerard approach the entrance to the subway.

GERARD

So, Louis, what did you think of Radha?

LOUIS

I agree with you -- she's very interesting.

GERARD

I told you so. But you probably don't go for that kind of woman. I understand. You are of a simple nature... a 'savage,' so to speak.

LOUIS

Simple nature, savage... on the contrary. I admire women like Radha. I found her to be very enchanting.

GERARD

Louis... you are so sensitive.

(beat)

As for my take on Radha... I adore such creatures. I feel immense tenderness towards them, an extraordinary affinity...

As I do for pederasts, prostitutes...

(ashamed)

Oh, Louis... What am I saying?

Louis is concerned.

LOUIS

Gerard... It's not about them; it's about the art.

GERARD

No. It's about the artist. The artist does not reveal himself in his work; he reveals himself in his personality. The object created is of little importance. An artist must be interesting and brilliant in his physical appearance -- that's true art and the role of a true artist.

Gerard pauses and puts his hand on Louis's shoulder.

GERARD

Because, Louis, giving the name artist and genius to any painter of the post Pop school is simply wrong -- it's neither fair nor should it be permitted.

LOUIS

But, what about...

GERARD

Stop, before you start naming names,
let me say two words: 'Andy Warhol.'
He may have been a 'factory' artist but
he was also a man of great passion.
Andy Warhol was a true character, and
hence, a great artist.

LOUIS

And on that note... I'll call you
tomorrow.

Louis and Gerard shake hands.

GERARD

Goodbye Louis... And don't let those
gold toes haunt you.

LOUIS

(chuckling)

I won't. Gerard, you're a real
character.

Louis and Gerard part ways and Louis enters the subway
tunnel.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Louis is lying in bed; he is drifting off to sleep.

GERARD (O.S.)

Don't let those gold toes haunt you.

INT. RUSSIAN TEA ROOM - DAY

Radha is reciting her sonnet; Gerard, holding Radha's foot
in his hands, is sucking her toes. Gold colored feathers,
falling from the ceiling, blanket the table.
The phone RINGS.

BACK TO SCENE

Louis wakes up, reaches for the phone, and misses the call.
The phone RINGS again.

LOUIS

Hello?

GERARD (O.S.)

Louis, it's Gerard. Did I wake you?

LOUIS

Yes, but that's okay. Are you all right?

GERARD (O.S.)

I couldn't be better.

(beat)

I just got off the phone with our interesting friend, Radha.

(beat)

You remember her, don't you?

LOUIS

Gerard, don't be silly.

GERARD

I'm just kidding. Anyway, She's throwing a party next Thursday and we're invited.

LOUIS

Are you going?

GERARD

Yes, of course.

(beat)

It should be interesting.

LOUIS

And the two women at the table? -- Will they be there?

GERARD

I'm sure they will be. They are her lovers. Radha is a follower of Sappho.

LOUIS

Sappho, huh? Why does that not surprise me?

GERARD

Radha also said that there would be a performance at the end of the party -- a dance, an apotheosis of sorts.

(beat)

Are you interested?

I know how that sort of thing bores you.

LOUIS

Gerard, let me be the decider of what bores me.

(beat)

I'd love to go.

GERARD

Well, how about we meet at Fanelli's this Thursday?

LOUIS

Sounds good. What time?

GERARD

Ten?

LOUIS

I'll see you then. Good night, Gerard.

GERARD

Good night, Louis.

(beat)

Oh, and again, don't let those gold toes haunt you.

LOUIS

Enough with the gold toes, already. Good night, Gerard.

Louis hangs up the phone; he is uncomfortable with his decision to go to the party.

INT./EXT. FANELLI'S BAR — EVENING

A taxi pulls up and stops, Louis gets out and enters the bar. The bar is crowded and noisy. Gerard, sitting at the bar, turns to greet Louis. Louis is apprehensive.

GERARD

Louis...

LOUIS

Hello, Gerard.

GERARD

What are you drinking?

LOUIS

I'll have a water... ah, never mind.
I'm fine.

GERARD

Louis? What's wrong?
(beat)
You don't want to go, do you?

LOUIS

I don't know.

GERARD

Well, maybe I can help you change your
mind.

LOUIS

Yeah? How?

GERARD

Richard Lovegrove. He's also invited
to Radha's soiree and... he's meeting
us here.

LOUIS

Richard Lovegrove?

RICHARD LOVEGROVE walks into the bar and notices Gerard.

GERARD

Speak of the devil.
(beat)
Richard.

RICHARD

Hello, Gerard.

GERARD

It's good to see you again.

RICHARD

You too.

GERARD

I'd like you to meet a dear friend of
mine -- Louis Turner.

Gerard gestures to Louis.

GERARD

Louis Turner -- Richard Lovegrove.

LOUIS
Hello, it's a pleasure to meet you.

Louis and Richard shake hands.

RICHARD
The pleasure's all mine.

GERARD
Well, should we go?

RICHARD
Sure.

Gerard finishes his drink and the three men leave the bar.

EXT. SOHO STREET – EVENING

The three men are walking down the street. Louis and Richard are conversing; Gerard falls behind to listen to the two men.

RICHARD
I just finished reading your most recent volume of short stories and... *Blinking Deities* is... is sublime.

LOUIS
Thank you and coming from you... I'm honored.

RICHARD
Don't ever underestimate yourself.
(beat)
Talent recognizes talent.
How else would explain this?

Richard gestures towards the line of people outside of a SoHo loft building. Gerard makes his way through the crowd and presents to the doorman two invitations -- Richard presents his own -- and the three men, bypassing the crowd, enter the building.

INT. RADHA'S LOFT BUILDING – HALLWAY

The three men walk down the hall and are greeted by a second doorman, who directs them to an elevator. The elevator door opens and the three men enter. The doorman pushes the button and the elevator door closes.

INT. ELEVATOR/INT. ELLIPTICAL ROOM

Gerard and Richard are enthusiastic; Louis is becoming uncomfortable.

LOUIS

Have either one of you been here before?

GERARD

Yes, several times.

RICHARD

You too?

Before Gerard can respond, the elevator door opens onto a crowded elliptical room. The ceiling is a gilded cupola supported by columns and the floor is blanketed with gold colored sand. The three men walk out of the elevator and into the diverse, well-dressed crowd. Immediately, the crowd responds to Gerard, who saunters through the crowd and climbs the stairs of a sphinx supported stage. Louis and Richard follow Gerard.

RICHARD

More proof of what I said earlier.

(beat)

Stop questioning yourself.

(beat)

You are part of 'something' greater than you and your doubts.

LOUIS

It's still scary.

RICHARD

Of course it is. You wouldn't have it any other way.

(beat)

The trick is to shake hands with fear and to make it work for you.

LOUIS

I never looked at it that way.

The three men traverse the stage and walk down a flight of pink marble steps and enter several galleries surrounding a semicircular swimming pool full of translucent water. As they enter the amphitheatre, the MUSIC of a big band playing Mingus FADES IN.

Radha, on seeing Gerard, saunters over to the three men.

RADHA

Hello gentlemen. I'm so pleased you could make it.

GERARD

We wouldn't miss it for the world.

RADHA

So, what do you think?
Tonight marks this room's debut.
(looking around the room)
Actually, we put the final touches on the room this very morning.

GERARD

I'm impressed.

LOUIS

It certainly is mesmerizing.
(beat)
Richard, what do you think?

RICHARD

I'd have to agree.

RADHA

Thank you.
(smiling mysteriously)
I want to know your opinions about what happens later on... especially the lights.

Radha drifts away to greet her other guests. The three men watch her leave, look at each other.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) Couples dancing.
- B) Gamblers gambling.
- C) Diners dining including Richard, Louis, and Gerard.

INT. DINING ROOM

Richard, Louis, and Gerard are finishing dinner; Radha appears.

RADHA

Gentlemen...
Is the food satisfactory?
(looking at Gerard)
Sensual?

GERARD

Yes, but I wouldn't use the word
'sensual' to describe it.

RADHA

Oh, really?

Radha leans over and whispers into Gerard's ear; Richard moves in closer to Louis.

RICHARD

What's going on there?

GERARD

(to Radha)

Radha, you're right... the food is
sensual. I'd even say artful.

LOUIS

(to Richard)

You are witnessing an aesthetic shift
in our friend... whether he likes it or
not.

GERARD

(to Louis)

Hey, I heard that. Don't you worry;
I'm not that easy.

RADHA

Gentlemen...
Now, now... let's be patient... for
after supper comes my performance.
(beat)
And my triumph!
(beat)
I've summarized in it all of my ideas
about sensuality as an art: the lights,
the bodies, the smells, the fire, the
water -- everything will come together
in an orgy of flesh distilled into
gold.

Radha turns to leave, stops, and looks and waves at Louis.

RADHA

See you soon.

Radha walks away. Louis is uneasy.

RICHARD

(To Louis)

Whew! What was that all about?

LOUIS

I don't know.

GERARD

She's put a spell on you.

LOUIS

I think you're right.

(beat)

Maybe I should go?

GERARD

Go? Go where?

People begin to file past the men and towards the amphitheatre. Gerard stands up and motions to Richard and Louis to follow him.

GERARD

Come on, it would be rude for us not to see her performance.

Richard stands up and puts his hand on Louis's shoulder.

RICHARD

He's right. What's the worst thing that can happen?

LOUIS

(shrugging his shoulders)

I don't know.

RICHARD

Nothing! Nothing is the worst thing that can happen.

Richard smiles. Louis gives a look, stands up, and joins Richard and Gerard and the throng of people entering the amphitheatre.

INT. AMPHITHEATRE

Gerard and Richard enter the eclipse shaped room. Louis is right behind them. Richard notices Louis's reluctance and tries to coax him. Gerard continues on without them.

RICHARD

Oh, Louis. It's just a performance.

LOUIS

I know...

RICHARD

Well, if you decide to leave, please give me a heads up... I'll join you.

LOUIS

Thank you, Richard.

Richard and Louis walk together and find a good vantage point to watch the performance.

The room is filled to capacity and a fog, illuminated by multicolored lights, moves around and through the audience; the audience is transfixed.

The MUSIC changes from Mingus to Glass.

The curtain rises on the Aurora stage, revealing three partially naked women dancers. The dance begins with the three women kissing each other hard on the mouth and slowly moving to the music and as the tempo increases, so the dancers' movements. The dance and the music end suddenly and the three women collapse entangled together, in a frenzy of desire.

The curtain falls and the MUSIC of Ellington FADES IN.

The lights focus on the pool and naked male swimmers appear chasing each other, mimicking the erotic nature of the water. The swimmers disperse and the MUSIC ends.

The lights shift the focus onto the Aurora stage; the curtain rises onto an South Indian themed set with a large hearth; Carnatic MUSIC FADES IN.

Suddenly, Radha, painted gold and wrapped in a burlap tunic, appears and motions to the audience -- the audience carefully applauds. Radha motions again and all is SILENT. The MUSIC FADES IN again and Radha begins to dance, the MUSIC conforming to her movements.

Carefully, Radha removes her tunic, revealing her gold painted body. She dances over to the hearth and as she gets closer to the flames, the fire responds and grows in intensity. Radha tries to dance with the flames but she is driven away. The audience responds to the love affair. Defeated, Radha wraps herself in the tunic, allowing one breast to be exposed.

Suddenly, the pool is illuminated with blue colored light and Radha, in a culminating, convulsive motion, dives into the pool. As Radha sinks to the bottom, the light turns from blue to blood red and gold colored feathers fall onto the audience.

Radha, motionless and facedown, floats to the surface and the amphitheatre's lights go out except for the illuminated arrows directing people to the exits. The people, shocked and awed, make their way to the doors.

EXT. RADHA'S LOFT — EVENING

People, mesmerized by the apotheosis, trip out of the building. Several cabs, lined-up on the cobblestone street, are quickly occupied.

Richard and Louis step outside and stand in silence. Richard looks at Louis.

RICHARD

Are you all right?

LOUIS

(taking a deep breath)

Yeah, I wasn't expecting that.

RICHARD

I don't think anyone was.

LOUIS

(looking around)

Where's Gerard?

RICHARD

Something tells me that he's on his own.

(beat)

But we can wait, if you like?

LOUIS

Yeah, just for a moment.

(beat)

Ah, hell with it. Let's go.

Richard and Louis start walking down the street.

RICHARD
Are you up for a drink?

LOUIS
I'd like to but I'm shot.

RICHARD
I know the feeling.
(beat)
Maybe this weekend?

LOUIS
Most definitely.
(beat)
Richard, I am very happy that we met
each other.
(beat)
And on a most memorable evening.

RICHARD
Pleasure to meet you as well.

Richard and Louis shake hands and Louis hails a cab. A cab pulls up next to the two men.

LOUIS
See you soon.

RICHARD
How can I get in touch with you?

LOUIS
Gerard has my number.

RICHARD
Cool.
(beat)
I'll call you.

Louis gets into the cab; the cab drives off. Richard watches the cab disappear into the city.

INT. ROOM (2009) – DAY

Louis, still looking at the CAMERA, pauses for a moment before returning his attention to the pad of paper and to the writing of his confession.

LOUIS (V.O.)

Within a month, Richard and I had become not merely inseparable companions but close and sincere friends.

(beat)

As for my long association with Gerard, that ceased the night of the Radha's "Happening" and the word on the street was that he moved back to Seattle.

(beat)

Oh, how different life was with Richard and how different we were from Gerard.

(beat)

Ah, the statements Gerard used to make!

INT. GERARD'S STUDIO (1998) – EVENING

Gerard is standing in front of one his cold paintings of human torsos. Louis is reclining in a chair.

GERARD

You can't imagine how it hurts me that people don't like my work.

(beat)

But don't think I feel sorry for myself...

I know my work is good.

I feel sorry for them -- those poor creatures -- the neophytes who fail to recognize beauty, true beauty.

INT. FANELLI'S – DAY

Louis and Gerard are sitting at the bar, by the window.

GERARD

Louis -- it's time for you to stop pandering to the 'man.'

The true artist should keep his work out of the public eye for as long as possible.

Look at me, for example.

Have you ever known me to have an exhibition?

(MORE)

GERARD (CONT'D)

(beat)

As for you and your writing? You should publish only limited editions and sell them for thousands of dollars a piece.

(beat)

Publicity? Who needs it? Certainly not a true artist.

BACK TO SCENE

Louis is busy writing, stops, and speaks to the CAMERA.

LOUIS

My conversations with Richard, on the other hand, were, from the start, conversations from the soul.

(beat)

For the first time, I met someone capable of descending into the unvisited recesses of my spirit -- a place sensitive and sometimes painful. And he felt the same way towards me.

EXT. SUNSET PARK, BROOKLYN (1998) – SUNSET

Louis and Richard are sitting on a park bench.

RICHARD

I used to allow myself to daydream and for those brief moments, I would feel happy.

(beat)

But no longer.

LOUIS

Richard... dreaming is what keeps us viable.

RICHARD

I agree but... I've already built my cloud castles...

Richard gestures to the Manhattan skyline.

RICHARD

(continuing)

And I'm tired of them.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)
 (pointing to the sunset)
 Even that... bores me.

LOUIS
 What? A sublime sunset setting behind
 a magnificent city?
 (beat)
 You must be kidding?

RICHARD
 No, no I'm not.
 (beat)
 Not only does all of this bore me...
 I'm even bored by what I do not
 possess.

LOUIS
 That doesn't make any sense. How can
 you be bored with what you do not know?

RICHARD
 Louis, it's quite simple.
 (beat)
 If I occasionally suffer because I
 don't possess certain things that have
 not, as yet, become all too familiar, I
 immediately see, that if I had them, my
 pain, my tedium, would be even greater.
 (beat)
 So, wasting time is now my aim in life.
 If I travel, if I write, if I think, I
 do these things to use up my minutes.
 (beat)
 And funny enough, I'm starting to feel
 it happening to me right now, as I
 speak.
 (beat)
 I'm becoming cynical.

LOUIS
 Becoming? Richard, the future is
 bright. You are a wonderful writer and
 these doubts go with the territory but
 you can't allow these musings to
 destroy the beauty that surrounds you.

RICHARD
 I truly appreciate your tenderness but
 let's not talk about the future.
 (MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(beat)

Look, Louis, up until now I've never been able to see myself in the future. And I know that the things I can't see won't happen.

Louis is dumbfounded. A silence is created. Richard notices that Louis is becoming uncomfortable.

RICHARD

Louis, I'm sorry.

LOUIS

No need to apologize... it's just that I'm concerned. I've never heard you speak this way before.

RICHARD

You have no need to worry. At least I felt comfortable enough with you to bear my soul.

(beat)

Can I make a suggestion?

LOUIS

Sure.

RICHARD

Let's continue this conversation at Fanelli's.

LOUIS

Yes, let's... I could use a drink.

Richard and Louis get up and exit the park.

INT. FANELLI'S - EVENING

The bar is empty and the BARTENDER is counting the money in the register. Louis and Richard are sitting at the bar, by the window.

RICHARD

Perhaps you don't understand.

LOUIS

Please continue... maybe I do and maybe I can help you through it.

RICHARD

Thank you, Louis.

(beat)

Can I offer you another drink?

LOUIS

Sure... I think I'm allowed one more.

RICHARD

(to the bartender)

Excuse me!

The bartender turns around from the till and gives Richard a sarcastic look.

RICHARD

Can we order another round?

BARTENDER

(with a British accent)

I'm closing and... you're infringing on my beauty sleep.

RICHARD

I thought that went with the territory.

The Bartender walks over to the two men, picks up their glasses, and pours them two more beers. Richard returns his attention to Louis; the bartender brings over the drinks including a shot of Jagermeister for himself.

BARTENDER

That round's on me.

The three men 'cheers' and the bartender gulps down his drink and returns to the register.

RICHARD

Louis, I've been doing it ever since I was a child.

LOUIS

Doing what?

RICHARD

Well, when I'd think about situations I could get involved in, I'd look ahead and I'd either see myself in those situations or I would not.

LOUIS

That's pretty common.

RICHARD

Except for one difference... I've never been able to see myself in life... in any of its aspects.

LOUIS

Richard, now you're starting to lose me.

RICHARD

Oh, Louis, it's quite simple.

(beat)

In my childish imagination I used to dream, to create a thousand wonderful, heroic adventures... Except that I never saw myself actually experiencing those adventures later on.

LOUIS

That's not uncommon, Richard.

RICHARD

Maybe, but it's more strange than that.

(beat)

I have never "seen" myself in any of these delightful episodes. Not as a participant and not even as a spectator.

LOUIS

And now?

RICHARD

Yes, even now.

(beat)

I cannot imagine myself participating in everyday life.

(beat)

I'm twenty-seven and I have yet to earn a living from my work.

I've never managed to enter into life, into ordinary life with a capital 'L.'

(beat)

I'm an outsider, an outcast.

LOUIS

Richard, what are you talking about?
You are respected as a person, as a
writer. I have never heard a bad word
spoken about you.

RICHARD

That may be true but that does not
nullify what I've been saying.

(beat)

I have never seen myself belonging
anywhere.

(beat)

And what is even more horrifying is
that if I can't 'see' a particular
project that I feel keen to undertake,
how can I carry it out?

I may even think the idea is worth my
attention... but then what?

LOUIS

It sounds like you are in a rut. It
happens. You must ride it out. This
too will pass.

RICHARD

I hope so, except...

LOUIS

Except what?

RICHARD

That what I'm experiencing is similar,
albeit in reverse, to déjà vu.

LOUIS

That's an interesting idea.

RICHARD

You may not understand what these two
ideas have in common and I'm not sure
if I can explain it but I'm certain
there's a connection.

LOUIS

You had me there for a moment but now I
think you are trying to confuse me.

RICHARD

Louis, I wouldn't dare do that. I feel very comfortable with you and as I have said before, I'm now not afraid to bare my soul.

LOUIS

I appreciate your candidness.

The bartender comes over to Richard and Louis.

BARTENDER

Hey, fellas, it's that time.

Louis and Richard finish their drinks.

LOUIS

(to bartender)

Thank you.

RICHARD

Yeah, thank you.

BARTENDER

Good night, gentlemen.

Richard and Louis leave the bar.

EXT. FANELLI'S — EVENING

Richard and Louis are standing outside the bar on a beautiful evening. The conversation continues.

RICHARD

But I haven't revealed to you the strangest part of my story.

(beat)

I cannot imagine myself growing old, just as I cannot imagine myself ill or dying.

(beat)

Nor can I imagine committing suicide.

(beat)

So great is my confidence in this superstition that, were I not absolutely sure that we all must die, I swear I would not believe in my own death, because I cannot see myself dead.

LOUIS

Richard, you had me worried there for a moment but you were able to turn your story around and leave it on an up note.

(beat)

A sign of a true artist.

RICHARD

Louis, I was speaking from the heart.

LOUIS

I know. I would never doubt your sincerity.

RICHARD

Thank you.

(beat)

What are your plans tomorrow?

LOUIS

I was thinking of going to the Met. Interested?

RICHARD

I'd love to.

(beat)

What time?

LOUIS

Earlier the better.

RICHARD

Ten... On the steps?

LOUIS

Sounds good.

(beat)

I'll see you then.

Louis and Richard hug.

RICHARD

Thank you for today.

LOUIS

My pleasure. Good night, Richard.

(beat)

And sweet dreams.

Louis and Richard go their separate ways.

EXT. METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART – MORNING

Louis, sitting on the steps, is writing in a journal.
Tourists climb the stairs to the museum's entrance.
Richard appears and approaches Louis.

RICHARD

Good morning.

Louis stands up to greet Richard.

LOUIS

Good morning.

Louis starts to climb the stairs; Richard hesitates and Louis stops.

LOUIS

Richard?

(beat)

Do you not want to go in?

RICHARD

I thought I did but...

(looking around)

It's such a beautiful day.

LOUIS

Yeah, I agree.

RICHARD

Let's take a walk through the park.

LOUIS

That's a great idea.

Richard and Louis descend the stairs.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK – GRAND CONCOURSE – MORNING

Richard and Louis are walking.

RICHARD

Louis, I guarantee you that all the ideas that appear in my work, however strange, however impossible, are all, at least in part, genuine.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(beat)

In other words, I translate into words the emotions I have felt; ideas I have had about certain aspects of my own psychology.

All that happens arrives in the world already fictionalized.

LOUIS

Richard, you are a writer and you see the world through a writer's eyes.

(beat)

Besides, I have never questioned the integrity of your work.

RICHARD

I know.

Louis and Richard approach the Grand Concourse and on the stage is a dance troupe. Also on the stage is a chicken coop full of chickens.

Louis and Richard stop to watch the dancers and the chickens.

RICHARD

Tell me, Louis, are you ever prey to sudden, mad inexplicable fears?

LOUIS

No, not really.

RICHARD

Well, I am. Do you want to know something? I am afraid of those dancers.

Louis laughs, Richard turns away and Louis follows him.

LOUIS

Richard?

RICHARD

Don't mock me.

LOUIS

I'm not mocking you.

(beat)

What's going on?

RICHARD

Do you promise not to laugh?

LOUIS

I promise.

RICHARD

Did you notice that those dancers were all the same? -- the same costumes, the same legs, the same unremarkable features, the same air about them?

(beat)

How can I think of them as individuals? Do they have separate lives? -- lovers, pasts, habits, personality traits?

(beat)

I cannot disentangle the individual from the group.

(beat)

And that's what frightens me.

LOUIS

I understand.

RICHARD

Do you?

LOUIS

Yes. But, I do not fear them.

Richard and Louis approach a tunnel and Richard stops and stares into the darkness. Louis stops and looks at Richard.

LOUIS

Richard?

RICHARD

Louis, I have many fears.

(beat)

Many phobias.

Louis points at the tunnel.

LOUIS

Is this one of them?

RICHARD

No.

Richard, leading the way, enters the darkness of the tunnel; Louis follows him.

RICHARD

(continuing)

More like the fear of the arches of triumph -- like the one in Washington Square Park.

(beat)

It's not really the arch itself; it's the empty space that the arch frames.

(beat)

I still remember the mysterious feeling of terror I felt when I discovered at the end of a lovely road a small arch - - or rather a doorway that opened onto the infinite.

(beat)

The road was on an incline and the monument of triumph stood at the top of it, and so that from a distance, the only thing you could see was the sky through the arch.

(beat)

Louis, I wanted to continue on that road, to pass through that arch, but as I approached the emptiness, my courage failed me and I fled, terrified.

LOUIS

Where did this occur?

RICHARD

Honestly, I can't recall. The terror was so intense, that I blocked out the location -- forever.

LOUIS

Have you thought about seeing a therapist?

RICHARD

Yes, of course I have.

LOUIS

And?

RICHARD

I've come to realize that a therapist would be baffled by my brilliance and soon look to me for psychological guidance.

LOUIS

Do you really believe that?

RICHARD

Partially.

(beat)

Louis... I'm also troubled by the sky above many New York streets -- those narrow streets lined with tall buildings that suddenly open up to reveal tight arcs of sky.

LOUIS

That's most of Manhattan.

RICHARD

I know. I know.

(beat)

I'm terrified of the sky above this city.

LOUIS

Richard, you need a break from here -- New York is suffocating you.

RICHARD

Maybe you're right. The city is getting to me. But I've learned that from annoyance sometimes comes enlightenment.

LOUIS

Really?

RICHARD

Yes, really.

(beat)

And while we were watching that dance troupe, I discovered the fundamental reason for my suffering... And I saw it in those chickens, those poor cooped-up, sleep deprived creatures.

(beat)

And each time they tried to sleep; those fucking dancers jarred those chickens awake.

(beat)

My soul is like those poor creatures -- it is constantly being torn from sleep. All my soul wants to do is to sleep but dancing feet and clamorous voices keep waking it up.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

Those powerful longings, wild ideas, tumultuous aspirations, and golden dreams, are juxtaposed with gray realities.

(beat)

My soul would suffer less if it never slept.

LOUIS

Why?

RICHARD

Because what makes the infernal torment worse is that my soul often does manage to drop off. But no sooner does it do so, than someone prods it awake again into bewildered and bleary-eyed pain.

LOUIS

Richard, you're rambling on and not making much sense.

Richard is offended; Louis senses the tension.

LOUIS

Richard, you're a great writer, a wonderful artist. How can you have such despairing thoughts?

RICHARD

They go hand-in-hand, don't they? And if you don't like it... You can go fuck off!

(beat)

I felt comfortable enough with you and our friendship that I could reveal these thoughts to you. I never thought that you would hold my revelations against me.

LOUIS

Oh, come on. You are overreacting.

RICHARD

Overreacting?

(beat)

Is that all you can say? Well, have a good day, then.

Richard walks off.

LOUIS

Richard?

Richard doesn't stop and Louis watches Richard exit the tunnel and into the bright sunshine.

INT. FANELLI'S - DAY

Louis is sitting at the bar; he's alone and staring out the window at the intersection of Prince and Mercer Streets. The bartender walks over.

BARTENDER

Another drink?

LOUIS

No thanks.

Louis walks out of the bar, stands on the corner for a spell, and then walks away.

INT./EXT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Louis enters his apartment building, checks his mail, and removes a letter from the box -- it's a letter from Richard.

Louis looks at the letter, pauses for a moment, and then climbs the stairs to his apartment.

INT. HALLWAY

Louis enters his apartment.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT

Louis is sitting at his desk; he is carefully holding the letter. Louis opens the letter and reads it.

CLOSE-UP - LETTER

RICHARD (V.O.)

Dear Louis,
Please accept my apology for my
behavior the other day.

(MORE)

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

Lately, for no apparent reason, my moral suffering has become so intense that I am now physically aware of my soul.

It's horrible!

My soul does not merely feel anguish, it bleeds. The pain has become physical pain -- not in my body but in my spirit.

That's what I meant the other day when I said that my soul is constantly being wrenched awake. My poor soul is longing to sleep but they won't let it. My soul is cold and I do not know how to warm it.

My soul has grown hard, withered, stiff...

Louis stops reading, puts the letter down, pauses for a moment, and then picks up and looks at the letter again.

RICHARD (V.O.)

One day, and it's bound to happen, my soul will shatter and fly into a million pieces -- mirror fragments reflecting the devastation.

CLOSE-UP - RICHARD'S FACE

Richard's eyes are lifeless and veiled in light.

INT. ROOM (2009) - DAY

Louis is sitting at his desk; he's holding the letter in his hand.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Sometimes, I really envy my legs because my legs do not suffer. They have no soul, my friend... No soul.

Louis puts the letter down and looks at the CAMERA.

LOUIS

I spent hours trying to understand Richard's singular ideas; unfortunately, I never penetrated his psychology. And my conclusion: Richard was a superior being -- brilliant and disquieting.

(beat)

Even today, after all these years, that conclusion is all that I'm certain of, a mere document in my defense.

(beat)

Again, I give facts, only facts.

(beat)

So, have I piqued your interest?

(beat)

Richard and I understood each other perfectly and yet, we were two very different creatures.

The truth is we shared few common links except one...

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE (1998) - DAY

The CAMERA TILTS from the sky to the Empire State Building to Louis and Richard walking down the street.

RICHARD

Ah, New York. Why do I love it so?

(beat)

I only have to say to myself that I live in one of the great cities of the world for me to experience a wave of pride, joy, and elation.

It is the one golden opiate for all of my pain.

(beat)

New York.

(beat)

Look at this.

Oh, how I love to walk down Fifth Avenue and every time I'm far away, this great avenue rises before me like a shimmering mirage, an arching avalanche that floods me with light. And my body, transfixed, is caught up in a whirlpool of sensation.

(beat)

Do you know the feeling?

LOUIS

Of course.

RICHARD

Louis, when I'm here, I love everything equally: the monuments, the theatres, the avenues, the parks, the trees... To me everything has a heraldic, holy significance.

(beat)

And how I've suffered the year that I spent away from the city, with no hope of an early return. In those sad evenings, I would walk the empty streets of Baltimore saying the name over and over again like a prayer: New York, New York.

(beat)

And at night, in my great, empty bed, and right before falling asleep, I would think of New York as if one might remember the naked flesh of a past lover.

LOUIS

How did you feel when you returned to New York?

RICHARD

I'm sure you know the feeling. My immediate, overriding desire was to walk every street, every avenue, to visit every neighborhood, to entwine myself about her, to love her more fully, more deeply.

Louis and Richard stop at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Washington Square Park North. Richard looks up and Louis watches Richard's reaction. Richard is awestruck.

LOUIS

Richard?

(beat)

Richard?

RICHARD

I'm fine.

(beat)

You mustn't think that I love this great city for its avenues, its bars, its women...

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(makes a sweeping motion)

Its monuments.

(beat)

No! That would be vulgar!

(beat)

I love it for the aura that surrounds it and constitutes its soul -- not something that can be seen but felt, really felt.

LOUIS

That is why we are here; that is why the world is here.

RICHARD

Oh, how true.

Louis and Richard cross the street and enter Washington Square Park.

RICHARD

I can only live in large cities. I love progress, civilization, the hustle and the bustle, the feverish activity of modern life.

(beat)

Because, deep down, I love life very much.

Richard is gleeful as the two men walk under the arch. Louis watches Richard's reaction.

RICHARD

Louis, I know what you're thinking and you're right: I'm full of contradictions.

Louis and Richard enter the park.

RICHARD

I feel desolate, depressed, drained of energies and yet, I love life as no one has ever loved it.

(making sweeping motions)

New York...

Rise up within me, fill me with sensation, and anoint me with the oils of my own age.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(beat)

Let them build bridges, let them pave roads, let them construct mile-high skyscrapers.

(beat)

I love it all.

(beat)

I'm a vast contradiction. My own body is a contradiction. Do you think me thin, hunchbacked? I am, but much less so than I seem. You'd be surprised if you saw me... naked.

Louis and Richard blend into the crowd around the fountain.

LOUIS

Yeah, you're right. Actually, I would be shocked.

Louis chuckles.

RICHARD

But, it's more than that. Everyone thinks of me as a man of mystery.

(beat)

But I have no life, no lovers... nothing.

And what people do think are lies, all lies! My life is entirely without secrets and yet it's bizarre.

LOUIS

Bizarre?

(beat)

How is your life any more bizarre than anyone else's life?

RICHARD

Because my life consists not in that there are elements in it that cannot be found in normal lives, but in its lack of any of the elements that are thought to be common to all lives.

(beat)

That is why nothing happens to me. Not even the things that happen to everyone else.

(beat)

Do you know what I mean?

LOUIS
Strangely enough, I do.

Louis and Richard get lost in the crowd.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT — KITCHEN — DAY

Louis is washing dishes; the door buzzer RINGS. Louis wipes his hands and answers the buzzer.

LOUIS
Hello?

RICHARD (O.S.)
It's Richard.
(beat)
Are you busy?

LOUIS
No. Come up.

Louis BUZZES Richard into the building.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT — KITCHEN — DAY

Louis and Richard, sitting at the table, are drinking wine. The bottle is half empty.

RICHARD
(shaking his head)
Oh Louis, how many times have I found myself alone amongst a group of banal acquaintances?

Louis pours the remaining contents of the wine bottle into their glasses.

RICHARD
I can recall a particular dining experience...
I was at...

EXT. RAOUL'S RESTAURANT — NIGHT

It's raining and Richard is sitting inside the restaurant with three other men -- they are engaged in lively conversation.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Raoul's Restaurant and I was dining
with two actors and a playwright.

(beat)

I made a special effort to bring myself
down to their level.

And yes, I fooled myself and for a
moment, I was happy.

(beat)

But I'm not like them. And yet, their
lives -- the 'everyday life' -- is the
only one I love. It's just that I
can't live it.

And I'm proud of not being able to live
it.

(beat)

Happiness...

BACK TO SCENE

RICHARD

Oh, happiness...

A close friend of mine -- he's dead now
-- had an intense, expansive soul of
the true artist. He was always
surprised to find me rubbing shoulders
with certain inferior creatures.

(beat)

I know what you're thinking, but please
let me continue.

Those creatures were involved in life
and I was happy to join them in that
illusion.

However, you Louis are a true artist, a
great soul. You would never step
outside, or attempt to step outside, of
your golden circle.

LOUIS

I do not have a golden circle.

RICHARD

Oh, Louis... Yes, you do.

(beat)

You never descend into life for very
long. And in that lies your dignity.

(beat)

And you're right to keep your distance.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(beat)

And hence, you're happier.
I, on the other hand, suffer because I
live in two worlds -- yours, the golden
circle, and the other -- and I know how
to live in both.

LOUIS

Richard, I do not agree. It's the dual
life that makes you the greater artist.

(beat)

The artists you refer to wouldn't dare
to lower themselves because if they did
they would brush up against everyday
existence.

And that existence would suck them up
and drown their genius in banality.

(beat)

They're weak and yet instinctive enough
to remain where they are because they
know what will happen to them.
However, you can risk your genius.

(beat)

Your genius is so great nothing can
corrupt it.

RICHARD

I appreciate the compliment but...
As for being a genius, I wouldn't know.

(beat)

What I do know is that the banality of
mankind is tragic and regrettable. Ah,
the way that the majority, the folk,
content themselves with so few
spiritual desires. They are true
Philistines -- looking to the physical
world to satisfy their needs.

(beat)

It's heartbreaking!

(beat)

A play by Genet, a novel by Cortázar,
an opera by Verdi, a sonnet by
Shakespeare -- that's all they need to
fulfill their ideal.

(beat)

What am I saying? Even those
characteristics are the refinements of
superior souls.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(beat)

The others -- the truly normal, the majority, the middle class -- are content with what is given to them. But then again, who is to say that they aren't right?

(beat)

Who knows?

(beat)

Regardless, it's a beautiful day and I say we mingle with the world.

Richard downs his glass of wine and stands up.

LOUIS

I'd love to join you but...

RICHARD

But what? Let me guess? You have work to do?

LOUIS

Why yes I do -- Besides, I am little buzzed.

RICHARD

Good. Let's get out there before the buzz wears off.

LOUIS

Where are you thinking?

RICHARD

The East Village, of course.

Louis finishes his wine and reluctantly gets up.

LOUIS

Okay. But don't be surprised if I cut it short -- I do have work to do.

RICHARD

Of course you do... We all do.

Louis and Richard exit the apartment.

EXT. AVENUE A -- DAY

Louis and Richard are walking down the street and towards Tompkins Square Park.

EXT. TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK – DAY

Louis and Richard enter the park and make their way towards a park bench.

RICHARD

Ah, Sundays in New York. On these marvelous Sundays, you can't help but breathe in life itself...
Intense, healthy life!

(beat)

It's the simple life, the useful life slipping by us, right under our very noses.

Hours that we cannot share -- we, the dreamers of beauty -- touched by the beyond, marked by uncertainty.

(beat)

How wonderful!

Louis sits down on the park bench; Richards continues to stand.

RICHARD

(continuing, gesturing)

How much better it would be if we were like the ordinary people around us?

LOUIS

I don't think that we should suppose that their lives are any easier.

RICHARD

Oh, come on.

Richard sits down next to Louis.

RICHARD

(continuing)

You know the difference.
If we were ordinary, we would find gentleness and peace, at least in our souls.

(beat)

As it is, we only have the light but the light blinds our eyes.

(beat)

We are like alcohol, pure alcohol -- and like alcohol we evaporate in the flame that engulfs us!

Louis looks at Richard and smiles. The two men take in the city.

RICHARD

It's the hustle and the bustle of this immense city, at this present moment, that makes me love New York with such golden tenderness.

(beat)

However, I know nothing of affections.

LOUIS

Oh, come on, I can't believe that.

RICHARD

No, it's true.

LOUIS

What about love?

RICHARD

Any love I may have felt never went beyond tenderness.

(beat)

I could never love a woman for her self... I mean her soul.

(beat)

I could only love her for her tenderness that her kindness awoke in me. Her fair fingers squeezing mine on a beautiful day like today... her subtle timber of voice, her blushing, her laughter, her playfulness...

LOUIS

And then the lover, by objectifying the beloved, destroys the beauty in both.

RICHARD

Oh, Louis... You are such the...

A beautiful woman, wearing a flowing white skirt, walks by and captures Richard's attention.

RICHARD

Wow!

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(beat)

Anyway, what I find touching about love -- and no I'm not objectifying the emotion -- is the white skirt trembling in the air, a satin ribbon plaited by slender fingers, a supple waist, a braid of hair undone by the wind, a song murmured by golden, twenty year old lips...

LOUIS

Beautiful but you are objectifying again.

RICHARD

So... What if I am?
I'm a writer and to write about the world, as you know Louis, one must remove oneself -- and yet, not entirely so -- to explore the essence of things.

(beat)

And by the way, you're sounding more and more like a politically correct post modernist.

LOUIS

Richard, I agree but to call me a post modernist... That's a bit extreme, wouldn't you say?

RICHARD

Louis, you're so sensitive. I'm being provocative, can't you tell?

(beat)

But seriously, it's not even beauty that impresses me -- and this is where you're wrong about objectification -- it's something more vague than that, something imponderable, translucent -- it's kindness.

LOUIS

Kindness?

RICHARD

Yes, kindness!

(beat)

I find it in everything.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

(beat)

And that's where my giddiness comes from... A sexual longing to possess voices, gestures, smiles, scents, and colors!

(beat)

A mad fire, quite mad!
And oh so disastrous!

LOUIS

Wow, you were obviously moved by Radha's performance.

RICHARD

Yes, yes I was -- it was transformative.

LOUIS

I have yet to make up my mind.

RICHARD

That surprises me. You will come around. As for the good people walking by us, they will never know such complications. They live, just live. They do not think. But I never stop thinking. My inner world has expanded, has come to mirror the universe and like the universe, it's constantly expanding.

(beat)

It's horrible.

(beat)

Oh, Louis, I'm afraid, afraid of drowning, of losing myself in my inner world, of disappearing from life, lost in my own creations...

Now there's a subject for one of your novels: a man, who by turning in upon himself, disappears from life and is absorbed by his inner world.

Louis makes a sucking sound as if he is inhaling his essence.

LOUIS

Like that?

RICHARD

Yeah, just like that.

(beat)

And now you see what I mean...

Damn literature!

Louis, smiling, looks at Richard and the two men begin to laugh.

LOUIS

Richard, I feel light... worry free.

RICHARD

I have known the feeling.

(beat)

The trick is to stay that way.

A beautiful woman rides by on a bicycle and steals a glance at Louis and Richard, who are still laughing.

RICHARD

What I'd give to trade places with that lovely woman.

(beat)

To be beautiful, really beautiful, and to blaze through life as if I was one of life's cherished members.

(beat)

Could there be any greater triumph?

(beat)

The greatest glory of my life was not, and please don't think it was, any praise that may have been heaped on my poetry, my genius.

(beat)

No, I will tell you.

One April afternoon, three years ago, I was walking...

EXT. BEDFORD AVENUE — DAY (1995)

Richard is walking down the avenue.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Down Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg. I was alone, when...

Two young women, PETRA and BIRGIT, both laughing, walk out of a bodega and brush past Richard, who is lost in thought. Petra and Birgit look at Richard. Richard ignores the advances and walks ahead of the two women.

Petra pursues Richard and using the handle of her parasol, grabs Richard around the arm. Richard, surprised, turns around to confront the women.

PETRA

Don't be angry with us. We're just having fun.

(beat)

You're very handsome, you know?

RICHARD

Thank you, but...

BIRGIT

No buts -- she's right.

PETRA

And you are?

RICHARD

Richard.

PETRA

We just got off of work and we were wondering if...

Birgit and Petra, wrapping their arms around Richard, sandwich him and guide him down the street. Richard is flattered.

BIRGIT

If you'd like to have a drink with us?

RICHARD

I'd love to... But...
Maybe some other time?

PETRA

Maybe?

Birgit, Petra, and Richard stop at the corner. Birgit and Petra break away from Richard and start to walk in the opposite direction.

PETRA

Carpe diem, Richard.

BIRGIT

See ya, handsome man.

BACK TO SCENE

RICHARD

(continuing)

The events that afternoon constitute the most beautiful memory of my entire life.

(beat)

How I long to be beautiful, truly beautiful, and not the owner of this hunched body, this twisted face.

(beat)

And it was that afternoon that I felt beautiful.

(beat)

I must also add that I had just written some of my best lines of poetry.

I felt proud, worthy of admiration.

(beat)

Ah, I lived for weeks on pure nostalgia. I was filled with tenderness for both of those young women -- women I have never seen again. How I loved them! How I blessed them! My lovers, my dear lovers.

Louis looks at Richard whose face is lit by his soft, intense brown eyes.

LOUIS

But Richard, you are beautiful and where you think you are deficient, your genius makes up for it.

RICHARD

Thanks Louis.

(beat)

What do you say we go for a midday cocktail?

LOUIS

Sure, what the hell.

Louis and Richard get up and walk out of the park.

EXT. FANELLI'S - DUSK

Louis and Richard are sitting at the bar, by the window. Louis is listening to Richard. Women walk by and their reflections are seen in the window. Louis occasionally steals a glance at the women passing by.

RICHARD

(subtitles)

Ah, Louis, how I envy the triumph of a lovely woman, stretched out on a coverlet of lace, contemplating her own naked flesh.

Splendid and golden as alcohol!
Female flesh -- the apotheosis of beauty.

(beat)

If I were a woman, I would never allow myself to be possessed by the flesh of man -- it's so sad, dry, sallow -- it has no sheen to it, no light.

(beat)

On occasional moments of enthusiasm, I would feel nothing but admiration and tenderness for the great debauchees, who chose to entwine their marble limbs about the tawny, sumptuous limbs of others like themselves, other women.

(beat)

This thought fills me with a mad desire...

INT. FANELLI'S - DUSK

RICHARD

(continuing)

... to be a woman.

Louis is surprised to hear Richard's confession; Richard acknowledges Louis's surprise.

RICHARD

(gesturing)

Louis, I say this for one reason and for one reason only -- so that I might gaze upon my own bare, alabaster legs slipping coolly over a linen sheet.

Louis remains silent.

RICHARD

Louis, you seem surprised to hear this?

LOUIS

Yes, a bit. I know that your work is sensuous and mixed with a wild perversity but I have never heard you speak this way before.

Richard is embarrassed.

RICHARD

I'm sorry. I didn't think that my revelations, at this point in our friendship, would shock you.

LOUIS

I wouldn't say shock; surprised, maybe, then again, maybe not.

RICHARD

Well, are we still on for dinner tonight?

(beat)

Oh, that's right, you still have work to do. I'm sorry I have taken up so much of your time.

LOUIS

Richard, are you serious? Take up my time? Besides, we both have work to do but dinner sounds great.

RICHARD

21... and I'll treat.

LOUIS

Whew! Beautiful.

Louis and Richard finish their drinks and leave the bar.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) Establishing shot: A taxi pulls up in front of 21 Club, Louis and Richard get out of the cab and enter the restaurant.
- B) Autumn moon over Central Park.
- C) Leaves dance along the sidewalk.
- D) Black and white photographs of 21 Club and couples drinking champagne.

INT. 21 CLUB

Louis and Richard have finished dinner; a waiter approaches and serves coffee and dessert.

RICHARD

Louis, you can't imagine how our friendship delights me, how I bless the hour that we met.

LOUIS

I feel the same way. Our meeting marked and ushered in a dramatic shift in my life.

RICHARD

Before I met you, I had relations with indifferent, vulgar creatures who either refused or could not understand me.

(beat)

While you, on the other hand, have an open, generous soul -- a soul with enough insight to glimpse my own.

(beat)

That's why today, for the first time ever, I have the courage to confess to you my soul's strangest characteristic and greatest source of suffering.

Richard pauses for a moment, takes a deep breath.

RICHARD

It's this: I cannot be anyone's friend.

LOUIS

What are you talking about?

(beat)

I'm your friend.

RICHARD

I may be your friend but you are not a friend of mine.

Louis looks at Richard quizzically.

RICHARD

(continuing)

But before you protest, let me explain.

LOUIS

Yes, please do. I'm all ears.

RICHARD

As I have said before, I have never felt affection, only tenderness. And tenderness always brings with it the desire to touch, to embrace, to kiss... In a word, to possess.

(beat)

Now, in my case, and only after I have satisfied my desires, can I really feel what provoked them.

(beat)

I have never felt my own tender feelings -- I have only guessed at their existence.

(beat)

So, for a person to be my friend, I would be obliged first to possess that person, be they man or be they woman. But I cannot possess a person of my own sex. Therefore, for possession to take place, I, or the other person, would have to change their sex.

(beat)

You can't imagine the pain I feel.

(beat)

Everyone can have friends -- they are life's chief consolation. But, however hard I try, I can't return the affection; affections do not manifest themselves in me.

(beat)

I'm a poor wretched man!

LOUIS

Richard... You have to stop this kind of talk. Self-pity is not becoming for a man of your intellectual stature.

RICHARD

Louis, please... please listen to what I have to say.

LOUIS

Richard... I have been listening.

RICHARD

I know and thank you; however, can I continue?

LOUIS

Of course.

RICHARD

Louis, sometimes I feel such self-disgust. And the worst part is when I'm face-to-face with the people I know I should value and feel tenderness towards, I am always gripped by a violent desire to kiss them hard on the mouth!

(beat)

But I haven't told you everything. I do not experience these physical desires in my flesh, but in my soul. Only with my soul could I quench these tender desires. Only with my soul could I possess those persons I value and, in turn, reciprocate my friendships emotionally.

(beat)

Louis, please don't say anything. Just have pity on me, have pity...

Louis remains silent; the SOUND of a raged wind FADES IN.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD — DAY

It's a bright, sunny, windy day. Louis is walking along a smooth country road. Suddenly, he stops.

EXT. GRAND CANYON — DAY

Louis, jolted and terrified, is standing on the edge of a cliff overlooking the canyon. The SOUND of the wind begins to FADE OUT.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Louis...

BACK TO SCENE

The SOUND of the wind FADES OUT completely.

RICHARD

(continuing)

Should we get going?

(beat)

Louis, are you okay?

LOUIS

Yeah, let's go.

Richard pays the bill and Louis, still stunned, follows Richard as the two men leave the restaurant.

EXT. 21 CLUB – EVENING

It's raining. Louis and Richard stand under the awning. Richard hails a taxi. A taxi pulls over. Richard walks over to the taxi; Louis remains under the awning.

RICHARD
Louis, are you coming?

LOUIS
No. I'll take the next one.

RICHARD
Are you sure?

LOUIS
Yeah, I'll call you tomorrow.

RICHARD
(confused)
All right. Good night, Louis.

Richard climbs into the taxi; the taxi drives off. Louis watches the taxi leave; Louis turns and walks in the opposite direction and into the rain.

INT. FANELLI'S – DAY

Louis and Richard are sitting at the bar by the window. There is an uncomfortable silence; Louis is pensive.

LOUIS (V.O.)
Richard and I met the following day at Fanelli's, our office so to speak, but neither one of us made any allusions to last night's revelation or to my reaction.

EXT. BROADWAY – DAY

Louis and Richard are strolling down Broadway. Both men are silent.

LOUIS (V.O.)
Nor was anything said the following day when we strolled down Broadway.

EXT. BRYANT PARK – DAY

Louis and Richard are sitting at a table in Bryant Park; they are drinking a bottle of wine. The silence continues.

LOUIS (V.O.)

Nor ever again.

(beat)

Regardless, our friendship continued to move through this great city.

INT. LOUIS'S KITCHEN – DAY

It's a gray, rainy day. Louis is sitting at the kitchen table; he is watching a drop of water makes its way down the windowpane.

LOUIS (V.O.)

However, I could not stop thinking about Richard's disquieting confession.

INT. LOUIS'S KITCHEN – WINTER – DAY

It's snowing. Louis is sitting at the kitchen table; he is watching the snow flakes accumulate on his windowsill.

LOUIS (V.O.)

And not a day went by without me going over it, again and again, in my slowly unraveling mind.

Louis takes a deep breath and puts his hands on his head.

LOUIS

Stop it! I don't care. Why am I obsessing over what Richard said ten months ago? It doesn't involve me. It never did.

Louis gets up and starts pacing in his apartment.

LOUIS

Stop it!

Suddenly, the phone RINGS. Louis, startled, returns to the kitchen table and answers the phone.

LOUIS

Hello?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 Good morning, Louis.
 (beat)
 I don't know how to say this.

LOUIS
 Richard, what is it?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 I'm leaving New York today.

LOUIS
 What? When?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 In about an hour -- I'm at the train
 station now.

LOUIS
 Where are you going?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 I'm going back to Baltimore.

LOUIS
 Baltimore? When did you decide this?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 It's been in the works for a while.

LOUIS
 And you're telling me now.
 (beat)
 What are you doing?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 It's a long story. Maybe one day I
 will have the courage to tell you.

LOUIS
 Courage? Richard, what are you talking
 about?
 (beat)
 Hey, why don't you take the next train
 and I will meet you at Fanelli's for
 one last one?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 I'd like that but...

LOUIS
 But what?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 I can't. I'm sorry.
 (beat)
 Louis...

LOUIS
 Yes?

RICHARD (O.S.)
 I'll write to you as soon as I'm
 settled in.

LOUIS
 I would certainly hope so. Richard, I
 will miss you.

RICHARD (O.S.)
 I will miss you too.
 (beat)
 Goodbye, Louis.

Richard hangs up; Louis hears the click.

LOUIS
 Goodbye... Richard.

Louis hangs up the phone, sits down at the kitchen table,
 and returns to staring out the window.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- A) Louis is at Fanelli's; he is sitting alone at the bar
 and staring out the window.
- B) Louis is walking down Broadway.
- C) Louis is sitting alone at a table in Bryant Park; he
 is drinking a bottle of wine. Suddenly, he gets up
 and walks out of the park.

EXT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT BUILDING — DAY

Louis approaches and enters the building.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT BUILDING — HALLWAY — DAY

Louis checks the mailbox and discovers a letter from
 Richard.

CLOSE SHOT – ENVELOPE

Louis carefully looks at the letter.

BACK TO SCENE

Louis climbs the stairs to his apartment.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT BUILDING – HALLWAY – DAY

Louis approaches and enters his apartment.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT – KITCHEN – DAY

Louis, sitting at the kitchen table, stares at the envelope. After a moment, Louis carefully opens the letter.

CLOSE SHOT – LETTER

RICHARD (V.O.)

Dear Louis,

I apologize for the delay in my correspondence. However, I do have a very good excuse – I've tied the knot. Besides that, I have been surprisingly busy with my writing and I'd love to share it with you. So, please visit and all will be revealed.

My address:

1968 Eutaw Place
Baltimore, Maryland

Yours truly,
Richard

P.S. My phone number is 410.555.1492

BACK TO SCENE

Louis, lost in thought, puts down the letter and walks to his bedroom.

BEDROOM – DAY

Louis is surveying the room and returns to the kitchen.

KITCHEN — DAY

Louis, sitting at the table, is writing a letter to Richard.

LOUIS (V.O.)

Dear Richard,

Thank you for the letter—you remain as mysterious as ever. I suppose it's in keeping with your character that you would wait almost a year to write to me. I thought that our friendship went deeper than that. Regardless, you sound well and yes, I am very curious to meet this new person in your life. Congratulations. As for my life, things are not going so well. Your departure ushered in a void that I have not been able to fill and meeting new people no longer appeals to me. As for the future, I feel that I have exhausted my opportunities in New York and I'm thinking that it may be time for me to return to Baltimore as well. I'd love to rekindle our friendship and I will keep you posted.

Truly yours,
Louis

Louis folds the letter, slips it into an envelope, and seals it tight. Louis returns to looking out the window.

EXT. SOHO STREET — DAY

Louis approaches a mailbox, removes the letter to Richard from his satchel, looks at it, and tenderly deposits it into the mailbox. Louis surveys the neighborhood before crossing the street and entering Fanelli's.

INT. FANELLI'S — DAY

Louis is sitting alone at the bar and staring out the window. Emil and Jules walk into the bar, notice Louis, and approach him.

EMIL

Hey, Louis.

LOUIS

Hello, Emil.
 (beat)
 Jules?

Jules nods.

EMIL

Can we join you?

LOUIS

Sure. What are you two up to today?

EMIL

The usual... You know, bouncing around.
 (beat)
 Right Jules?

JULES

How can we not? I know... I should be
 in my studio making art but on a day
 like today?

(gesturing)

Look! Beautiful women. You can't tell
 me that this is not the better way to
 spend the day.

(beat)

Wouldn't you agree Louis?

Louis shrugs his shoulders.

LOUIS

Sure...

JULES

Besides, I just completed a big
 commission.

The bartender approaches.

BARTENDER

Well?

EMIL

Jules, what are you having?

JULES

A beer.

BARTENDER

A beer? Anything in particular or are
 you going to be a generalist today?

JULES

I'll have a Radeberger and yes, I'm generalist today and I'll be a generalist everyday from this day on.

The bartender smirks and looks over at Emil.

EMIL

Make that two. Louis, can I get you a drink?

LOUIS

No, no thanks.

The bartender walks away and pours two beers.

EMIL

So, what have you been up to?

LOUIS

Not much... I've been in a funk lately.

EMIL

Have you been writing?

LOUIS

Here and there.

JULES

It sounds like you need some inspiration.

(beat)

Right Emil?

(to Louis)

A poke?

LOUIS

No, no thanks.

JULES

Sure?

The bartender returns with the beers, looks at Jules, and walks away.

JULES

It's good stuff.

LOUIS

I'm sure it is but it doesn't work for me any longer.

EMIL

Really?

(beat)

Louis, what's up with you? Ever since Richard rolled out of town, you have been down in the dumps.

(beat)

Have you heard from him?

LOUIS

Yes.

JULES

And?

LOUIS

He moved back to Baltimore and I think I am going to join him.

EMIL

What? Baltimore?

LOUIS

Yes, Baltimore.

EMIL

Why would you want to do a thing like that?

LOUIS

It's quite simple. I'm not enjoying it here any longer.

EMIL

That feeling is temporary. Why do you think you are the only one who experiences such feelings?

LOUIS

I don't know. Maybe.

(beat)

Well, gentlemen, I've got to go.

(beat)

Enjoy the day.

Louis gets up and walks to the door.

EMIL

See ya later.

JULES

Louis... Are you sure you don't want any?

LOUIS

Yeah... Thanks. Goodbye.

Louis exits the bar.

JULES

Wow, what a downer.

EMIL

Yeah, he's obviously fallen on hard times.

JULES

So, if he returns to Baltimore, what do you think he will do with his apartment?

EMIL

I don't know. Maybe you could sublet it from him?

JULES

Yeah, I was thinking the same thing.

Jules celebrates his good fortune.

JULES

Cheers!

Jules and Emil CLINK glasses.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT - LIVINGROOM - DAY

Louis is organizing his belongings and packing books into boxes. Louis stops packing and walks to the kitchen.

INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Louis picks up the letter from Richard, looks at it for a moment, and then reaches for the telephone and dials Richard's telephone number. The phone RINGS twice before a woman, MARTHA, answers it.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Hello?

Louis is surprised and hangs up the phone. Louis looks at the number, pauses for a moment, and then dials it again. Martha answers the call.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Hello?

LOUIS

Ah... Hello? I'm trying to reach Richard Lovegrove. Is this his number?

MARTHA (O.S.)

Yes, it is. Did you just call?

LOUIS

Yes, I did. I am sorry.

(beat)

Is he available?

MARTHA (O.S.)

He's busy right now. Can I take a message?

LOUIS

Ah, yes. Can you tell him Louis called and that he can call me back.

MARTHA (O.S.)

And your number?

LOUIS

He should have it but if not, it's 212.555.8821.

MARTHA (O.S.)

212.555.8821.

LOUIS

Yes.

MARTHA (O.S.)

I will tell him.

LOUIS

Thank you. Goodbye.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Bye.

Louis hangs up the phone and sits down at the kitchen table and looks around the apartment.

RICHARD (O.S.)
Thursday? So soon?

LOUIS
Yes, it's time to come home.

RICHARD (O.S.)
Do have a place to stay?

LOUIS
Yeah, I'm returning to my old studio in Remington.

RICHARD (O.S.)
That's splendid. I'll meet you at the train station? Will you need a ride?

LOUIS
Yes, that would be great. I'll call you Wednesday with my arrival time.

RICHARD
If I'm not at home, leave a message with Martha.

LOUIS
(under his breath)
Martha?
(beat)
I will.
(beat)
Richard... It's so good to hear your voice.

RICHARD
Louis, I look forward to seeing you Thursday. Bye Louis.

LOUIS
Bye Richard.

Louis hangs up the phone and pauses for a moment.

LOUIS
(under his breath)
Martha?
(beat)
Martha?

Louis returns to stacking boxes by the door.

SERIES OF SHOTS – INT. LOUIS'S APARTMENT

- A) A UPS man arrives and picks up the boxes.
- B) Louis sits against the wall and surveys his empty apartment.
- C) Louis places a blank piece of paper in the center of the room, puts his keys on it, and leaves the apartment.

FADE OUT.

THE END