

**AMERICA**

**by**

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**Registered WGA/E**

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FADE IN

1 EXT. BROAD STREET -- PHILADELPHIA -- DAY

A gray, late afternoon/dusk, cold enough to see breath.

A trash truck moves building to building, stopping periodically. Each stop, a TRASHMAN jumps from the back of the truck, moves to the alley between buildings.

The Trashman flips the lids from the cans, grabs the plastic bags within, tosses them into the rear of the truck. He bangs the side of the truck, the truck moves on.

A hip-hop beat punctuates these images, a mature female voice recites def poetry under.

AMERICA (V.O.)

...but the streets --  
They ain't the lonely thing;  
That's reserved for the game of hide  
and seek you play after dark  
When things come alive in the park  
When everyone just looks for that  
spark  
To light their way or their barrel;  
And warmth is measured in the number  
of bodies you got layin' next to  
you...  
If you got any at all,  
'Cause like I said,  
The night's the lonely thing.

A hundred feet up, a FIGURE bends into a trash can in another alleyway. A threadbare, ratty wool coat hovers above mismatched, shredded Ugh boots.

Various pieces of trash fly as the Figure rummages through the can.

At the sound of the trash truck airbrakes, the VO poetry ends abruptly as the figure stands, swings around.

AMERICA MORRISON, late 30s, early 40s, dirty, dusty dreads, with the body language of a cheetah in the Veldt, bends around the alley corner, eyes wide.

AMERICA

(rhythmically)

Shit. Shit.  
God damn it.

America jumps back to the trash can, vigorously digging through it.

AMERICA  
 (from inside the can)  
 Fuckin' guys early one day, Late the  
 next...

AMERICA  
 Can't never get no schedule set...  
 How'm I s'pos to...

America jumps up, a small pad of paper in her hand.

AMERICA  
 Ah-hah!

America flips through the empty pad, kisses it, and tucks it into her coat. She wraps the lapels across her chest, hustles up the street, looks back to gauge the trash truck's progress.

2 EXT. SYMPHONY HOUSE RESIDENCE -- BROAD STREET -- DAY

A towering high-rise of luxury apartments, fronted by an oversized burgundy awning covering a rich red carpet.

America approaches, eyes the main entrance warily, then moves to the mouth of an alleyway at the side of the building. She flips off the lid to a trash can and starts to rummage through it.

ARKIS (O.S.)  
 What the fuck I tell you about comin'  
 around here, bitch?

America spins to face the harsh and hawkish features of VERNON ARKIS, doorman/building manager of Symphony House. Fear crosses her face as she backs against the alley wall.

ARKIS  
 Didn't I tell you I'd smack your  
 sorry ass? You remember that?

Arkis makes a lunge at America, but she ducks under his arm's swing. But not quite far enough...Arkis gets a hand on her coat, pulls her back around. A roundhouse slap bounces off America's head.

America screams and kicks wildly, enough to back Arkis off. She runs from the alley and onto Broad Street.

Arkis chases her as far as the sidewalk.

ARKIS  
 There's more where that came from,  
 you don't stay away from here, you  
 understand? This trash is too good  
 for you, you hear? Fuckin' bum.

America dodges cars as she hurries across Broad Street. She turns and yells back across the traffic.

AMERICA

Your voice  
Is noise...  
You busboy,  
Altar boy,  
Asshole...

America tucks into a storefront entrance, watches Arkis go back into Symphony House.

AMERICA

Fucker.

3 EXT. ENTRANCEWAY -- SYMPHONY HOUSE -- DAY

Arkis moves toward the Doorman's station, but stops when an ELDERLY JAPANESE COUPLE exits the lobby. A smile explodes on his face.

ARKIS

(fawning)  
Mr. and Mrs. Yamada. How are we  
today? Going for a walk? Nice day  
for it.

Mr. Yamada gives a perfunctory bow of the head to Arkis as he guides his wife out onto the street.

MR. YAMADA

Ohayoo gozaimasu.  
(good morning)

Arkis watches them go. The smile on his face changes to a smirk of disdain.

ARKIS

(under his breath)  
Learn-a to speak-a de English, gook.

As Arkis turns back into the lobby, he nearly slams into a smiling CHARLIE EMSON, 20s, a smallish, rail thin man.

Charlie stands rocking from foot to foot, carrying a pail and mop. It's obvious that he's mentally challenged.

ARKIS

Jesus, Charlie! You retards are  
always sneakin' around, goddamn it!  
(moving to the  
doorman's station)  
Honest to God, if your daddy hadn't  
owned this building...

CHARLIE

I'm sorry, Vern...

ARKIS

It's MISTER Arkis to you out here,  
Charlie. Don't want the tenants to  
think we're buddy-buddy, now do we?  
Next thing you know, they'll be  
splittin' my tips with you. Start  
moppin' that lobby.

Charlie smiles and proudly lifts the mop and bucket, then  
moves back toward the elevators.

4 INT. LOBBY -- SYMPHONY HOUSE -- DAY

Charlie starts to mop the floor.

The elevator doors open and a WOMAN emerges. She's average  
size, but her features can't be seen, as she is wrapped in a  
full-length, black wool cape, the hood of which is pulled  
down over her head and face.

The only thing visible are her hands -- frail, black skin,  
and a large blue diamond cluster ring.

Charlie stops mopping as the figure approaches.

CHARLIE

Morning, Ms. Fanning.

ROBERTA FANNING stops a moment, her hand reaching out of the  
cape and touching Charlie's arm before moving on.

5 EXT. ENTRANCEWAY -- SYMPHONY HOUSE -- DAY

Roberta passes Arkis, who doesn't see her. He's on the phone.

ARKIS

(quietly)

Yeah, it's open, but it's gotta be  
right now...

(seeing Roberta)

Call me back.

Arkis leaps to the door a tad late to open it for her.

ARKIS

(fawning)

Morning, Ms. Fanning. Lovely morning.

Roberta ignores Arkis, moves out onto Broad Street.

Arkis turns back to the Doorman's station.

ARKIS

Freak.

CHARLIE

You shouldn't talk like that about  
Ms. Fanning, Vern...

(off Arkis vicious  
stare)

Uh...Mr. Arkis. Anyway, she writes  
pretty poems.

ARKIS

Uh-huh.

CHARLIE

I read them in school. She's a Nobel  
person.

ARKIS

Yeah, well, she ain't written shit  
in years. And in a couple months,  
she ain't gonna be livin' here either.  
Hidin' upstairs under a hood ain't  
payin' no bills. Now shut up and  
get that mop swingin'.

6 EXT. BROAD STREET -- DAY

America sees Roberta leave. She notices Roberta wrapping  
her hooded cape tighter around her body.

AMERICA

Gotta get me one a' them...

America grabs the lapels of her tattered coat and tries to  
wrap it tighter around herself. With a glance toward Symphony  
House, she moves across and up the street.

7 INT. ENTRANCEWAY -- SYMPHONY HOUSE -- DAY

A MAN, 50s, in a business suit and cashmere overcoat, enters  
and walks to Arkis. On the Man's arm is a YOUNG WOMAN, maybe  
30, in a short skirt and fur-trimmed, white leather jacket.

The Man pulls an envelope from his pocket and hands it to  
Arkis.

MAN

I'm to give this to Vern.

ARKIS

Vernon.

MAN

Excuse me?

ARKIS

Vernon. You're to give that to  
Vernon.

MAN

What's the difference?

ARKIS

Nothing. I can just make you say  
it, that's all. You want to say it  
or you want to take your honey  
somewhere's else?

The Man stares at Arkis a moment.

MAN

Vernon. Okay?

Arkis smiles, hands the Man a key.

ARKIS

Fifth floor. 512. It's booked at  
six, so that gives you...  
(checks his watch)  
50 minutes. Can you get it done in  
50 minutes, stud?

The Man takes the key, moves to the elevators.

Charlie glances at the Man and Young Woman, then at Arkis,  
then goes back to his mopping.

8 EXT. BROAD STREET -- DAY

America moves up the sidewalk, the rhythm of her walk sounding  
cadence for her talking.

AMERICA

(to herself)

Can you hear me, 'Zette?  
I keep rhyming, yet  
Do the rhymes I'm saying  
Somehow find you maybe?  
Everyday I try to  
Send this message to you,  
Do you hear it, do you?  
Can you hear me, 'Zette?

America passes SQUINTS, a graying, bespectacled, homeless  
man impossible to age, warming himself on a subway grate.  
He sees her, rises quickly, and falls into step with her.

SQUINTS

Hey, Miss America. Who's you talkin'  
to?

America doesn't look at him.

AMERICA

Nobody.

SQUINTS

(laughs)

Uh-huh. You always talkin'. Makin' them poems. Any luck today? Anything you can share? I'm a little hungry.

America shakes her head.

SQUINTS

Where you goin' now?

AMERICA

Nowhere.

America picks up her pace. Squints has a hard time keeping up, finally slows to a stop.

SQUINTS

Walkin' awful fast goin' nowhere, America.

America cuts away from Squints as she reaches the corner of South Street, crosses the street.

9 EXT. SOUTH STREET -- NIGHT

America slows as she approaches a neon-lit club entrance.

The club's door is framed by posters and a large sign above it that reads, "STANZAS -- Philadelphia's Premiere Poetry Stage".

Several PATRONS stop at the door, show the SECURITY MAN their ID, pay the cover.

America tucks tightly behind the last group of Patrons, head down. As the Patrons move into the club, America tries to move with them.

A hand grabs America's arm.

SECURITY MAN

Whoa, whoa, whoa, sweetheart. Where you goin'? Let's see some ID and ten American dollars.

America pulls her arm from his grasp. She points to the Patrons just entering.

AMERICA

I'm with them.

SECURITY MAN

Uh-huh.

(calls to the Patrons)

Hey. You know her? She with you?

A couple of the Patrons shake their heads.



SECURITY MAN

Thought so.

(to America)

Move along, honey. Nothin' for you here. Let these folks through.

He tries to guide America aside. She sloughs off his hand, tries to enter the club again.

The Security Man stands and blocks the door.

SECURITY MAN

I ain't fuckin' with you now, girl.  
Move on down the way 'fore I call  
five-oh on ya.

America glares at him a moment, then moves off. The Security Man turns to a COUPLE, checking ID.

America stops at the end of the club building, looks back, then glances up at a billboard on the building wall.

INSERT -- THE BILLBOARD

It's an announcement of an "American Poetry Symposium / Sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania / For the Purpose of Endowing the Wordsworth Chair in Poetry / Poetry's Top Names in Performance."

At the bottom of the poster is a picture of a distinguished BLACK MAN, and the words "Moderated by Orrin Mays Stanley, Chairman, UPenn's Department of English Literature".

BACK TO SCENE

America stares at the picture of Orrin Mays Stanley. Her jaw sets. She glances at the Security Man, whose back is to her.

America pulls out a marker, steps to the poster, and maniacally crosses out the picture of Stanley. She then moves off quickly up the street.

10 EXT. EMPTY LOT -- NIGHT

The typical bombed-out look of an abandoned neighborhood.

At the back corner of the lot, a group of HOMELESS MEN and WOMEN crowd around a barrel fire. They have monikers that are more description than names: WHISPER, SNACKS, FINGERS, BOSTON, LITTLE JEANNIE. Squints is there too.

America approaches, sits on a concrete block.

SQUINTS

(to America)

This the nowhere you was in such a hurry to get to?

America crinkles her nose at Squints, pulls out a pad and starts to write.

BOSTON

What you talkin' 'bout?

AMERICA

(without looking up)

He's talking about nothing.

SQUINTS

Nothing. Nowhere. Same thing.

Both here.

SNACKS

Got that right.

Whisper throws a table leg on the fire.

WHISPER

(obvious why the name)

What you doin', A?

America pulls the notepad closer to her body, curls around it.

AMERICA

Nothin'.

SQUINTS

Is everything nothin' with you?

FINGERS

We may be homeless, but we ain't blind, Sugar.

BOSTON

Uh-huh. Last time I looked, what you doin's called writin', not nothin'.

AMERICA

(looking at Squints)

Nothin' you'd be interested in, then.

SQUINTS

How you know that? Maybe we would be.

(looks at the others)

Right?

A chorus of "Uh-huhs" and "That's right."

LITTLE JEANNIE

Read us some, honey. Take us outta here a minute or two.

America shakes her head.

WHISPER

Go on, A...We wanta hear.

America looks around, then slowly pulls her notepad out, turns it to the light of the fire.

AMERICA

It's called "Eye of God."

America looks around the circle. All eyes are on her.

AMERICA

Under the black sky  
 Where I can't tell the moon  
 From the halogen streetlamp  
 That hangs over me  
 Like the eye of a God in judgment,  
 I wonder why it's me here  
 And not some other poor slob.  
 Why I'm the lonely one on the lonely  
 streets under the lonely night  
 With the eye of God in judgment...  
 But the streets --  
 They ain't the lonely thing;  
 That's reserved for the game of hide  
 and seek you play after dark  
 When things come alive in the park  
 When everyone just looks for that  
 spark  
 To light their way or their barrel;  
 And warmth is measured in the number  
 of bodies you got layin' next to  
 you...  
 If you got any at all,  
 'Cause like I said,  
 The night's the lonely thing  
 And the only thing that makes it  
 right...  
 The only bright spot down here on  
 this earth...  
 Is the touch of another's warmth,  
 The sound of another's voice,  
 The wet of another's tear  
 Shed for me and us alone in this  
 Night  
 Under this light  
 Under this moon  
 Under this eye of God.

America stops. All are silent. The only movement is  
 Whispers' head, which nods in agreement or approval, or maybe  
 both.

11 EXT. STREET ALONG FRONT OF EMPTY LOT -- NIGHT

A van slows and stops. The driver, MARCUS SIMPSON, 30s and  
 black, and his passenger, CARL LYSTECKI, 40s and white, look  
 across the lot at the group of huddled homeless.

SIMPSON  
Maybe over there.

Simpson and Lystecki exit the van.

12 EXT. EMPTY LOT -- NIGHT

Simpson and Lystecki approach the group, all of whom stand like deer about to bolt into the invisibility of the forest of buildings around them.

America shrinks behind the group.

SIMPSON  
It's okay, folks. This ain't a roust.  
Just lookin' for someone is all.  
I'm Marcus Simpson...some of you may  
know me from Social Services.  
(indicates Lystecki)  
This's Carl Lystecki. I'm helping  
him out tonight.

Lystecki holds up a very outdated, but recognizable picture of America.

LYSTECKI  
I'm looking for a young woman. I'm  
told she's using the name America  
Suzette Morrison.

WHISPER  
Suzette!?

The group snickers.

SQUINTS  
Don't know no Suzette.

LYSTECKI  
How about America? You know America?

Little Jeannie opens her arms to the vacant lot.

LITTLE JEANNIE  
You're lookin' at our America, mister.

13 INT. BURNED OUT BUILDING SHELL -- NIGHT

America moves quickly through the building, her footing sure through practice. She can see the group talking to Simpson and Lystecki through the paneless windows as she moves quietly away through the building and into the night.

14 EXT. STREET ALONG FRONT OF EMPTY LOT -- NIGHT

Simpson and Lystecki approach their van.

SIMPSON

That's the best place I can think of. You want to circle around a while?

Lystecki doesn't react, pulls out his cell phone and dials.

LYSTECKI

(into phone)

It's Lystecki. She wasn't where we heard she'd be...Yeah...No, I won't. I'll find her. Just a matter of...Okay. What time?...Where?

Lystecki closes his phone, climbs in the van.

SIMPSON

Client?

LYSTECKI

(nods)

Always in a hurry.

Simpson smiles, puts the van in gear and drives off.

15 INT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA -- REGENT'S BOARD ROOM -- NIGHT

ORRIN MAYS STANLEY, 60's, a distinguished black man who holds himself with the crispness of a man acclimated to seldom being contradicted, closes a cell phone and turns back to the room.

He faces three OLDER GENTLEMEN -- Regents of the University of Pennsylvania.

ORRIN

I'm sorry, gentlemen. Where were we?

REGENT 1

I was just saying that I believe the symposium will be good for the university, Orrin. Good for community relations, good for our image. That's why we've proceeded.

ORRIN

But you proceeded without my approval. And I won't --

REGENT 2

We don't need your approval, Dr. Stanley. Just your involvement. But if you'd rather not, I'm sure we could --

ORRIN

Are you threatening me, John?

REGENT 3

Gentlemen, please. There's no need for disharmony here. We're all working toward the same goal, are we not?

ORRIN

Are we? What we're endowing here will be the premiere position in American poetic letters. Are we going to muddy it's reputation before we even bestow it? The Wordsworth Chair in American Poetry requires -- no, demands -- the highest level of craft. Do you really think we're going to find that in a Bohemian street poetry...nightclub?

REGENT 1

You ever been to one of those readings, Orrin?

Orrin doesn't even consider answering.

ORRIN

I told you who I feel would be right for the Chair. Roberta Fanning is a Nobel laureate, the voice of a generation. A poet equal to the Chair's namesake. And she lives right here in Philadelphia.

REGENT 2

And she hasn't been seen in public, nor published one word in God knows how long.

ORRIN

Word has it that she's readying a new manuscript right now. But what's that got to do with it anyway? It's my department. It should be my decision who sits--

Regent 1 rises from his chair.

REGENT 1

Orrin, please.

Regent 2 moves to a coffee cart, pours a cup.

REGENT 2

It's a matter of relevance.

(MORE)

REGENT 2 (CONT'D)

And if you'd be honest with yourself, you'd know it. Times are changing. If we as a university want to attract the coming generations -- and their tuition dollars -- then we must dress ourselves in the fashions of the day.

ORRIN

What about standards? What about taste? Do we discard them along with our responsibility to those who handed them to us?

REGENT 1

Of course not. That's where you come in, Orrin. You'll make the recommendation. You can still protect the legacy.

ORRIN

Then I insist that Roberta Fanning--

REGENT 3

Then perhaps you ought to personally invite her to the symposium, Orrin. Because we are committed at this point. The next chair will come from that competition. That is our decision.

Orrin stares at Regent 3, then at the other two. Then he turns abruptly and leaves the room.

16 INT. LOBBY -- SYMPHONY HOUSE -- NIGHT

Roberta Fanning, again wrapped in her cape and hood, enters, several books in her arms.

Arkis leaps up, walks beside her.

ARKIS

Evenin', Ms. Fanning. At the library again?

Roberta says nothing, moves to the elevators. Arkis punches the floor button in the elevator.

ARKIS

There you go.

The doors close without Roberta saying a word.

ARKIS

Bitch.

17 INT. ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- NIGHT

Roberta drops her keys and books on a side table as she enters. She sloughs off the cape, drops it on a nearby chair.

Roberta's 50s, with aristocratic features and intelligent eyes, but her body language is tired, almost fragile, as if moonlight would crush her.

Roberta moves into the kitchen, then returns with a cup of tea. She sits at a desk that overlooks the skyline.

Roberta picks up a legal pad of paper, poises a pencil over it, then begins writing.

ROBERTA (V.O.)

Those in our hearts never really  
leave;  
A piece of them continues;  
They may leave us here alone to  
grieve,  
As if the grieving gives them virtue.

Roberta stops, tears off the page, wads it up and tosses it toward a waste basket. She puts pencil to pad again.

ROBERTA (V.O.)

When loved ones leave us suddenly,  
A piece of them remains  
To aid us in the grieving,  
To dissipate the pain.

Roberta stops again, scratches this last verse out almost angrily, tears the page up and tosses it.

ROBERTA

Damn it.

Roberta is startled by the ring of her phone. She touches the speakerphone button.

ROBERTA

Yes.

WALLINGS (O.S.)

(on speakerphone)

Roberta. It's Mike Wallings. At William Morris. I believe Bill Condon told you I'd be calling?

ROBERTA

I seem to recall Bill mentioning something, yes. How is he?

WALLINGS (O.S.)

Enjoying retirement, I hear.



ROBERTA  
He deserves it.

WALLINGS (O.S.)  
Yes he does. He'll be missed by  
both of us, I'm sure. He was a good  
agent. I learned a lot from him.

An awkward moment of silence. A throat clear.

WALLINGS (O.S.)  
I, uh...I'm calling about the new  
book, of course.

ROBERTA  
Of course.

Roberta reaches across the desk, picks up a large manila  
folder stuffed thick with pages.

WALLINGS (O.S.)  
I was wondering how it's coming?  
It's a bit...overdue, I think is the  
way the publisher put it today.

Roberta thumbs through the pages in the folder, then places  
it back on the desk.

ROBERTA  
Yes, well, I'm still rewriting a  
bit.

Another moment's silence.

WALLINGS (O.S.)  
I understand you've been doing that  
for quite a while now.

ROBERTA  
It takes time, Mr. Wallings.

WALLINGS (O.S.)  
I understand, yes. Of course. But  
hear me out on this...The University  
of Pennsylvania is underwriting a  
new Chair -- the Wordsworth Chair in  
Poetry -- and word is they want  
someone with your credentials -- Nobel  
Laureate, former State Poet Laureate.

ROBERTA  
Sounds interesting.

WALLINGS (O.S.)  
Yes. But they also want someone who  
is writing today. Now.  
(MORE)

WALLINGS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Which means we need to get this new book out, or at least in the pipeline. I don't need to tell you how important it would be to tie your appointment to the Wordsworth Chair with the release of the book. How close are you?

ROBERTA

Oh, I'm close.

WALLINGS (O.S.)

Then I can pick up the manuscript? Say Friday? Would Friday work?

Roberta sits back in her chair, unsettled. She doesn't answer.

WALLINGS (O.S.)

Roberta?

ROBERTA

I just don't think --

WALLINGS (O.S.)

Roberta...We don't have any more time. The publisher reminded me today -- rather pointedly, in fact -- that a substantial advance was paid almost two years ago.

Roberta drops her head, rubs her temples with her free hand.

WALLINGS (O.S.)

We need to give them something.

ROBERTA

I will not give them a manuscript that's not ready, Mr. Wallings. I simply--

WALLINGS (O.S.)

You don't have a choice, Roberta. They're threatening legal action.

A long silence.

WALLINGS (O.S.)

So I will come by on Friday, then.

Again, silence.

WALLINGS (O.S.)

Roberta?

ROBERTA

Yes. Yes, Friday.

## WALLINGS

Good. Good. Thank you Roberta.  
 This will work out, I promise you.  
 I look forward to meeting you.

Roberta punches off the phone, opens the manuscript on the desk, turns a couple of the pages.

## ROBERTA

It'll be here, but it's shit.

Roberta takes her tea cup to the windows and looks out at the night city skyline.

## 18 INT. 30TH STREET STATION -- NIGHT

Almost completely empty. The large clock hanging from the ceiling in the center of the station reads 3:22 am.

In a dark corner, huddled into the back of an alcove, America sits scribbling on her little pad, a can of Lipton Iced tea balanced on her knee.

## AMERICA (V.O.)

The quiet numbs,  
 Plumbs your soul,  
 Makes you remember the unquiet times  
 When all of life seemed to be  
 screaming,  
 When even your own soul wailed like  
 a coyote in the canyons;  
 But now it's quiet.  
 So quiet.  
 And there's no quiet like middle of  
 the night quiet,  
 Alone on the planet quiet,  
 Wondering where you fit quiet,  
 Looking for where you stepped off  
 the track quiet,  
 Afraid you'll never get back quiet.  
 That's the quiet that numbs...

## 19 EXT. BROAD STREET -- DAY

Early morning rush hour. Bright and cold.

America, trying in vain to wrap herself against the cold, moves up the street, checking trash cans, panhandling the occasional PASSERBY in the thick commuter crowd.

## 20 INT. LYSTECKI'S CAR -- DAY

Carl Lystecky sips a cup of coffee, watches the street.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

he sees America. He checks the old photo, then sets the coffee on the dashboard, exits the car.

21 EXT. BROAD STREET -- DAY

Lystecki tries to cross the street, moving toward an unsuspecting America.

A car almost hits him. The DRIVER honks his horn, curses out the window.

America hears this, looks up. She sees Lystecki coming quickly across the street, his eyes on her. She takes off.

Lystecki pursues her, about 60 feet back. Both of them dodge around and through the thick crowd of rush hour PEDESTRIANS.

America dashes across a cross street just as a bus pulls around the corner, which blocks Lystecki's view.

America sees the burgundy awning of Symphony House 30 feet ahead. Standing at the doorway is Vernon Arkis. He's busy with a DELIVERY MAN.

America slows her pace, moves expertly among the crowd. When she comes to the alleyway next to Symphony House, she ducks into it.

The bus finally clears the intersection, allowing Lystecki to continue. He looks for America, but can't see her. He runs past Symphony House and on up Broad.

22 INT. ALLEYWAY BESIDE SYMPHONY HOUSE -- DAY

A pile of trash bags near a big dumpster. America is tucked by the wall beside the dumpster, several trash bags pulled around her. Her eyes are wide, her breath rapid.

The side door to Symphony House suddenly flies open, bangs against the wall, scaring the bejesus out of America. Her shriek scares the bejesus out of Charlie, who has emerged with a trash bag in each hand.

America jumps up from her hiding place, moving like a mongoose sizing up a cobra -- short, up and down, side to side shifts, uncertain whether to run or fight. Charlie smiles at this.

Charlie's smile disarms America. She stops her odd movements. Then starts again. This makes Charlie laugh out loud.

CHARLIE

What are you doing?

America stops. She looks to the mouth of the alley, then back to Charlie.

AMERICA

Playing hide and seek.

CHARLIE

You are?

AMERICA

Uh-huh. And I need a place to hide.  
You have a place to hide?

CHARLIE

No...

AMERICA

How 'bout...

America points to the basement door.

CHARLIE

Inside?  
(off America's nod)  
Sure. I guess so.

America darts inside. Charlie watches her, then drops the two trash bags in his hands and follows her in.

23 EXT. BROAD STREET -- DAY

Lystecki stops. It's obvious he's lost America.

LYSTECKI

Shit.

Lystecki turns and retraces his steps back up Broad.

24 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- DAY

Concrete and block walls, bare-bulb stark, sooty, dusty.  
Stored junk, huge heaters and blowers, assorted equipment.

Charlie closes and locks the door, then turns. No America.

CHARLIE

Where are you?  
(no answer)  
Are you hiding now?

Charlie hears a noise. He walks around one of the blowers, into a large open space. He sees America next to a huge pile of trash bags. She's bent over one, searching through it.

CHARLIE

You gonna hide in the bag?

AMERICA

(without looking up)  
Looking for treasure.

CHARLIE

There's no treasure in there. There's only trash.

AMERICA

Oh, no. No, no. Look...

America reaches into the trash bag and pulls out a small, hinged box -- the kind a new watch comes in.

AMERICA

See? A treasure box. Just need the treasure.

Charlie smiles big, his face full of fascination.

A trash bag suddenly falls from a chute opening in the ceiling, lands on the pile. America is startled, jumps back, does her mongoose thing again.

Charlie laughs, points to the chute opening.

CHARLIE

That's where they come from. From upstairs.

(proudly)

I carry them out.

America goes back to the bag, but glances warily at the chute above as she does so.

CHARLIE

Any treasure?

AMERICA

Always treasure...

She pulls out a ballpoint pen, clicks it.

AMERICA

See?

Charlie smiles, takes the pen from America, who digs back into the bag, comes up with a single blue, wool glove.

AMERICA

Oh, yes

The hand gets

The warm threads...

(holds the glove up)

Real treasure.

CHARLIE

But there's only one.

AMERICA

Better than none.

America digs into another bag, stiffens, and stands upright, something in her hands.

AMERICA

Oh...

CHARLIE

What?

America turns, a huge smile on her face. She shows Charlie an almost full package of Oreos Extra Creme.

AMERICA

Somebody doesn't seem  
To like the creme in-between.  
You like the creme?

Charlie nods eagerly. He and America plop down onto the pile of bags. America hands Charlie a cookie, takes one for herself. They both twist them apart to get the creme.

CHARLIE

Treasure.

AMERICA

Mm-hmm. Good treasure.

25 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

A TALL BUSINESSMAN, 40s and balding, with a THIN REDHEAD, 20s, on his arm, approaches Arkis at the doorman's stand.

The Tall Businessman hands Arkis an envelope, takes a key from him.

ARKIS

512. One hour.

The Tall Businessman nods, moves toward the elevators.

26 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- DAY

Charlie and America both twist open cookies, lick the creme.

CHARLIE

Where do you live?

America points to the alley door.

CHARLIE

Outside?  
(off America's nod)  
It's cold, isn't it?

AMERICA

Sometimes a choice  
Is not what they give;  
Sometimes a choice  
We make just to live...

CHARLIE  
 (smiling at her)  
 I wouldn't want to live outside.

AMERICA  
 Sometimes you need to hide  
 And not be found;  
 A game of hide and seek  
 On neutral ground...

CHARLIE  
 I used to play hide and seek. I was  
 good. Mom could never find me. You  
 want to play with me?

AMERICA  
 Be warm and left alone.  
 Only game I want to play.  
 Be warm and left alone.  
 (she glances at Charlie)  
 Okay?

Charlie twists another Oreo. He nods.

CHARLIE  
 Wanna see where I live?

27 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- CHARLIE'S ROOM -- DAY

America sits on a small cot, looks around the walk-in-closet-sized room. There's a small desk with a lamp, a chifferobe, a nightstand. Movie posters on the walls.

CHARLIE  
 I used to live upstairs...before...

Charlie's face skews a bit -- a painful memory.

AMERICA  
 Upstairs?

CHARLIE  
 (nods)  
 But this is where Vernon tells me I  
 live now.

America looks around the room. Her eyes fall on a book on the nightstand. On the cover is a picture of a black woman -- a younger Roberta Fanning. America picks up the book, looks at it.

CHARLIE  
 That's Ms. Fanning's book. She lives  
 upstairs.

INSERT: THE BOOK



A dog-eared copy of "The Constancy of Soul", Roberta Fanning's first book of poetry -- a banner across one corner proclaims it "Winner of the Nobel Prize for Poetry".

CHARLIE (V.O.)

It's my favorite. You kind of talk like it.

BACK TO SCENE

AMERICA

I talk like it?

CHARLIE

Uh-huh. You know. Like in poems. You read poems?

America's face freezes a little, her eyes defocus. She nods slowly, then looks down at the book as she opens it. She looks at a poem closely, reading it to herself, her finger running down the lines.

America turns the page, reads another. She's a little excited.

AMERICA

Oh...

CHARLIE

You like it?

America nods.

AMERICA

Like my...  
(looks to Charlie)  
Where is she?

CHARLIE

Upstairs. But she hides too, like you. She wears a...a kind of...

Charlie tries to indicate a hood, then wraps himself in his arms.

CHARLIE

...thing...around her. Nobody can see her. But maybe she'd like to play with us.

AMERICA

Charlie, I...

The elevator ding nearby stops her, and the angry voice of Vernon Arkis makes America drop the book and stand in abject fear.

ARKIS (V.O.)  
 Charlie! Where the hell are you,  
 boy? Why aren't you upstairs watering  
 the plants like I told you?

America is once again the mongoose...terrified, not knowing  
 where to go, what to do.

Charlie puts his finger to his lips, then moves to his door.

CHARLIE  
 Be right there, Vern...uh, Mr. Arkis.  
 I'm sorry. Be right there.

ARKIS (V.O.)  
 Don't want to have to hold back your  
 dinner, you hear what I'm sayin'?

CHARLIE  
 Yessir. Be right there.

At the sound of the elevator doors closing, Charlie takes  
 America's hand and guides her to the alley door. America  
 bounds up the steps and into the alley.

CHARLIE  
 Come back when you want to get warm  
 and look for treasures. And we still  
 have to play hide and seek.

America smiles at Charlie, then moves quickly up the alley  
 toward Broad Street.

Charlie watches her go, then sighs, and goes back into the  
 basement.

28 EXT. ALLEYWAY ENTRANCE ONTO BROAD STREET -- DAY

America emerges from the alley, but jumps back immediately.

Standing at the entrance of Symphony House, talking to Arkis,  
 is Lysteki. He shows Arkis the photo. Arkis nods his head,  
 points up and down the street.

America looks to the back of the alley for another way out.  
 It's a dead end. And Charlie's already gone, the door closed.

29 EXT. SYMPHONY HOUSE ENTRANCE -- DAY

Arkis hands the picture of America back to Lysteki.

ARKIS  
 She's a pain in my ass is what she  
 is. Filthy bitch. If it were up to  
 me, I'd smack her with...

The doors suddenly open and Roberta Fanning, again dressed  
 in her cape and hood, exits.

Arkis, with a glance to Lystecki, pops into fawning mode, his voice loud.

ARKIS  
Uh...Miss Fanning. Morning. Nice day, huh?

30 EXT. ALLEYWAY ENTRANCE ONTO BROAD STREET -- DAY

America leans up against the wall, listening.

ARKIS (O.S.)  
Anything I can do for you, Miss Fanning?

31 EXT. SYMPHONY HOUSE ENTRANCE -- DAY

Fanning ignores Arkis completely, moves down the block.

Arkis turns back to Lystecki, his hardass face on again.

ARKIS  
As I was saying...

LYSTECKI  
(disdainfully)  
Yeah, yeah. I got it.  
(hands Arkis a card)  
And before you go smacking anybody, give me a call, she comes around again.

Lystecki moves off. Arkis sucks his teeth and watches him go before he tears up the card.

32 EXT. BROAD STREET -- DAY

Roberta passes the alley entrance, where America leans up against the wall.

America looks toward the entrance, sees Lystecki moving away and Arkis going back inside.

America jumps out of the alley, blends into the crowd, and moves up the street, several paces behind Roberta.

America tries to tighten her ratty coat against the cold. Her eyes fall on Roberta ahead of her, the cape and hood wrapped around her, looking warm.

America quickens her pace.

33 EXT. CORNER OF BROAD AND WALNUT STREETS -- DAY

Roberta stops, looks at the lights, and seeing she can cross, steps into the intersection.

Two seconds later, America reaches the curb. She calls out.

AMERICA

'Scuse me! Hey!  
 (looks at the book)  
 Miss Roberta Fanning!

Roberta stops in the near lane of the intersection and turns, looks back into the eyes of America.

AMERICA

I have poems too;  
 And maybe you  
 Can help me to...

At that instant, a delivery truck runs the light on Walnut, broadsiding an SUV on Broad. The impact of the collision hurls the SUV across the intersection, where it slams into Roberta.

Roberta is thrown two dozen feet back onto the sidewalk, where she rolls like a ragdoll, ending up on her stomach, broken, bent and unconscious, her cape covering her like a shroud.

America backs against the wall of a building, stunned.

AMERICA

I didn't mean...I didn't...

Shocked PEDESTRIANS, and a moment later, a UNIFORMED COP, rush to Roberta's side. The Uniformed Cop reaches for his shoulder mic.

UNIFORMED COP

1420 to base. I need a bus at Broad  
 and Walnut, stat. Got a pedestrian  
 down. Looks bad.

The Uniformed Cop reaches down and pulls the cape from Roberta to better assess her condition. He tosses the cape to the side.

The cape lands at the feet of America Morrison, who looks down at it, then around at the CROWD collecting to gaze at the drama unfolding around them. No one looks at America.

34 EXT. BROAD STREET -- DAY

A caped and hooded figure moves quickly up the street away from the commotion on the corner, where an ambulance pulls up.

Occasionally, a shredded Ugh boot will protrude from the bottom of the cape, which drags on the concrete.

Inside the hood, the frightened face of America Morrison looks down, only interested in getting as far from that corner as possible.

Suddenly there is red carpet beneath her feet.

35 EXT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- DAY

The voice is unmistakable.

ARKIS

Good morning again, Ms. Fanning.  
Did we forget something? Let me get  
the door for you.

America stands frozen.

ARKIS

Ms. Fanning? You comin' in?

America's eyes glance over the carpet toward the door. She sees Arkis' foot take a step toward her.

ARKIS

Ms. Fanning?

America immediately moves past Arkis and through the door, head down and tucked back into the cape's hood as far as possible.

36 INT. LOBBY -- SYMPHONY HOUSE -- DAY

America moves blindly across the lobby, head down, not knowing where she's going. She glances up, sees a hallway in the corner, heads for it.

ARKIS

Where you goin', Ms. Fanning?

America stops, steals a glance back at an approaching Arkis. Desperate, she takes a tentative step, then stops again.

ARKIS

What's up? You all right, there?

Suddenly, the elevator doors open. Inside the car is Charlie Emson, a pump canister and watering wand in his hands.

Charlie smiles.

CHARLIE

Hi, Ms. Fanning.

America immediately moves into the elevator.

CHARLIE

I'll take you up.

Charlie pushes the Penthouse button, then stands back. He smiles and half-waves at Arkis as the doors close.

ARKIS  
Everybody's a fuckin' nutcase...

37 INT. ELEVATOR -- DAY

Charlie and the concealed America ride up in silence.

Charlie steals a glance toward the caped figure next to him, then smiles. He sets the canister and wand down, reaches into his jacket. He pulls out his copy of Roberta's "The Constancy of Soul."

CHARLIE  
I was just showing this to a new friend, Miss Fanning. She liked it. It's my favorite, too.

Charlie thrusts the book toward America.

America hesitates a moment, then reaches out a hand from inside the cape to take the book. But the hand she offers wears the blue wool glove she pulled from the trash bag earlier.

Charlie instantly recognizes the glove, and peeks around and up into the hood. Charlie's jaw drops, then a smile appears.

38 INT. JEFFERSON HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM -- DAY

Neurosurgeon DOCTOR EVAN CRAIN snaps off his gloves, looks to the TREATMENT NURSE across the gurney from him.

CRAIN  
Monitor her vital signs, send her upstairs immediately. I'm going to prep.

On the gurney, it's just possible to make out the swollen, bruised, and lacerated face of Roberta Fanning.

Crain looks to the Uniformed Cop standing nearby.

CRAIN  
Know who she is yet?

UNIFORMED COP  
No ID. Nothing. Nobody nearby knew her. She gonna make it?

They walk to the nearby elevator. Crain holds the doors.

CRAIN  
Don't know. She's in a coma, probably caused by severe bleeding in her brain. I'm not even looking at the broken hip, ribs, or leg yet.  
(MORE)

CRAIN (CONT'D)

She has a slim chance, but there's no telling if there's brain damage, or if she'll ever come out of it. It would help to know her medical history.

UNIFORMED COP

I'll keep lookin' for someone who knows her.

Crain nods and steps into the elevator.

39 INT. PENTHOUSE FLOOR FOYER -- DAY

Charlie and America emerge from the elevators. America is nervously looking around for a way out.

AMERICA

I'm not her...

CHARLIE

You look like her, in the cape and all...

AMERICA

(still moving)

Yes...

But a thing doesn't make

Another thing true...

Doesn't make

Another one you...

CHARLIE

But it's her cape. Where's Ms. Roberta?

America stops, looks at Charlie.

AMERICA

She's...hiding.

Charlie takes a moment to process this.

CHARLIE

(a smile spreading)

Oh-h-h-h...she's playing...

AMERICA

Yes. She's playing.

CHARLIE

And you're s'pose to hide?

America isn't really paying attention. She's looking around for a way out.

AMERICA

Yes. Yes, I'm...I'm hiding...here...

(anxiety level rising)

No...I'm...I don't...

(realizing there's no  
way out)

Where is this? How do I get...?

Charlie points to the Penthouse door.

CHARLIE

This is Ms. Roberta's house.

America stops, looks at the door, then Charlie.

CHARLIE

She always leaves the key here...

Charlie bends, pulls up the corner of a doormat, picks up a key.

CHARLIE

...so I can water plants, leave mail.

Charlie takes the key, opens the door. America immediately scurries inside. Charlie remains in the doorway.

CHARLIE

I better go. Vern will be looking  
for me.

The mention of his name stiffens America.

AMERICA

Don't tell him...

CHARLIE

He's not playing, right? He never  
plays.

America shakes her head.

CHARLIE

(cheerfully)

I'll come back later, okay? After  
my work. Bye!

Charlie backs out, closes the door, leaving America standing alone in the Penthouse Foyer.

AMERICA

(whispered)

Oh, shit.

40 INT. LECTURE HALL -- UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA -- DAY

An amphitheater, with 30-40 students slouching in chairs, taking notes.



At the front of the hall is Dr. Orrin Mays Stanley, impeccably dressed in expensive suit and tie. His name, and "Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Age of Romantic Poetry" is written on the blackboard behind him.

ORRIN

One cannot underestimate the importance of Coleridge and Wordsworth to the world's literature. With the publication of their collaboration, "Lyrical Ballads", in 1792, they began the Romantic Era of poetry, perhaps the greatest era of poetry this world has ever seen. In fact, given what is out there today, I doubt we'll ever see quality poetry like that again.

BLACK MALE STUDENT

Doesn't it depend on the time and place, Doctor?

ORRIN

What's your point?

BLACK MALE STUDENT

Shouldn't the value of what an era calls its "rhymed literature" rest in how it expresses that era's emotional connection to itself? I mean, have you read or heard any of the hip-hop or def poetry out there? I suspect your Symposium for the Wordsworth Chair will be offering --

ORRIN

First, it's not my Symposium. It's public relations, period. Second, I don't "suspect" anything I hear there will hold a candle to someone like Coleridge or Wordsworth or Blake. Theirs was the poetry of discipline -- of meters and structure, of language that uplifts rather than destroys, that expresses the power of God in man, a future of hope and compassion for one another.

During this last, the door at the upper back of the hall opens quietly, and Carl Lystecki steps into the room.

Orrin catches sight of Lystecki, moves to the lectern.

ORRIN

There's a reason, sir, why a university with the stature that this one has -- that you are

(MORE)

ORRIN (CONT'D)  
 privileged to be allowed to attend --  
 is endowing a chair to William  
 Wordsworth and not to "50 Cent."  
 (closing his folders  
 and books)  
 The next 200 pages for Wednesday.  
 Good afternoon.

Orrin mounts the stairs quickly to the door, where Lystecki has already exited.

41 EXT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA -- COMMONS MALL -- DAY

Orrin and Lystecki walk among students, their conversation in hushed tones.

ORRIN  
 How can someone live on the streets  
 of Philadelphia for so long and not  
 be found?

LYSTECKI  
 It's a big city, Dr. Stanley. If  
 someone doesn't want to be found --

ORRIN  
 She's mentally ill, Mr. Lystecki,  
 and habitual, if she fits the mold.  
 You just need to find the pattern, a  
 trace.

LYSTECKI  
 Which I think we have. We think  
 she's working Broad Street right  
 now.

ORRIN  
 "Working." My God. It sounds like a  
 criminal enterprise.

LYSTECKI  
 Sir, it was just a figure of --

ORRIN  
 Look...I asked you to handle this  
 quietly because a lot of eyes are  
 going to be watching me and this  
 campus in the next couple of weeks.  
 I don't need an embarrassing situation  
 to arise. And I certainly don't  
 want to relive...Well, that's none  
 of your business. I just want this  
 woman found and properly cared for.  
 Please do that, Mr. Lystecki. It's  
 what you're being paid to do.

Orrin turns from Lystecki and walks away.

42 INT. ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America sits on the edge of an ottoman, still in the cape. She reaches into the cape's pocket, pulls out a small wallet. She looks at the ID of Roberta Fanning.

AMERICA

I'm so sorry...

America rises, takes off the cape, and moves into the apartment. She wanders slowly, touching knick-knacks, running her hand on the fine, smooth wood of the dining room table. She wanders into the kitchen.

43 INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

America opens the refrigerator, looks inside at the wealth of food and smiles.

AMERICA

Your food...  
I'm you...  
My food...  
All good...

America takes bread, cold cuts, cheese, mustard -- an armful -- and sits at the small kitchen table, makes herself a sandwich, begins to eat ravenously.

America pulls her notepad and pen from her pocket, flips to a blank page, begins to write as she eats.

AMERICA (V.O.)

How YOU know what empty is  
When you got all a' this  
Stuck inside a freezin' box --  
Every day you get to eat  
What others only get to dream  
About...  
One or two bites tops  
Is what the have-not's get  
If you're lucky, yet  
Even that's a lottery win.  
But here inside, you got a feast  
Feed us ALL a week, at least...

America stops, considers the last line. Then she jumps up, opens the fridge and pulls out more food, takes it to the table. She starts to make a lot of sandwiches.

44 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

A MAILMAN drops a large plastic container of mail at the Doorman's desk, where Arkis sits reading a sports magazine.

Arkis watches the Mailman leave, then picks up a radio unit.

ARKIS

Charlie. Mail's here. Get your ass  
down here and deliver it.

45 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- NINTH FLOOR HALLWAY -- DAY

Charlie sets the watering wand down, fumbles for his radio.

CHARLIE

Okay. Be right there.

Charlie moves to the elevators.

46 INT. PENTHOUSE KITCHEN -- DAY

America places the last wrapped sandwich in a large department  
store shopping bag, hefts it to see it's weight.

America carries the shopping bag of sandwiches into the main  
room.

47 INT. PENTHOUSE MAIN ROOM -- DAY

America approaches the front door, sets the bag down, and  
picks up Roberta's cape, puts it on, pulls up the hood.

America picks up the bag, takes a deep breath, opens the  
front door.

And screams.

Charlie screams back. He stands there with the mail.

AMERICA

Stop doing that!

CHARLIE

I'm sorry...I didn't mean...  
(seeing the cape)  
You leaving?

America nods, then moves toward the elevators.

CHARLIE

Vernon's down there.

America stops, distraught.

AMERICA

Oh-h-h-h...

CHARLIE

Want me to help you?  
(off America's nod)  
Okay. Listen.

Charlie pushes the elevator button.

48 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

Evening rush hour. A number of RESIDENTS are coming in, being fawned over by Arkis.

The elevator doors open. America stands, in cape and hood, shopping bag in hand, Charlie next to her.

CHARLIE  
(quietly)  
Okay. Just walk to the door.

America starts to move across the lobby with her normal quick step.

Charlie surreptitiously grabs the cape and give it a tug.

CHARLIE  
(whisper)  
Slower. She walks slower.

America slows down, takes a more methodical step.

CHARLIE  
(whisper)  
Yeah. Like that.

When they make it to the front door, Charlie opens it for America as she moves out onto Broad Street.

Arkis looks up from his desk, where he's doing something with a Resident. He bolts to the door, shoves Charlie out of the way.

ARKIS  
Whatta you doin'? Get the hell outta here. Sorry Ms. Fanning...

But America is already moving up the block.

Charlie moves back toward the elevators, doing his best to contain his excited glee.

49 INT. LYSTECKI'S CAR -- DAY

Lystecky again sips coffee.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

he sees the caped figure moving up Broad, but looks away, uninterested, takes another sip of coffee.

50 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- NIGHT

The Nurse approaches the bed, on which lies Roberta Fanning, her head and most of her face covered in bandages, a breathing tube hanging from her mouth, a saline drip-line running to her arm.

Dr. Evan Crain listens to her chest.

NURSE  
How's she coming?

CRAIN  
I honestly don't know. I've done  
all I can. Keep talking to her. It  
might help. There's evidence coma  
patients are lucid on some level.

NURSE  
It would be nice to know her name.

51 EXT. EMPTY LOT -- NIGHT

America sits with Whisper, Boston, Little Jeannie, and Squints  
around the fire at the back of the lot. They all eat the  
sandwiches.

SQUINTS  
Where'd you get these again?

BOSTON  
Who cares?

WHISPER  
Hear that. Thanks.  
(smiles)  
Suzette.

America stops mid-bite, eyes wide.

AMERICA  
Don't call me that.

WHISPER  
Why not, honey? Man says it's yo'  
name.

AMERICA  
My mother's name...

Little Jeannie hears something in America's voice. She leans  
in close to America.

LITTLE JEANNIE  
You and your momma don't talk no  
more?

America shakes her head, then holds up her notepad.

AMERICA  
I try. I write everyday like she  
did -- like we talked when I was  
little. I figure she'd hear me best  
that way. But she doesn't answer  
back...

Little Jeannie nods understanding.

LITTLE JEANNIE

She passed?

Little Jeannie sees the answer in America's eyes, nods again.

LITTLE JEANNIE

Talk us one of those poems you got  
there, sweetie. Like you'd talk to  
your momma.

FINGERS

Yeah, A. That'd be nice. Ain't  
heard one in a while.

America thinks a moment, then pulls out her pad, flips a few  
pages.

AMERICA

(she reads quickly,  
with a hip-hop cadence)

A hand, a pen,  
A will,  
No words;  
A mind, a desire,  
A potential,  
No thoughts;  
A need, a wish,  
A dream,  
No fulfillment;  
A song, a lyric, A voice,  
No sound;  
A love, a friend,  
A companion,  
No connection;  
A mother, a father,  
A family,  
No understanding;

The crackle of the fire is the only other sound. No one's  
even chewing as they listen intently to America.

AMERICA

A touch, a glance,  
A hope,  
No recognition;  
A prayer, a faith,  
A calling,  
No followers;  
A God, an earth,  
A creation,  
No faith;  
A breath, a heartbeat,  
A life,  
No freedom;  
A you, a me,

(MORE)

AMERICA (CONT'D)

An us...  
 A you, a me,  
 An us...  
 A you, a me,  
 An us...  
 ...Is all.

America stops. No one speaks for a moment.

LITTLE JEANNIE

Right on, girl. All we got is each other, right?

WHISPER

Amen.

52 INT. BURNED OUT BUILDING SHELL -- NIGHT

Everyone's asleep around a small fire tucked into a corner. Squints and Little Jeannie have their arms wrapped around each other. Whisper, Fingers, and Boston are huddled together like spoons in a drawer, an old tarp over them.

America lies near one wall, newspapers covering her length. She stares at the starry sky visible through a jagged hole in the concrete above her.

She sighs, then slowly and quietly slides the papers from her and rises. She carefully puts a broken two-by-four on the fire, then tiptoes away from the group.

53 INT. JEFFERSON HOSPITAL -- MAIN ENTRANCE -- NIGHT

America enters, moves to the Receptionist's desk. An elderly CANDYSTRIPER, 70s, with a wrinkled face dominated by a sweet smile, looks up.

AMERICA

I'm looking for someone.

CANDYSTRIPER

We have lots of those, sweetie.

AMERICA

She was hurt bad in the street.

CANDYSTRIPER

Do you know her name?

America stares at her a moment.

AMERICA

Roberta. I think.

CANDYSTRIPER

Does Roberta have a last name?



AMERICA

Fanning?

The Candystriper scrolls a computer screen.

CANDYSTRIPER

No one here by that name. You sure that's her name?

America shrugs.

CANDYSTRIPER

Well, without a name...

(smiles)

Tell you what -- try the Trauma Floor...number 7. She'd most likely be there, or they'll know more'n I do, seein' as how I'm a little new.

America smiles, moves to the elevators.

54 INT. JEFFERSON HOSPITAL -- HALLWAY -- NIGHT

After-hours quiet. A solitary NIGHT NURSE rises from the Nurse's station and moves down the hall.

The elevators open. America emerges, wanders in the opposite direction, looking quickly into each room as she goes.

At the end of the short hall, she looks into a darkened room. In the dim light, America can see a black hand on the sheets.

55 INT. ROBERTA'S HOSPITAL ROOM -- NIGHT

America enters, gently closes the door. She moves to the bedside, looks at the bandaged Roberta Fanning.

AMERICA

(whispered)

Oh, my sweet God.

America brings a nearby chair to the bedside and sits. She touches Roberta's hand gently, then takes it in her own. She leans near Roberta's ear.

AMERICA

I'm America.  
You don't know me, see,  
But it was me  
That made you be  
Here...

America looks up at Roberta's eyes, black and blue and closed. Then back to the ear.

AMERICA

Can you hear me?

America looks again at Roberta's face for any recognition. She then begins to speak, hesitantly, without cadence or rhyme.

AMERICA

Just listen, then. 'Cause Charlie says you and me's a lot the same. And if we are, I need to talk to you. First and all, I'm so sorry you're here. I didn't mean for you to get hurt. I just wanted to ask you...you know...to find out how to make my poetry strong. Like yours. Charlie says your poetry is heard by everybody, so I thought...I mean, I just want mine to be heard by one person, you know? Just one. Her name is...was...Suzette. She's gone now, but maybe you know how...to...

America drops her head. This is hard.

AMERICA

I don't know. I just want her to hear my poems so she knows I learned it from her and hers can't be bad if that's so. But I don't know how to get her to hear it, and I figure maybe you know. Maybe you have a way, since so many people hear yours. But now you're here and I'm there, and they think I'm you...If it's okay with you, I'll stay there, okay? I'll be you a while, just 'til you get better, okay? 'Cause maybe I can find how you do it, you know? How I can get her to hear me.

America looks up at Roberta again.

AMERICA

I hope you're hearin' me.

56 EXT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- NIGHT

Late. A street sweeper goes by as America, swathed in cape and hood, enters.

57 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- NIGHT

America walks past the Doorman's desk, where the night man, JOHNNY JANOSIK, 70s and white-haired, sits in a rumpled uniform watching football on a small portable TV.

Janosik sees the hooded figure, looks back to his TV.

JANOSIK  
Evenin', Ms. Fanning.

58 INT. ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- NIGHT

America drops the cape on the couch and moves to the windows that overlook the city, lit up in the night.

AMERICA (V.O.)  
A city lights itself  
From inside,  
Like a ball of fire  
Rests beneath the surface  
And shimmers through  
The holes man pokes  
In the surface to let it out.  
Is that how the soul  
Shows itself to others?  
Through holes punched into  
The flesh that surrounds it?  
I wonder...  
Could she see my light tonight?

America turns from the window and begins to walk past the desk. But her eye for treasure spies a new legal pad on the desk. She instinctively tucks it under her sweater.

Something else catches her eye...the file of yellow legal pad paper that is Roberta Fanning's new manuscript.

America picks up the file, opens it, sees the first poem. She sits down, turns on the desk lamp and begins reading.

ROBERTA (V.O.)  
PLAYGROUND  
Children aren't afraid  
Of pain when they play;  
It's not in the world for them;  
The earth is soft,  
It catches and kisses,  
Caresses like a mother or kin...

America's face skews.

AMERICA  
(under her breath)  
No...

ROBERTA (V.O.)  
Teachers don't see,  
And accidents will happen,  
There's tragedy, they say, but not  
here...

AMERICA  
(louder)  
No, no, no...

America picks up a pencil, takes a clean pad of paper, and begins to write.

AMERICA (V.O.)  
 (in a hip-hop, def  
 style)  
 Children don't know fear,  
 They don't think pain's sharpness  
 Will rear  
 It's head;  
 So they run  
 Like it doesn't exist for them;  
 They jump  
 Like the earth is soft;  
 They fall  
 Like arms will catch them,  
 And lips will caress them,  
 Like the playground is their mother.

America taps her forehead with the pencil, nods, then continues writing.

AMERICA (V.O.)  
 The teacher looks  
 The other way,  
 Like accidents happen  
 On other days  
 And never here,  
 Like tragedy don't know this  
 address...

America smiles at her work. She picks up the page, then looks at Roberta's manuscript file, at all the pages in it that resemble the page she just wrote.

America reaches inside her coat pockets, pulls out her pads, and various scraps of paper on which she's scribbled poem after poem.

America picks up a few of the pages from Roberta's file, looks at them, then looks at the scraps of paper from her pockets.

AMERICA  
 (whispered to herself)  
 This is the way they're supposed to  
 be...like this...

America gets up, moves to the dining room table. She spreads out her scraps and notebooks around a pad of legal paper. She takes a scrap of paper with a poem on it, looks at it, then bends into transcribing it onto the pad.

59 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- HALLWAY IN FRONT OF APARTMENT 512 --  
 NIGHT

Charlie approaches 512. He stops and leans against the doorjamb, puts his head against the door.

Charlie hesitantly puts a key into the lock and turns it.  
He quietly enters.

60 INT. APARTMENT 512 -- NIGHT

The lights are on, but low. Soft, sexual jazz plays. In the deep background can be heard an occasional moan.

Charlie wanders, smiling at things he sees. He sits on the couch and picks up a throw pillow, smells it, then hugs it.

Charlie moves to a small table and picks up a photograph and smiles -- a MAN and a WOMAN, their arms around a small BOY, a younger Charlie.

Charlie touches the Woman's face with his fingers, then turns at a sound...

And is suddenly faced with a LARGE FAT MAN, a bath towel around his waist, holding two highball glasses, who is just as surprised to see Charlie.

LARGE FAT MAN

Who the fuck are you!?

Charlie bolts for the door.

LARGE FAT MAN

What the fuck are you doing in here!?

WOMAN (O.S.)

What is it, baby?

Charlie throws open the door and runs into the hallway.

61 INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Charlie runs into the room. He curls up on the bed, whimpering. He looks down at the picture he still holds in his hands. He pulls it to his chest as his closing eyes squeeze tears onto his cheeks.

The elevator dings, the sound of the doors sliding open.

ARKIS (O.S.)

Emson! You sorry little fuck! Where are you?!

62 INT. ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America lies asleep, bent across the dining room table, a pencil still in her hand.

Spread in an arc around her head are the pages and pages of America's poetry, now transcribed onto legal paper.

America awakens and slowly sits up. She rubs her eyes, then looks over the pages.

She gathers them, and places them in a file folder like the one Roberta's manuscript is in.

America carries her file to the desk. She puts Roberta's file on the floor with a stack of other files.

America puts her hand on her file of poems, looks up to the ceiling.

AMERICA

I've done them like hers. Can you  
see them now? Should I read you  
one?

She opens the file, picks up one of the poems, reads it aloud.

AMERICA

You fear I am made  
From all her dark shades,  
Colored by what  
You called second-rate;  
But what you fear's part  
Of your misguided heart,  
Of language so sharp  
It lacerates;  
Where were you when  
I needed you then,  
In silence so loud  
It still desecrates?  
But that voice still calls  
From within those walls  
Where once you made it  
Capitulate.  
And know I will strive  
To keep it alive,  
As her voice in mine  
I incorporate.

America lets the page drop to the desk, thinking. Then she sets her jaw and moves toward the door.

63 EXT. STANLEY HOUSE -- 39TH AND WALNUT -- DAY

A tree-lined college street. Brick sidewalks. Large old houses with verandas.

America stands by the trunk of a large oak tree, staring across the street at her childhood home.

LITTLE AMERICA (V.O.)

Oh, Mommy, I miss you;  
Why did you leave? It's awful without  
you;  
Can you still see me?

64 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- 1968 -- DAY

A mantelpiece of family photos -- combinations of a distinguished Black Man, a beautiful but fragile-looking Black Woman, a small Black Girl.

A nearby wall of photos -- the Black Man in doctoral graduation robes, the Black Woman autographing books.

A television in the corner, sound down, shows live images from the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, 1968.

LITTLE AMERICA (V.O.)

It's days since you kissed me  
Or told me your love;  
Is everything all right  
With you up above?

The room is filled with MOURNERS, in black, talking in hushed tones, sipping coffee. A group of WOMEN whisper.

WHISPERING WOMAN 1

...found her hanging in the basement,  
can you imagine? Leaving her daughter  
like that? And Orrin?

WHISPERING WOMAN 2

Don't feel sorry for Orrin. Her  
writing was never good enough for  
him. Wouldn't give her no credit --

WHISPERING WOMAN 3

-- Off her medication is what I hear.

WHISPERING WOMAN 1

Uh-huh. And it runs in the family,  
you know. Poor little thing.

An ELDERLY BLACK MAN, 70s, rises from a chair, leaves the room.

65 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- HALLWAY -- 1968 -- DAY

The Elderly Black Man moves quietly down the hall to face a closed door.

LITTLE AMERICA (V.O.)

Grandad, he tries,  
But it's not the same...

The Elderly Black Man knocks on the door and opens it.

66 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- STUDY -- 1968 -- DAY

Orrin Mays Stanley, younger and thinner in his 30s, stands ramrod straight in black suit and tie, using the light from a window to read a large book. He doesn't look up when the door opens.

ELDERLY BLACK MAN  
Orrin. What you doin', son?

ORRIN  
I have a lecture on Coleridge  
tomorrow. I'm preparing.

ELDERLY BLACK MAN  
You have a wife fresh in the ground's  
what you have. And a daughter who  
needs her daddy. People's talkin'  
out there.

Orrin closes the book, gazes out the window.

ORRIN  
Let them talk.

He sets the book on the desk, walks to the Elderly Black  
Man.

ORRIN  
And never mention my wife again.  
She made her choice. Where's America?

67 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- LOFT WRITING ROOM -- 1968 -- DAY

Orrin opens the door, walks to the desk, looks down at a  
couple of books that rest on it.

INSERT: THE BOOKS

The title of one is "Missives from Dark Quarters". The  
author's name is Suzette Morrison. The second is titled  
"Moments", the author Suzette Morrison Stanley.

BACK TO SCENE

Orrin turns the books over, then squats, and looks under the  
desk.

LITTLE AMERICA (V.O.)  
And since you've been gone,  
Daddy's not said your name.

America Stanley, 8, small in short dress, sweater, and  
pigtails, sits under the desk, writing on a notepad.

ORRIN  
Come out of there, America.

America pushes further back under the desk.

LITTLE AMERICA  
No, Daddy! I want to stay here and  
write poems like Mommy did!

Orrin takes her arm, pulls her out from under the desk.



ORRIN

You're not to come into this room  
again. Do you understand?

LITTLE AMERICA

But daddy...

ORRIN

You'll not take the same path she  
did, America. Not on my watch.

He escorts a whimpering America from the room.

MONTAGE: (VO poetic stanzas run beneath each of the scenes  
that follow them, and with each scene, the poetic delivery  
becomes more insistent, more def, and the voice more mature  
and strident)

10-YEAR-OLD AMERICA (V.O.)

I don't like you, Coleridge,  
I don't like your words;  
You speak from a dead time  
Not part of my world...

-- America sits at a table, writing on her pad. Orrin  
approaches, takes her pad and pen, sets one of his large  
books in front of her, taps it. America shoves the book  
from the table, runs from the room;

14-YEAR-OLD AMERICA (V.O.)

At what single point  
Did I lose connection  
With what now looks back  
From my own reflection?  
Who is that there,  
Seeking salvation?

-- Orrin walks past America's bedroom door and looks in.  
America sits in front of a mirror on the closet door, her  
nose on the glass, staring at herself, her lips moving in  
silent recitation;

18-YEAR-OLD AMERICA (V.O.)

You don't speak for me, old man  
You don't make the decisions  
anymore...  
I don't listen  
I choose what matters now  
I choose what makes better sense  
This is my world now, old man.  
My world

-- Orrin bangs on the door to his office, tries the knob --  
it's locked. Inside, America sits cross-legged on the desk,  
one of Orrin's large texts of romantic poetry on her lap.  
She crosses out words and phrases in the book, rewrites them.

25-YEAR-OLD AMERICA (V.O.)  
 Down deep in the fibers of each of  
 us...  
 The clarity of ourselves shines out  
 like a beacon on a rough shore...  
 A beach of impossible assail;  
 But we look for that beacon,  
 Each of us;  
 We cry out for it,  
 We dig our nails into it when they  
 try to take it from us...  
 And when there's no other way to let  
 the beacon shine...  
 We turn it off. We put it away.  
 We hide it from even ourselves.

-- America sits in the Stanley living room, rocking, rocking,  
 rocking -- her eyes staring straight ahead, disconnected.  
 Nearby, Orrin is on the phone, agitated.

ORRIN  
 I need to admit her tonight. No,  
 not tomorrow! Tonight!

Orrin looks back at America, then turns back into the phone  
 call.

ORRIN  
 Yes. Her name is America Stanley --

American jumps up.

25-YEAR-OLD AMERICA  
 My name is Morrison! America  
 Morrison! Like my mother!

America runs to the front door, opens it and runs out into  
 the night.

Orrin drops the phone, runs to the door.

ORRIN  
 America!

He looks onto the street.

ORRIN  
 America!

68 EXT. STANLEY HOUSE -- 39TH AND WALNUT -- PRESENT DAY -- DAY

America comes out of her memory, to the sound of Orrin's  
 voice.

ORRIN  
 America?

America looks across the street. Orrin, briefcase in hand, stands on the curb, looking at her.

ORRIN  
America, is that you?

America looks at Orrin intensely for a moment, then turns and almost runs down the block.

Orrin crosses the street, dodging a car, trying to follow her.

ORRIN  
America! Please! Stop!

But America is too swift, and disappears around a corner.

Orrin stops his pursuit.

ORRIN  
Damn.

69 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

America, hidden in the cape, enters and moves toward the elevators. As she passes the Doorman's stand, Arkis jumps up.

ARKIS  
There she is.

A young man, MIKE WALLINGS, 20s, in sharp, expensive clothes worn to imply unplanned and casual, stands as Arkis moves from the Doorman's stand.

ARKIS  
(to Wallings)  
Come on.

Arkis and Wallings move toward America.

ARKIS  
Ms. Fanning. Hold up a minute.  
Someone here to see you.

America keeps moving to the elevators, reaches out and presses the UP button.

ARKIS  
Ms. Fanning...

America doesn't move as Arkis and Wallings come next to her. She continues to look down. Inside the hood, her face is a mask of terror.

ARKIS  
Guy here says he's your agent.  
(MORE)

ARKIS (CONT'D)

I tried to phone up, but no answer.  
Obviously.

WALLINGS

I'm Mike Wallings, Ms. Fanning.  
From William Morris. We spoke on  
the phone?

Wallings extends his hand in front of America. America  
hesitates, then snakes a hand out of the cape.

AMERICA

Mm-hmm.

Wallings leans around, tries to catch a glimpse of the woman  
before him in the cape, but just as he does so, the elevator  
doors open.

America instantly moves into the back corner of the car.

Wallings looks at Arkis, who shrugs his shoulders, rolls his  
eyes.

ARKIS

(to Wallings)  
Tried to tell ya.

WALLINGS

(to America)  
Do you mind if I come up, Ms. Fanning?  
We need to talk about the new  
manuscript.

America hesitates, then nods.

Wallings moves into the car.

WALLINGS

What floor?

ARKIS

Penthouse.

Wallings pushes the button. The doors close.

70 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- PENTHOUSE FLOOR FOYER -- DAY

America, still in the cape and hood, approaches the Penthouse  
door, Wallings behind her. She stoops, pulls the key from  
under the mat, opens the door and enters. Wallings follows  
her.

71 INT. PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America moves into the apartment, drops the key on a side  
table.

WALLINGS

We're all excited about this book, believe me. It's not everyday a Nobel poet delivers a new collection of work. And I'm sure you're as excited as we are about the possibilities for the Wordsworth Chair, right? Great cross-promotional opportunities there.

America stops in the middle of the room, without turning.

An awkward silence, as Wallings stares at America's back.

WALLINGS

So...uh...

America takes a deep breath. She reaches up, and drops the hood onto her back. Then she turns and faces Wallings.

Wallings smiles.

WALLINGS

Perhaps I can take a look at the manuscript? Would that be all right, Ms. Fanning?

America stands transfixed, a deer in headlights. Her eyes dart to the desk, where her file of poetry lies, then back to Wallings.

Wallings catches the eye move, goes to the desk.

WALLINGS

Here? This it?

Wallings picks up the file. America immediately reacts.

AMERICA

No, don't...!

But Wallings is not deterred.

WALLINGS

It's okay. I'll just take a quick look through it.

Wallings turns to the windows, sits in a chair. He opens the file and begins reading.

America is frozen. She doesn't smile, doesn't blink, doesn't move a muscle. But after a moment, she slowly removes the cape, drops it on a chair.

AMERICA

(quietly)

Tea.

Wallings looks up.

WALLINGS

Hmm? What?

AMERICA

Tea.

WALLINGS

Uh...sure. Tea would be great.

Wallings goes back to the file. America backs into the kitchen.

72 INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

America prepares the tea. As she does so, she sneaks a peek now and again at Wallings in the main room.

AMERICA

(whispering)

WhatamIdoingWhatamIdoingWhatamIdoing  
...?

73 INT. PENTHOUSE MAIN ROOM -- DAY

Wallings turns a page, reads, turns another page, reads. A short, amused breath escapes his lips, which expand into a smile.

America emerges from the kitchen, carrying two mugs of tea. She approaches Wallings, stops several feet from him, wary of getting close.

Wallings looks up. America stays put. Wallings rises slightly, enough to reach out and take the mug of tea from America. He puts the mug on the sill next to him.

America backs off a step, sips her tea, eyeing him.

Wallings turns another page, then another, shaking his head.

America sees this, checks the most direct path to the door.

WALLINGS

(looking up)

This is...

America picks up the cape, moves toward the door.

WALLINGS

...remarkable.

America stops, looks back at Wallings.

WALLINGS

I had no idea you had such a...a  
"young" voice. It's terrific,  
Roberta.

AMERICA

It is?

WALLINGS

Yes. Absolutely. It's edgy, current,  
a modern voice. Like this one...  
(flips back a couple  
pages)  
"Salvation Sister." A beautiful piece.

Wallings takes out the page, holds it out to America.

WALLINGS

Here. Read it for me.

America looks at the page, covered in her scrawled hand.  
She shakes her head.

AMERICA

No...it's not...

WALLINGS

Please, Roberta. Poetry's meant to  
be read aloud.

Wallings offers her the page again.

America reluctantly takes it, looks at it, then begins to  
read. Her voice is quiet at first, then the force begins to  
come as she connects to the emotions in the words.

AMERICA

I looked to you as a  
Salvation Sister,  
And you did not back down  
From the props or the obligation.  
You kept the light in your eye,  
And in my seeing it flare,  
You replaced the shine in mine.  
You came to me with no shame  
And a rebuilt innocence  
Of spirit and life,  
And reassured my own reachings-out.  
You shared your soul  
And in the passing,  
Gave me mine again --  
In soft love,  
In sensual caress,  
In whispered words  
Only my heart has retained.  
They will echo  
And re-touch me,

(MORE)

AMERICA (CONT'D)

Float me softly,  
Hold me warmly,  
Pass me securely  
On to the next day.

She looks up to see Wallings smiling.

WALLINGS

I can see why you won the Nobel.

Wallings takes the page from America, puts it back in the file, tucks it under his arm, stands.

WALLINGS

I can't tell you how excited about this I am. I'm going to push for this to be released immediately. We have to set up some readings, too.

AMERICA

Readings?

WALLINGS

Absolutely. I'll make some calls today. You need to get out there right now with this.

AMERICA

What "out there"?

WALLINGS

Your voice is amazing, Roberta. If people hear you reading this stuff, they're going to want to buy it. Trust me. I know a dozen clubs that'll book you tonight.

AMERICA

No. No, I can't--

Wallings moves toward the door.

WALLINGS

And wait'll that guy at Penn reads this...that Wordsworth Chair is as good as yours--

AMERICA

-- Penn? What guy?

WALLINGS

Stanley, I think his name is. We're going to be lobbying for you to--

America grabs her file of poetry from Wallings' arm. Several pages flutter to the floor.



AMERICA

No, no, no, no, no...

WALLINGS

Roberta--

AMERICA

Don't call me that.

America stoops and gathers the fallen pages.

WALLINGS

I'm sorry. Ms. Fanning--Let me help you there.

America blocks him.

AMERICA

No. They're mine. I need them. You can't have them.

WALLINGS

Ms. Fanning. We talked about this. You have an obligation to Harcourt Brace.

America holds the file close to her chest.

AMERICA

No. They're for someone else.

WALLINGS

Who? We have a contract--

America points to the door.

AMERICA

--Go. You go.

WALLINGS

Ms. Fanning. Mr. Mills is--

America opens the door.

AMERICA

Go! Go, go, go!

Wallings puts up his hands, moves into the hall.

WALLINGS

All right, all right. But we have to --

America slams the door closed, stands transfixed, looking at it. Then she bolts.

74 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- DAY

The elevator doors open. America, in her old tattered coat, emerges. She walks quickly around the heaters, looking.

AMERICA  
(quietly)  
Charlie? Charlie!

America finally finds the area where Charlie's room is. She moves to the doorway. It's dark in the room.

AMERICA  
Charlie? You in there, Charlie?  
Where you been?

75 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- CHARLIE'S ROOM -- DAY

America steps into the dark room. She stumbles around, finds the lamp, turns it on.

On the bed, Charlie lies curled, facing the wall. America sits on the edge of the bed, pushes Charlie.

AMERICA  
I gotta go.  
People gonna know.  
Can't stay.  
Gotta go 'way.

Charlie doesn't move. America nudges him again.

AMERICA  
Charlie. Hey.

Slowly, Charlie begins to roll over. He still holds the picture.

AMERICA  
Gotta say goodb...

She stops cold when she sees Charlie's deeply black eye.

AMERICA  
Oh. Oh, God.

Charlie scootches up against his pillow, his eyes down in embarrassment.

CHARLIE  
I went somewhere...not s'posed to.

AMERICA  
Who...?

CHARLIE  
I made somebody mad, and then  
Vernon...

Charlie struggles for the description, finally giving up and just mock-socking himself in the eye.

CHARLIE

...you know.

America points up.

AMERICA

Hawkface? He...?

America swings her arm, stops her fist as it comes close to Charlie's face, Charlie wincing and pulling back. Charlie nods.

America stands, starts her mongoose thing. But it's not in fear this time...there's an angry energy to it.

AMERICA

Ooh...Oh, damn...Damn, damn, damn...

Charlie is disturbed by this. He curls further into himself.

CHARLIE

Don't. Don't do that.

America sees his discomfort. She stops, moves to the bed, sits next to Charlie. America puts her arm around him, pulls him to her. They rock on the bed together, hugging.

76 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- 39TH AND WALNUT -- DAY

Orrin Mays Stanley enters his study, picks up the phone. He checks a card in his hand, then dials.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)

Harcourt Brace.

ORRIN

Yes. I would like to speak with whoever's in charge, please.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)

That would be Peter Mills. Who's calling?

ORRIN

Dr. Orrin Mays Stanley, University of Pennsylvania.

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)

One moment.

INTERCUT -- ORRIN at home / WALLINGS at work

MILLS

Dr. Stanley. Peter Mills.

ORRIN

Yes, Mr. Mills. I'm calling about Roberta Fanning. I understand she's still with your firm.

MILLS

Yes, she is. We're very proud to have her.

ORRIN

I'd like to talk with you about our upcoming Symposium and the Wordsworth Chair we're endowing.

MILLS

This is quite a coincidence, actually.

ORRIN

Why is that, sir?

MILLS

Well, I was just going to call you about the same thing.

77 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- CHARLIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

America and Charlie lie next to each other on the bed, talking.

AMERICA

So I thought if I could be Roberta, you know, I might get my poems out more, and Mom might hear 'em, and...I made them look like hers, but that might not be good, 'cause now there's this...man...who thinks my poems are hers, and wants me to...and I don't think I can--

CHARLIE

(interrupting)

My dad always said to think I can, think I can, think I can, 'cause it's only other people who think I can't.

AMERICA

It was always my father who said I can't.

CHARLIE

Can't what?

AMERICA

Write poems.

CHARLIE

Your poems are good. Don't listen.  
He was just afraid, maybe. My Dad  
was. About me. Dads are like that,  
and they say stupid stuff they don't  
mean when they're afraid.

(looks over at her)

Did your Dad name you a country, or  
your Mom?

America thinks a moment, tapping a rhythm on her knee.  
Then...

AMERICA

My mother loved  
The idea of  
What America said it was:  
Hope and possibility,  
Freedom and equality;  
She wanted me to have them all, I  
s'pose...

CHARLIE

Good poem. Maybe it's already  
working, see? You loved your Mom,  
huh?

(off America's nod)

Me too. Where is she?

America points up.

CHARLIE

Mine too.

AMERICA

How?

CHARLIE

Airplane. My dad was driving. It  
went into an ocean. I was at school.

AMERICA

And you came here?

CHARLIE

Upstairs. The judge put me here  
'cause my Dad built it. But then  
Vernon said he was my new Dad and I  
had to stay down here, and not go  
upstairs except to work.

AMERICA

Huh.

CHARLIE

But some nights, I go up there to  
where I used to live.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

He doesn't know. I like it there.  
It smells like Mom. But he's there  
now sometimes, and other people go  
there too. There was somebody there  
last night. Big and fat. And he  
yelled, and it made Vernon real mad.

Charlie touches his swollen black eye.

CHARLIE

I get scared when Vernon's mad.

America sits up, nods.

AMERICA

Me too.

CHARLIE

But I'm not afraid with you.

Charlie hugs into America. America looks down at him, then  
hugs him back.

AMERICA

Me either.

78 EXT. BROAD STREET -- NIGHT

Mike Wallings sits in his car, talks on his car speakerphone.

WALLINGS

Yes, it's good...it's damn good.  
She's writing with a whole new voice,  
very hip...

MILLS

(on phone)  
Think it's got a market?

WALLINGS

These days? Huge. Russell Simmons  
and HBO and all. Could even be  
another Nobel or a Pulitzer, we push  
it right.

MILLS

Then go get it.

WALLINGS

She won't give it to me...

79 INT. PETER MILL'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Mills sits at his huge desk.

MILLS

Hey, I've already paid for it. It's mine. She said you could pick it up, so pick it up.

WALLINGS

She seemed pretty adamant about...

MILLS

I don't give a shit what she is. Put it in my hands tomorrow, Wallings, or don't come in. Got it?

80 INT. WALLINGS' CAR -- NIGHT

Wallings sits up.

WALLINGS

Yes sir.

The phone clicks, then buzzes. Wallings reaches out, touches a button.

WALLINGS

Dial Roberta Fanning.

The phone beeps and boops, then rings. And rings. And rings.

Wallings touches off the phone, exits the car.

81 INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

America sits with Charlie on his bed. She reads from Fanning's book.

AMERICA

We are  
Sometimes Lovers,  
Full-time Partners  
In a scheme to fool the world.  
But no one  
Ever seems to be listening;  
You can't fool anyone  
Who won't hear your words.  
But if blessings were in season,  
I'd buy you a dozen,  
And leave them on your doorstep  
So you'd stumble on them at dawn,  
And wonder where I been.

America closes the book.

CHARLIE

I like that one.

AMERICA

Uh-huh.

CHARLIE  
I like 'em all. Wish I had more.

America thinks a moment.

AMERICA  
You want to hear more?  
(off Charlie's  
enthusiastic nod)  
Okay.

She gets up, begins to don the cape.

AMERICA  
It should just be starting.

Charlie smiles hugely, jumps off the bed, follows her out the door.

82 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- NIGHT

America points toward the alley door.

AMERICA  
Can we go out here?  
Don't want to go near...

CHARLIE  
...that man we fear...

America stops and smiles at Charlie.

AMERICA  
Is that a poet I hear,  
Next to me so clear?

Charlie jumps.

CHARLIE  
YES!

They both laugh as they climb the short steps and exit into the alley.

83 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- NIGHT

Mike Wallings enters, walks to the doorman's stand. Arkis looks up at him.

ARKIS  
Thought you left.

WALLINGS  
I did, but...just realized I left  
something up in Miss Fanning's  
apartment.  
(moves toward elevators)  
I'll just run up real quick.



ARKIS

No, no, no...can't let you do that,  
pal.

WALLINGS

I was just up there...

ARKIS

Sorry...

Wallings walks to Arkis, pulls out a roll of cash, peels off a fifty dollar bill, palms it into Arkis' hand.

WALLINGS

I won't be two minutes.

Arkis glances at the bill, then pockets it.

ARKIS

Clock's runnin'.

Wallings moves to the elevators.

84 EXT. SOUTH STREET -- NIGHT

America, in Roberta's cape and with Charlie by her side, approaches Stanzas. A large crowd is gathered outside, waiting to get in.

A banner drapes across the club building's front -- "TONIGHT!  
POETRY SLAM! TOP NATIONAL POETS! U-PENN WORDSWORTH CHAIR!"

America and Charlie move toward the doors. The Security Man is checking ID's again, and there's a YOUNG WOMAN with a clipboard near him.

America approaches the Young Woman, still in hood and cape.

YOUNG WOMAN

Yes, Ma'am. And you are?

CHARLIE

She's Ms. Fanning!

YOUNG WOMAN

Roberta Fanning? Oh, what a pleasure.

She extends her hand, takes America's hand and tries to look into the hood while she shakes. But America just nods, keeps her head bowed.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm Jocelyn Baker, with the Wordsworth  
Chair Committee at the Upenn Lit  
Department. We were so hoping you  
would attend. And who is this young  
man?

Charlie smiles and extends his hand.

CHARLIE

I'm Charlie. I like poems.

YOUNG WOMAN

Well, don't we all. Please, come in. I'll show you to the special area we've reserved for participants.

Jocelyn Baker turns and guides America and Charlie into the club.

85 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- PENTHOUSE FLOOR FOYER -- NIGHT

The elevator doors open. Wallings emerges and moves to Roberta Fanning's door. He knocks. Waits. Knocks again. Then he bends and pulls the key from beneath the mat.

He opens the door and enters.

86 INT. ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- NIGHT

Wallings moves quickly into the main room, then to the desk. He picks up America's file of poems, glances into it, then leaves.

87 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- PENTHOUSE FLOOR FOYER -- NIGHT

Wallings puts the key back under the mat, and moves to the elevator.

88 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- NIGHT

Wallings emerges from the elevator, and moves toward the street door, file under his arm.

ARKIS

Get what you needed?

Wallings gives a big smile and a thumbs up as he goes through the doors.

WALLINGS

Oh, yeah. I did indeed.

89 INT. STANZAS -- VIP AREA -- NIGHT

A roped-off area toward the back corner of the club. Several POETS stand in the space, listening to another poet, DARNELL WINSTON, 30's, spotlighted on an otherwise darkened stage.

Tucked into a dark corner of the roped off space are America and Charlie. America remains in the hood and cape. Charlie is enraptured with Darnell's performance.

90 INT. STANZAS -- ON STAGE -- NIGHT

Darnell stands behind a microphone, his eyes closed, his body undulating slightly.

DARNELL

...And we spoke of an evening,  
 This woman and I,  
 Of fantastic envisionings  
 We'd both gorged ourselves upon.  
 And we asked what we've been,  
 And what we shall be,  
 And why we shall be.  
 And yes, we spoke of finally  
 Coming to the joining of ourselves.  
 And she said,  
 "Someday you'll pull together, man.  
 I can see it in your eyes  
 And hear it in your words.  
 And I'll be ready for you...Then."  
 I looked at her.  
 "Fine," I answered,  
 But I don't really believe it;  
 See, I'm the kind of person  
 Who inflates easily and  
 Deflates violently.  
 Two minutes ago I felt inflated,  
 But at this moment,  
 I'm deflated,  
 Like somewhere the night found a pin  
 And stuck me,  
 And now, like Caesar's Last Breath,  
 I am nothing but molecules in air,  
 Empty and alone.

Darnell steps back from the microphone, drops his head, then bows.

The full house of PATRONS applauds, a few cheers ring out.

An EMCEE mounts the stage, gives Darnell a hug as he departs, grabs the mic.

EMCEE

Give it up for Darnell Winston, from  
 En, Wy, Cee! That poem, "Caesar's  
 Last Breath", is included in his new  
 book of the same title. It's out  
 now on the St. Martin's imprint, you  
 can pick it up wherever...

91 INT. STANZAS -- VIP AREA -- NIGHT

As the Emcee runs down a couple of announcements, Charlie looks to America, still tucked into the corner, hood on.

CHARLIE

He was good, huh Miss Fanning? You like his poem?

AMERICA

It was okay.

Charlie looks up into the hood.

CHARLIE

You should do a poem.

92 INT. STANZAS -- ON STAGE -- NIGHT

The Emcee leans over at the edge of the stage. Jocelyn Baker, the Young Woman from the door, speaks quietly into his ear, looks over toward the VIP area.

The Emcee nods, stands and takes the mic.

EMCEE

Ladies and Gents, this is your night of nights. Because I have just been informed that we have in the house tonight one of the great voices of American stanzas -- a Nobel Laureate and, I understand, one of the leading contenders for the Wordsworth Chair at Penn...

93 INT. STANZAS -- VIP AREA -- NIGHT

Charlie and America listen intently.

EMCEE (O.S.)

...please welcome to the Stanzas stage for a very rare public appearance...Miss Roberta Fanning!

The Crowd erupts in cheers and applause.

Charlie spins and looks up at America, a huge smile on his face.

CHARLIE

That's you!

America's eyes seem to fill the entire hood. She shakes her head.

AMERICA

Oh, God...no...can't...

CHARLIE

Don't say can't. Remember?

AMERICA

But what if...?

Charlie points at the stage.

CHARLIE

Maybe she'll hear you better from up there.

This stops America. She looks at Charlie.

EMCEE (O.S.)

Please, Miss Fanning! Grace the Stanzas stage!

AMERICA

You think?

Charlie shrugs, then smiles up at America again, reaches out and takes her hand, gives it a tug.

CHARLIE

I'll go with you.

America moves toward the stage. She keeps the hood low as they walk through the VIP area. America hesitates.

CHARLIE

Go tell her a poem.

Charlie lets go of America's hand just as the Emcee reaches out to help her up the two steps to the stage.

America moves on stage. She keeps the hood low, so the spotlight casts a dark shadow across any features that might be seen.

EMCEE

Miss Fanning.

The Emcee hands America the mic. She takes it with a shaking hand, as the crowd quiets.

America puts the mic to her lips.

AMERICA

(almost whispered)

This is for my mother.

America looks to the side of the stage at Charlie.

AMERICA

And to my new friend.

Charlie smiles.

AMERICA

I feel the rust again,  
Sitting in disgust again;  
I'm loose

(MORE)

## AMERICA (CONT'D)

And lying down among those dying.  
 Sinking fast again,  
 Running from my past again;  
 I'm hollow  
 And lying down among those sighing.  
 Seems like I'd learn in time,  
 And get myself in line in time,  
 And try to stand among those living.

Looking back again,  
 What's ahead seems black again,  
 I'm blind  
 And lying down among those crying.  
 Nothing to say again,  
 My soul as numb as clay again,  
 I run  
 And lie down among those hiding.  
 Seems like I'd learn in time,  
 And get myself in line in time,  
 And try to stand among those giving.

America's voice breaks with emotion. She stops. The silence is so palpable everyone in the room is afraid to breathe.

## AMERICA

And yet you stay again,  
 Ready to light the way again,  
 You love,  
 And make me lie among those hoping.  
 I'll try to turn away again,  
 But you're with me all the way again,  
 You hurt,  
 For me, and pull me from the groping.  
 Perhaps with you,  
 I'll learn in time,  
 And get myself in line in time,  
 And stand again among those living.

America lets the mic drop slowly to her side, doesn't move a muscle.

A single clap sounds in the crowd, then a second, then more, then a cascade of applause and "Bravo!" erupts. The crowd stands, as the roar of approval builds.

America turns and walks to the steps and down to Charlie.

## AMERICA

Come on.

She immediately moves toward the side door of the club.

94 INT. STANZAS -- FAR SIDE BACK WALL -- NIGHT

Orrin Mays Stanley stands transfixed, his eyes following the caped and hooded figure that just left the stage. Regent 1 stands near him, applauding.

REGENT 1

You were right about her, Orrin.  
She's the one.

Orrin suddenly moves across the back of the club toward the VIP section, his eyes on the hooded figure moving toward the side door.

Orrin reaches the roped VIP section just as America and Charlie reach the side door.

ORRIN

Miss Fanning! Miss Fanning!

America stops in the door, glances back, sees Orrin unhooking the velvet rope and coming toward her. Her eyes maintain contact on him for a second or two, then she bolts through the door, Charlie right behind her.

95 EXT. SMALL SIDE STREET -- NIGHT

America and Charlie run toward South Street. As they turn the corner onto South, Orrin emerges from the side door.

ORRIN

Miss Fanning! Wait! Please! I  
must talk with you!

Orrin runs up to South, looks both ways. But South Street is packed with pedestrians and traffic, and Roberta Fanning has evaporated into them.

96 EXT. SOUTH STREET -- NIGHT

America and Charlie walk toward Broad Street.

CHARLIE

That was...oh, that was...So cool.  
They all clapped! You were so --

AMERICA

I don't think she heard me.

CHARLIE

But --

AMERICA

You said she would hear me. I don't  
think she did.

CHARLIE

Why not?

AMERICA

I still can't feel her. If she heard  
me, wouldn't I feel her?

Charlie is quiet for a while, then...

CHARLIE

Maybe it was the wrong place.

97 EXT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- NIGHT

A hooded America, with Charlie by her side, enters and moves toward the elevators.

Johnny Janosik looks over his paper at them.

JANOSIK

Evenin', Miss Fanning. Charlie,  
what are you doin' out this late?

CHARLIE

(proud smile)  
I went to poetry with Miss Fanning!

JANOSIK

Did you now? Vernon know that? You  
supposed to...

AMERICA

(firmly)  
He was with me.

JANOSIK

Yeah, sure, Miss Fanning. Sure.  
Good night, now. Good night, Charlie.

CHARLIE

(cheerfully)  
Goodnight, Johnny!

The elevator door opens, and America and Charlie enter.

98 INT. ELEVATOR -- NIGHT

America and Charlie ride up. Second floor. Third floor.

CHARLIE

I want to show you something.

AMERICA

Okay.

Charlie reaches out, pushes button 5. The elevator slows and stops. The doors open.

CHARLIE

Come on.

America and Charlie move down the long hall. When they get to Room 512, Charlie stops, puts his finger to his lips.

CHARLIE

Shhhhhh...



Charlie leans his head against the door, listens, his eyes on America. After several moments, he smiles, pulls out a key and inserts it in the lock.

AMERICA

Charlie. You sure...?

CHARLIE

Come on.

Charlie pushes open the door. They enter.

99 INT. APARTMENT 512 -- NIGHT

Dark. Quiet. Charlie moves with familiarity to a side table, turns on a small lamp.

AMERICA

What are we doing here, Charlie?

CHARLIE

It's okay. Nobody's here. Come on.

Charlie waves for America to follow him. She tiptoes behind him.

100 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- NIGHT

Vernon Arkis enters, his arm around a leggy PLATINUM BLONDE in a short, tight mini-skirt and a red leather jacket. They're laughing and appear to have been drinking.

ARKIS

(to Janosik)

Hey, Johnnie! How's it goin', buddy?  
Wantcha to meet somebody. This's  
Elly. Elly, meet Johnny.

ELLY

Hi, Johnny!

JANOSIK

Hello, young lady.

ELLY

Oooh...You're pretty cute for an old  
guy.

ARKIS

Hey, hey, hey...don't be gettin' any  
ideas, baby. You're with me tonight,  
remember?

(to Janosik)

Be upstairs for awhile. Maybe a  
long while.

Arkis laughs, guides Elly to the elevators.

ARKIS

Come on, baby. Let me show you my place.

101 INT. APARTMENT 512 -- NIGHT

Charlie leads America to a large, double-door closet on a wall near the main windows of the large room. He opens the closet doors, reaches up and pulls a light switch. A bright light illuminates the closet, and the area in front of it.

Charlie reaches to one side of the closet, pulls out a large artist's portfolio envelope, sets it on the floor. He pats the floor.

CHARLIE

Sit.

America drops the hooded cape on a nearby chair, moves next to Charlie, squats down.

Charlie opens the portfolio, pulls out a small stack of sheet paper, some two foot square, some smaller, some rectangular. He spreads them out.

They're watercolors. Small paintings of park scenes, the shoreline of the Delaware River, still-lives, several studies of a small boy. They're quite good.

Charlie touches them lovingly.

CHARLIE

My mom's.

AMERICA

She did these?

CHARLIE

Uh-huh.

(points to the window)

She sat there. Painted and hummed songs. I sat on her lap sometimes.

America looks at Charlie as he looks at the paintings, runs his hand over them.

CHARLIE

This is where I come to be with her.

(he looks up at America)

Where was your Mom? Maybe that's where you should go.

America stares at Charlie, sits back against the door. She's about to say something when a loud commotion in the hallway is heard.

102 INT. HALLWAY IN FRONT OF APARTMENT 512 -- NIGHT

Arkis and Elly weave up the hall to 512, laughing. Arkis fumbles for the key.

ARKIS  
Got it here someplace...

ELLY  
Come on, Vern...I want a drink.

ARKIS  
(annoyed)  
Okay, okay...

Arkis finally finds the key, tries to get it into the lock.

103 INT. APARTMENT 512 -- NIGHT

America and Charlie scramble. Fear covers both their faces. They gather up the paintings, stuff them back into the closet.

AMERICA  
(whispering)  
Where...?

They hear the key enter the lock.

America enters the closet, pulls Charlie in after her, then closes the doors, pulls the light switch. The closet goes dark.

The apartment door swings open, bangs on the wall as Arkis and Elly stumble in. Arkis closes the door, moves into the room.

ELLY  
Ooh...nice place, honey...

Arkis hits a couple of lights, moves toward the bar.

ARKIS  
Yeah, not bad, huh? Bedroom over there, another one over there. And the bar's right here, you minx. Get over here.

Elly joins him at the bar.

ELLY  
Got any champagne?

ARKIS  
Fuck no. Whattaya think this is?

INSIDE THE CLOSET

America and Charlie huddle together in the dark, look through the louvered closet doors at Arkis and Elly.

AT THE BAR

Arkis opens a cabinet door, pulls down a bottle and two glasses.

ARKIS

We're drinkin' Johnny Red.

Arkis slops whiskey into the glasses, slides one to Elly.

ELLY

How long you been here?

ARKIS

Maybe a year.

ELLY

It's decorated nice.

ARKIS

Used to be a family here. Had a retard for a kid. Fuckin' asshole father flew his plane into the drink, killed himself and the wife.

ELLY

Where's the kid?

ARKIS

Well, that's the beauty of the PA courts -- Dad built the building, left instructions in the will that the kid's gotta stay here. Judge made him a ward a' the state until he's 21, then he can be on his own. But he was only two months shy a' 21 when they said it, so...

ELLY

Where's he now?

ARKIS

Place like this is a waste on a retard, don'tcha think? So he turns 21, I move him down to a room in the basement. He ain't smart enough to know any better, state don't care any more, so they don't come around, father's will pays the bills, hey...nobody's the wiser. Rent it out by the hour to you girls for extra cash, stay here when I want...I'm golden.

INSIDE THE CLOSET

America glances over at Charlie, whose pained face reveals that he is smart enough to know better.

AMERICA  
(whispered)  
Bastard.

AT THE BAR

ELLY  
Smart guy. 'S'why I like you.  
(slides off her coat)  
So...which bedroom, smart guy?

Arkis comes around the bar, puts his arm around Elly, guides her toward the far bedroom.

ARKIS  
Why not both? We can start in here.

Elly giggles, starts kissing Arkis' ear as they disappear into the bedroom.

A moment later, rock and roll starts playing in the bedroom.

INSIDE THE CLOSET

America carefully pushes the closet door open, listens. A giggle or two can be heard amid the rock.

AMERICA  
(whispered)  
Let's go.

America and Charlie crawl out of the closet then quickly scoot across the room to the front door. America realizes she doesn't have the cape.

AMERICA  
Shit.

America runs back, grabs the cape, goes back to the door.

America turns the knob, pulls the door open, slips into the hall. Charlie follows, letting the door close quietly.

104 INT. HALLWAY IN FRONT OF APARTMENT 512 -- NIGHT

Charlie immediately runs to the stairs at the end of the hall.

AMERICA  
Charlie! Wait!

Charlie doesn't stop.

AMERICA  
Charlie!

Charlie hits the stair door at full run, disappearing into the stairwell.

America turns and looks at the door of Apartment 512.

AMERICA

You sorry son of a bitch.

105 INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Charlie sits on his bed, looking at the picture of his mom, dad, and himself. America comes to the door and looks in.

AMERICA

He's an asshole.

CHARLIE

He's only what he is.

AMERICA

What do you mean?

CHARLIE

You said it...oh, you know...Miss Roberta said it...

Charlie opens Roberta Fanning's first book.

CHARLIE

See, look...

Charlie finds the page, reads.

CHARLIE

Men are only what they are,  
Achieve the most they have within;  
We can only hope for par,  
Accept the best, forgive the sin.  
(looks up at America)  
See? He is what he is.

AMERICA

You're askin' a lot  
To forgive that sot...

CHARLIE

My Mom always says, "Everybody  
deserves forgiveness, and if not  
that, then understanding."

AMERICA

She "says"?  
(off Charlie's nod)  
When you sit in her place...Where  
she was...you can...?  
(points up)

CHARLIE

Uh-huh.

AMERICA

My mom's place is somewhere I can't go.

CHARLIE

Why not?

America doesn't answer. Just defensively wraps her arms around herself.

CHARLIE

If you want to hear her, maybe you have to.

106 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- NIGHT

A hooded America exits the elevator and moves across the lobby.

Janosik stands as she goes by.

JANOSIK

You want I should call you a cab, Ms. Fanning?

America doesn't stop.

AMERICA

No cab.

107 EXT. STANLEY HOUSE -- 39TH AND WALNUT -- NIGHT

America walks up 39th Street, across the street from the Stanley home. She stops under the oak tree, looks at the dark house. Then she crosses the street.

America follows a hedge walk along the side of the house to the back. She climbs the stairs to the back door. She tries the knob. It turns.

America quietly enters the house.

108 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- NIGHT

The kitchen is dimly illuminated by under-cabinet lights. The sound of classical music can be heard.

America moves into the

HALLWAY

where the music grows a bit louder. A dim light from the living room splashes onto the floor in front of the stairway.

America peeks into the living room. Asleep in an easy chair, a book of poetry open on his lap, is Orrin Stanley. A nearby radio is the source of the music.

America quietly ascends the stairs, moves down the hallway, carefully opens the door to her mother's loft writing room, and enters.

109 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- LOFT WRITING ROOM -- NIGHT

America enters the dark room, closes the door. She finds the desk lamp, turns it on.

America looks around, then closes her eyes and breathes in deeply through her nose, smelling the room, holds her breath.

When she lets it go, she opens her eyes, moves to the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves along one wall. She searches the rows of books, until she finds what she's looking for.

America pulls several books, takes them to the desk, lays them out in front of her, and sits. She touches them one at a time.

INSERT -- PAN OF SEVERAL BOOKS -- titles are visible, among them:

*"Scents of an Afternoon*, a book of poetry by Suzette Morrison".

*"The Whisper of Obligation*, poems by Suzette Morrison".

*"When Hearts Collide*, new poems by Suzette Morrison Stanley".

BACK TO SCENE

America looks to the ceiling.

AMERICA

It's me. America. I'm back. Are you there?

America opens one of the books to a dog-eared page. She holds it closer to the light and reads silently.

SUZETTE MORRISON STANLEY (V.O.)

*To My Little One*

Night died slowly as the dawn grew older;

The mist left the grass as the sun grew bolder;

Sleep fled my eyes and I turned on my shoulder;

And there, lying near me, was you.

The coarseness of midday put an edge in the air;

(MORE)



SUZETTE MORRISON STANLEY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That weighed on my body and blinded  
with glare;  
Then I sensed a new softness near me  
somewhere;  
And there, reaching toward me, was  
you.

The coolness of evening brought a  
light breeze  
That moved through the grasses and  
shuffled the leaves;  
And just as the chillness gave me  
unease,  
There, wrapped around me, was you.

America pulls the book to her breast, hugs it, closes her  
eyes, rocks in the chair. A tear traces down her cheek.

AMERICA

I hear you, Momma...I hear you...

110 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Orrin's eyes pop open. He sits up and listens. He reaches  
over and turns off the radio, listens again.

111 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- LOFT WRITING ROOM -- NIGHT

America reclines on the chair, head over the back, eyes  
closed, still hugging the book, reciting to the ceiling.

AMERICA

See, he spoke to you of his tradition;  
He spoke to me of waste.  
You tried to speak of exploration;  
I tried to speak too late.  
I tried to show him my paper,  
I tried to show him faith;  
But he's got walls, and I've got  
bars,  
And we both have fear to face...

112 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- LANDING OUTSIDE LOFT WRITING ROOM --  
NIGHT

Orrin stands silently, listening to the recitation within.  
He reaches down, turns the knob quietly, pushes the door  
open.

113 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- LOFT WRITING ROOM -- NIGHT

Orrin stands in the door, stunned to see America. He listens  
as she continues.

AMERICA

And where were you, father dearest,  
 Lost among your truths?  
 Where an eye's an eye, a limb's a  
 limb,  
 And dreams are of no use.  
 Well, if I'm the one to lose a hand,  
 Then I'm the one to deal.  
 And all my cards are not yet played,  
 And my last ones aren't yet real.

ORRIN

America...

America bolts up so quickly, she knocks over the chair she  
 was sitting in.

AMERICA

Jesus...!

Orrin takes a step into the room.

ORRIN

What are you doing here, America?  
 How...?

America does her mongoose thing, breathing hard.

AMERICA

I'm talking to Mom. It's the only  
 place...she...I...

Orrin's face falls.

ORRIN

Your mother's gone, America...you've  
 never accepted that fact.

AMERICA

No! She's here! Right here!

AMERICA

No, America --

America holds up Suzette's book.

AMERICA

Right here!  
 (touches her heart)  
 And here.  
 (touches her head)  
 And here.

America stands a little straighter, lifts her head.

AMERICA

And she's in my poems. Her voice is  
 my voice.

Orrin takes another step into the room.

ORRIN

In a way that might be true, yes,  
because both your talents were...  
well --

AMERICA

Were what?

ORRIN

Not every voice is a nightingale,  
America.

AMERICA

Is that what you told her, Daddy?  
Seriously?! Did you ever consider  
what that would have done to her?  
Did you love her at all?

Orrin is speechless for a moment. No one's ever spoken to him like this, and certainly not about Suzette.

Orrin's shoulders drop.

ORRIN

There's not a day goes by that I  
don't think...that maybe I...that  
maybe I was...that I contributed...

But he can't get it out.

America moves to the desk, picks up a book.

AMERICA

Why wouldn't you let me read her  
poems, Dad? Or read them to me?  
Why wouldn't you let me come in here  
and read mine to her? Why?

ORRIN

(defensively)

Poetry is tradition, America. It is  
discipline. And history. I wanted  
you to know that. Good poetry is --

AMERICA

-- Who made you the judge of what's  
good and what's not? Did you ever  
take the time to read what she wrote?  
Did you ever listen to her read her  
poems? Really listen?

The sting of this accusation plays on Orrin's face. He lowers himself into a nearby chair.

ORRIN

(quietly)

There's a benchmark, America. There always has been, always will be. Her voice was not as strong as those I had to make heard in my classroom, the type that I think still need to be heard today.

AMERICA

No? You don't think so?

America opens the book in her hands and reads.

AMERICA

What do you see when you watch me?  
Do you look for the shadows that are chasing me from you?  
Do you look for the softness that I offer you?  
Do you ignore the reflection of the hardness you offer me?  
When you look, do you see me,  
Or an image,  
Or a wish?  
Do you want to touch me,  
Or would that constitute acceptance?  
Do you want to find an answer within me,  
Or have you convinced yourself it isn't there?  
What do you see when you watch me?  
Do you see the emptiness at all?

America slams the book closed.

AMERICA

Strong enough for you?

America hands the book to Orrin as she passes him on her way to the door.

AMERICA

It's called "To Orrin". It's the last thing she ever wrote.

America exits to the stairs.

Orrin looks down at the book, then stands quickly, follows America to the landing.

114 INT. STANLEY HOUSE -- LANDING OUTSIDE LOFT WRITING ROOM -- NIGHT

Orrin comes to the railing, as America goes down the stairs.

ORRIN

You don't understand. I have an obligation.

America stops at the front door.

AMERICA

Yeah. Like somebody else I've run into lately. He blew it too.

ORRIN

I have an obligation!

AMERICA

Don't worry. I won't embarrass you anymore.

America goes out the front door, lets it slowly close behind her.

Orrin stares at the door a moment, then slams his hand on the railing.

115 INT. ROBERTA FANNING'S HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

Dawn is just breaking outside. America enters the room, closes the door quietly. She pulls the chair to the bedside, sits down.

Roberta Fanning is still comatose, still bandaged.

America leans her head on the bed, near Roberta's head, stares off at nothing, speaks low and slow.

AMERICA

I found her. We talked. Traded poems.

(smiles)

My heart doesn't hurt so much now. I think I should thank you for part of that. 'Cause bein' you brought me there, you know? You and Charlie.

(sits up, looks at Roberta)

What do I do about Charlie?

(leans in close)

What would you do?

116 EXT. EMPTY LOT -- DAY

A chill morning. America, in the cape but with the hood down, moves across the back of the lot toward the corner where Whispers, Boston, Little Jeannie, and others are just firing up the barrel.

Little Jeannie's face lights up when she sees America.

LITTLE JEANNIE

Well, lookie here. Where you been hidin', girl? We thought you wuz taken.

AMERICA

Just been...you know.

WHISPER

Uh-huh. We all been "just been'n'", ain't that right?

(all laugh)

Well, whatever. Those two guys keep drivin' by now and again, Miss A, so keep your eye open.

America warms herself at the barrel.

AMERICA

When do they come?

BOSTON

Off and on. Mostly at night.

AMERICA

One of them was a Services guy, wasn't he?

BOSTON

Mm-hmm. Simpson. Social Services. Other guy's a private dick, sure as shit.

WHISPER

Acts like a dick.

(to Little Jeannie)

Sorry.

LITTLE JEANNIE

Why, honey? You need somethin'? A doctor, maybe?

America shakes her head.

AMERICA

I just want to talk to him. But not the other one.

WHISPER

'Bout what?

AMERICA

I just want to talk to the Services guy, that's all. Only him.

WHISPER

(more insistent)

'Bout what?

LITTLE JEANNIE

Shhh, Whisper. You ain't her daddy.

(to America)

You know where the Social Services building is? Down off Race Street on 15th?

(off America's nod)

That's where he is. You can ask for him, they'll tell you where he is.

AMERICA

Simpson.

LITTLE JEANNIE

That's what he said. Best to go end of the day. Catch him in the lot, you don't wanta go in, you know?

117 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

America, hood up, enters the lobby, moves toward the elevators.

Arkis jumps up the moment he sees her.

ARKIS

Hey, Ms. Fanning. There you are.  
Hold up a minute.

America stops at the elevators, head down, hood obscuring her face, as always. Arkis joins her, holds out a card to her.

ARKIS

This guy was here this morning.  
Twice already. Said to give you his card, and tell you he'll be back.

America, head bowed, looks down at the card.

INSERT -- THE CARD

Beneath the logo of the University of Pennsylvania, is the name, Orrin Mays Stanley, in straight, block letters.

BACK TO SCENE

America palms the card, pushes the elevator button.

ARKIS

You want I should send him on up when he comes?

The elevator doors open. America steps in.

AMERICA

No.

The doors close.

118 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America enters, drops the cape, sits by the window. She looks down at the business card still in her hand.

AMERICA

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

America stands, walks toward the kitchen. As she passes the desk, she glances at it.

She stops cold.

There's nothing on the desktop where yesterday there was a file -- a brand new file of brand new, fresh-written pages.

America jumps to the desk.

AMERICA

Where...?

America frantically spins, eyes the entire room in one sweep.

AMERICA

Oh, God! Where is it?

America runs into the kitchen, runs back out. She disappears into the adjoining bedroom, reappears a moment later.

AMERICA

Where, where, where, where, where,  
where, where...

America goes back to the desk, opens the drawers, slams them closed. No file. No poems. Nowhere.

AMERICA

Ah, NO! NO!

America turns in mid-cry, takes a step toward the door, but the shrill ring of the telephone stops her, the cry stuck in her throat. She looks at the phone as it rings again.

America moves to the desk, thinks about it. The phone rings again. She reaches out, picks up the receiver, puts it to her ear.

ARKIS (V.O.)

(through phone)

Miss Fanning?

America doesn't utter a sound.

ARKIS (V.O.)

Miss Fanning? You there? It's Vernon  
Arkis.



AMERICA

Yes?

119 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

Arkis stands at the Doorman's stand, on the phone. Before him stands Orrin Stanley, briefcase in hand.

ARKIS

It's Vernon, Miss Fanning.  
Downstairs. That guy I mentioned to  
you? He's here again, wants to come  
up.

120 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America looks down at the card, crumpled on the desk.

AMERICA

No.

ARKIS (V.O.)

Well, he's been here twice already,  
Miss Fanning. Maybe...

AMERICA

No. I told you no.

121 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

Arkis lays the phone on his shoulder, looks at Orrin.

ARKIS

She says "no", pal. Pretty much  
says it all, far as I'm concerned.

ORRIN

May I speak with her on the phone  
for one moment?

Arkis just looks at him.

ORRIN

Please?

Arkis rolls his eyes, puts the phone to his head.

ARKIS

He wants to talk to you, Miss Fanning.  
Hold on.

Arkis hands the phone to Orrin, who turns away from him as if it gives him privacy.

ORRIN

Miss Fanning? My name is Orrin Mays  
Stanley. I'm with the University of  
Pennsylvania.

122 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America stands transfixed.

ORRIN (V.O.)

(through phone)

I'm here about the Wordsworth Chair endowment of the Literature Department of the university. You're familiar with it?

AMERICA

(almost whispered)

Yes.

123 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

Orrin smiles.

ORRIN

Well, we'd like to offer you the Chair, Miss Fanning. An endowment that includes a house on campus, an annual six-figure stipend, and the opportunity to teach, if you wish to.

Silence.

ORRIN

I've been in touch with Peter Mills this morning -- over at Harcourt Brace? He said he'd be calling you too. He tells me your new book is spectacular, and neither of us could be more --

124 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America's eyes fall to the desk.

AMERICA

New book...?

ORRIN (V.O.)

Yes. *Lying Down Among Those Dying*, I think he said the title was -- that incredible piece you performed last night at Stanza's. I've not heard a piece like that in, well, decades, really. You have a voice that must be heard, Miss Fanning and I --

AMERICA

I don't...

ORRIN (V.O.)  
 -- would really like to discuss this  
 in person, if I may, Miss Fanning.  
 Perhaps if now is not a good time...

AMERICA  
 No. Not a good time.

ORRIN (V.O.)  
 All right, well, then, perhaps --

America hangs up the phone, drops into the chair by the desk.

125 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

Orrin turns, hands the phone to Arkis.

ORRIN  
 She hung up. Can you call her back?

ARKIS  
 Look...I'm gonna save you some trouble  
 here, okay? You're wastin' your  
 time with that one. Believe me. As  
 squirrely a bitch as you're ever  
 gonna meet. Give it up.

ORRIN  
 (stiffening)  
 Your opinion is not what I'm seeking  
 here, sir.

ARKIS  
 (a fierce stare)  
 No? Too bad. 'Cause that's all I'm  
 offerin' at this point.

Orrin stares back, but then turns and moves to the doors.

As Orrin exits, Mike Wallings enters, moves toward the  
 elevators.

WALLINGS  
 (to Arkis)  
 Going up to see Roberta Fanning.

ARKIS  
 No you're not. Appears she ain't  
 seein' anybody.

Wallings stops a moment, then moves to Arkis. He reaches  
 out, puts a fifty dollar bill on the Doorman's stand.

WALLINGS  
 Got a surprise for her. Wouldn't  
 want to spoil it, now would we?

Arkis picks up the bill, folds it.

ARKIS

I love surprises.

Wallings smiles, moves to the elevators.

126 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America is still in the chair, her head in her hands, leaning on the desk.

A knock on the door startles her.

Another knock, then the muffled voice of Wallings.

WALLINGS (O.S.)

Miss Fanning? It's Mike Wallings.

America moves quickly to the door, opens it.

AMERICA

Where's my pages? You stole them!

Wallings steps into the penthouse, closes the door.

WALLINGS

Hardly.

AMERICA

I want my pages back.

Wallings moves into the main penthouse space.

WALLINGS

And you'll get them back. In book form. First copies should be coming off the presses later today. Modern printing...amazing, isn't it?

AMERICA

No! I told you you couldn't have them. They're not...

WALLINGS

(turns to face her)

It's a done deal, Roberta. You signed a contract over two years ago, took the rather large advance Peter Mills and Harcourt provided. He's been very patient, and now he's collected what he paid for. Simple business transaction.

Wallings pulls a paper from his inside jacket pocket, unfolds it.

WALLINGS

Which leaves us to discuss the other part of that contract you signed -- promotion. I have here a preliminary schedule of personal appearances we've arranged, starting this Friday at two o'clock --

AMERICA

-- No, no, no...

WALLINGS

-- At two o'clock at the University of Pennsylvania, where you'll be introduced as the holder of the new Wordsworth Chair in Poetry.

Wallings holds the paper out to her. America moves away, as if Wallings was thrusting a cattle prod at her.

AMERICA

Not possible. Huh-uh.

WALLINGS

It's a prestigious honor. It will drive sales. Promotion is a huge part of publishing, Roberta. You know that. I know you're a little shy, but...

America moves to the penthouse door, opens it.

AMERICA

You don't understand.

WALLINGS

Roberta...

AMERICA

Please leave.

WALLINGS

Look --

AMERICA

Get out! Leave me alone!

Wallings drops the paper on the desk, moves to the door.

WALLINGS

I'm just the messenger, Ms. Fanning. If you won't work with me on this, the next person you'll deal with is Peter Mills, and I don't think...

America pushes Wallings into the hallway.

AMERICA

You don't know what you've done.  
You don't know anything. Just leave  
me alone. You hear me? Leave me  
alone.

WALLINGS

It's too late, Roberta...we're  
committed and so are you...

America slams the door closed.

AMERICA

(to herself)

Shit. Shit, shit, shit.

127 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- STAIRWELL -- DAY

America, in cape and hood, moves quickly down the stairs.  
She reaches the bottom and pushes open a door marked  
"Basement".

128 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- DAY

America moves through the basement.

AMERICA

Charlie?

No answer.

America looks inside Charlie's room. It's empty.

AMERICA

Charlie? You here?

America hears a noise in another section of the basement.  
She moves toward it, toward the alley exit.

Charlie is carrying trash bags out.

AMERICA

Charlie.

Charlie turns, smiles when he sees America.

CHARLIE

We gonna look for more treasure?

America shakes her head.

CHARLIE

Read some poems, then?

AMERICA

(in a hiphop rhythm)

Right now I have to go.  
But I need to let you know  
That I have to talk to yo'  
A little later.  
(she smiles)  
Okay?

CHARLIE

(smiles back)

Okay.

America gives Charlie a hug, then climbs the steps and disappears into the alley.

129 INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- DAY

The elevator doors open. America moves into the hallway toward Roberta's room.

130 INT. ROBERTA FANNING'S HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

America enters, pulls the chair to the bed again. She leans into the still-comatose Roberta.

AMERICA

How you doin' today, girlfriend?  
Still sleepin'?

America pauses, drops her head on the bedsheets, silent a moment, then whispers in Roberta's ear.

AMERICA

You need to wake up now, Ms. Fanning.  
You have to come back. 'Cause I  
can't do this anymore. Bein' you  
used to be okay, you know? Nice  
warm place to hide out, food, this  
nice cape.

(sighs deeply)

But some shit's come down, and it's  
gonna get hairy, and I just can't be  
you anymore. It's prob'ly already  
out of control...there's a book of  
poems that'll have your name on 'em,  
that...well, you'll see. And they  
want to give you that Chair at Penn  
tomorrow. Jesus. Wait'll Orrin  
finds out. He'll never forgive me.

America tries to look into Roberta's eyes.

AMERICA

But mostly it's Charlie, Ms. Fanning.  
He's such a good kid. And he knows  
more'n most.

(MORE)

AMERICA (CONT'D)

He knew how to help me, anyway. He gave me the one thing I needed most in my life. And now he needs some help. But I can't help him and be you. So tomorrow it's gonna get crazy around here. This room's gonna get pretty crowded. And I prob'ly won't be allowed to come back. So you better get ready. Now's the time. You gotta come back real soon, okay? Real soon.

America stands, straightens the sheets over Roberta.

AMERICA

(pulling the lapel of  
the cape)

I'll need this one more day. I'll bring it back after. If I can.

America takes Roberta's hand and squeezes it, and smiles. Then she turns and exits.

INSERT -- ROBERTA'S HAND

The right index finger moves...is it voluntary, or a random nervous twitch?

131 EXT. DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES -- DAY

America stands to the side of the building by a chain link fence that surrounds the adjacent parking lot. Hood on, she watches the street and the sidewalks, dancing from foot to foot to keep warm.

She stops when a car -- marked "Dept. of Social Services" on it's side -- pulls through the gate into the lot and parks near the building. Marcus Simpson is driving.

Simpson climbs from the car, moves toward the side entrance to the building.

America intercepts him.

AMERICA

'Scuse me. You're Mr. Simpson, right?

Simpson stops, looks toward her.

SIMPSON

Yes. Marcus Simpson. Who's that?

America pulls the hood from her head.

AMERICA

It's America. Morrison. Stanley.



SIMPSON

America! Wow. Been looking for you  
a while. You're not easy to find.

AMERICA

I need to talk.

SIMPSON

Well, come on in. I'll do whatever  
I can for you.

AMERICA

Not for me. For a friend.

SIMPSON

Okay.

Simpson holds the door for America as she enters.

SIMPSON

Who's your friend?

AMERICA

His name is Charlie.

132 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

Charlie is back close to the elevators, mopping the floor.  
He moves lethargically, his head down, his eyes on the floor.

Arkis leans on the Doorman's stand, reading a newspaper.

The elevator doors open, and a GREY-HAIRED BUSINESSMAN exits  
the car. A SMALL REDHEAD, in a tight dress, and chewing  
gum, is on his arm.

Charlie glances up at the couple, then sadly turns his eyes  
from them.

The Grey-haired Businessman drops a key on the Doorman's  
stand, points a finger at Arkis and heads for the door.

The Small Redhead looks back and waves.

SMALL REDHEAD

Bye, Vern.

Arkis looks up, shakes his head with disdain. He glances  
over at Charlie, who's looking at him.

ARKIS

What're you lookin' at? Get back to  
it.

America, in hood and cape, enters and moves toward the  
elevators.

Arkis drops the paper, stands straight.

ARKIS

Hey, there, Ms. Fanning. How are we today?

America stops. Inside the hood, her jaw has set, her eyes indicate she's thinking about something. But she holds it in, continues to the elevators.

Charlie waits there, eyes on America, but darting to Arkis and back. A smile creeps onto his face.

CHARLIE

Hi...Miss Fanning.

As the elevator doors open, America looks at Charlie.

AMERICA

Can you help me with something upstairs, Charlie?

Charlie looks at Arkis, who shrugs. Charlie leans the mop against the wall and joins America in the elevator.

133 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America points to the couch by the windows, as she sits in the chair nearby.

AMERICA

Sit a minute, Charlie.

Charlie drops onto the couch, a smile on his face.

CHARLIE

We gonna do poems?

AMERICA

I need to talk to you about something, okay?

(off Charlie's nod)

Charlie...I'm going to be leaving here tomorrow.

Charlie immediately comes to the edge of the couch.

CHARLIE

Why? No, I don't want--

AMERICA

-- I have to, Charlie. I don't belong here.

CHARLIE

But --

AMERICA

-- Listen to me a minute, okay?

(MORE)

AMERICA (CONT'D)

I'm just starting to understand this stuff myself, so let me get it out.

(she takes his hands)

Charlie, you've shown me more than you'll ever know. You brought me out of a dark pit. You gave me back the one person I've been looking for since I was eight years old. And you may have given me someone I never had.

CHARLIE

Who's that?

AMERICA

That doesn't matter right now. What does matter is that you understand something. You showed me a poem by Miss Fanning -- about forgiving people because they're only what they are. Remember?

(off Charlie's nod)

Well, there's some people we should forgive and there's others we shouldn't. Some we need to give the benefit of the doubt to, and others that don't deserve any benefit at all. Can you understand that?

CHARLIE

There's good people and bad people.

AMERICA

(smiles)

That's the simple way to say it, I suppose.

CHARLIE

And that's why you're going to leave? Bad people?

AMERICA

No. Tomorrow some things are going to happen, though. Things are going to change for you. And for me, I suppose.

(off Charlie's frown)

Don't be afraid. It's all good. But for now, I just want you to understand that no matter what happens, you will always be my best friend, Charlie. My best friend. I want you to know that.

(touches his face)

And to know that I love you.

Charlie looks at America. Tears well up in his eyes.

CHARLIE

My mom used to tell me that.

AMERICA

Well...now I will.

Charlie comes off the couch into America's arms. They hug each other tight enough to cut off breath.

134 INT. HARCOURT BRACE PUBLISHING -- MIKE WALLINGS' OFFICE -- DAY

Wallings leans back in his office chair, paging through a fresh copy of *Lying Down Among Those Dying* by Roberta Fanning.

PETER MILLS sits across from him.

WALLINGS

Looks great, Mr. Mills. When's it go out?

MILLS

Already on its way. We'll flood the Penn campus area tomorrow for the Wordsworth Chair ceremony. The media's been alerted, correct?

WALLINGS

All four networks, all three major papers. Penn's promised a big turnout.

MILLS

And Fanning?

Wallings sets the book down, sits forward.

WALLINGS

No word.

MILLS

No word?!

WALLINGS

Dr. Stanley said she wouldn't see him. And she hasn't answered any calls since yesterday.

MILLS

This better not blow up in our faces, Wallings. I'd hate to think we're launching a book and funding a chair, and --

A SECRETARY knocks on the doorjamb, leans into the room.

SECRETARY

You have a call on six, Mr. Wallings.  
 Roberta Fanning.

Wallings grabs for the phone.

WALLINGS

Finally!  
 (into phone)  
 Miss Fanning. I'm so glad to hear  
 from you.

135 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- DAY

America stands at Roberta's desk, phone to ear.

INTERCUT -- WALLINGS' OFFICE/ROBERTA'S PENTHOUSE

AMERICA

I'm calling to let you know that  
 I'll be attending the ceremony at  
 the University of Pennsylvania  
 tomorrow --

WALLINGS

Terrific --

AMERICA

-- And that I'll be reading a piece  
 written especially for tomorrow, if  
 that will be all right.

WALLINGS

Absolutely. Couldn't be more perfect.

AMERICA

I'll also be making an announcement.

WALLINGS

An announcement.

AMERICA

Yes.

WALLINGS

About...?

AMERICA

I'll leave that for tomorrow.

WALLINGS

Yes...but Miss Fanning...this  
 announcement...is it something PR  
 should --

AMERICA

-- 'Til tomorrow, Mr. Wallings.

136 INT. HARCOURT BRACE PUBLISHING -- MIKE WALLINGS' OFFICE -- DAY

The phone emits a dial tone. Wallings drops it into the cradle.

WALLINGS

What do you suppose that's going to be?

MILLS

Whatever it is, you better hope it doesn't fuck up the launch of this book.

137 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- ROBERTA FANNING'S PENTHOUSE -- NIGHT

The neon numerals of an electric clock glow 4:12.

Bent over the desk, her hands illuminated by the only circle of light in the room, America sits writing on a legal pad. She stops, looks over the page, then tears it off the pad, folds it, and puts it in her pocket.

America bends over and pulls the file of Roberta Fanning's new manuscript from under the desk where she'd put it a few days ago. On it she places a sticky note, on which is written:

"Charlie -- these are Roberta's newest poems. I thought you'd want to read them. Give them back to her when she comes home. I'll see you. America."

America stands, picks up the cape and file and turns out the light.

138 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- NIGHT

America emerges from the stairwell, makes her way to Charlie's room.

139 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- CHARLIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

America lays the file on the nightstand next to a sleeping Charlie. She looks at him, pulls his blanket up a bit, then leaves.

140 EXT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA -- HULLIHEN HALL -- DAY

A brisk day, but bright with sun. A very large, animated crowd surrounds the front steps of HULLIHEN, and spills out over the quad in front. On nearby tables are stacks of Roberta Fanning's new book.

At the front of the hall is a podium with microphones. Behind the podium, a line of chairs filled with VIPs, among them Peter Mills, Mike Wallings, and the Regents of the University.

At the end of the line sits a caped and hooded America Morrison.

Orrin Mays Stanley addresses the attentive crowd from the podium.

ORRIN

...and like the namesake of this prestigious new position dedicated to the highest standards of poetic expression, the voice that will hold it is clear, strong, and representative of the kind of ability rarely seen in today's literary pantheon. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great pride, pleasure, and respect that I give you the first holder of the Wordsworth Chair in Poetry at the University of Pennsylvania -- Miss Roberta Fanning.

The crowd erupts in applause. The VIPs on stage stand applauding and look at the hooded figure at the end of the line of chairs.

America slowly rises, and makes her way to the podium, where Orrin waits. Orrin picks up a ribbon with a large amulet and places it over America's hooded head, then steps aside as she turns to the crowd.

America unfolds the page of legal paper, spreads it on the podium, clears her throat.

The crowd hushes.

AMERICA

This is for all those who know want,  
those who know fear, those who know  
loneliness.

She pauses, glances into the crowd. Along the edge of the quad stand Whisper, Little Jeannie, Boston, Fingers, and Squints.

AMERICA

Where is it written  
We're allowed to ignore  
A sister or brother unluckily born?  
Who let us claim blindness  
Or swear we don't hear  
That cry, that whimper, that moan,  
that tear  
As it falls to the breast of a child?

Who gave us permission  
To show them our backs?

(MORE)

## AMERICA (CONT'D)

These darkened, forgotten wounded  
 who lack  
 A voice to cry mercy  
 And plead for a hand  
 To hold them, or touch them or pray  
 with them and  
 Maybe promise release for a while.

141 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

America's reading runs under:

Marcus Simpson enters, flanked by a DETECTIVE in plainclothes with a badge hanging from his jacket pocket, and two UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS.

## AMERICA (V.O.)

How can we give up  
 Obligation to change  
 The lives of those wounded and maimed?

Arkis looks up as the four men approach him, then abruptly stiffens as he realizes who and what they are.

## AMERICA (V.O.)

Have we lost our compassion  
 And let empathy slide?  
 Are we really so filled with self-  
 interest and pride  
 We can't see it's ourselves we defile?

As the Detective turns Arkis and begins to cuff him, Simpson walks to Charlie, who stands with a mop in his hand, riveted by the unfolding scene. Simpson extends his hand.

## SIMPSON

Hi, Charlie. My name is Marcus.  
 I'm a friend of America's...you  
 probably know her as Roberta. She  
 asked me to come see you.

142 EXT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA -- HULLIHEN HALL -- DAY

America's voice strengthens.

## AMERICA

So when do we raise up  
 Our voice in refrain,  
 And call for the end of their pain?...

143 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

Arkis is escorted from the building by the Uniformed Police Officers.



AMERICA (V.O.)  
 For there is no real distance  
 Between them and us...

Simpson opens the key cabinet behind the Doorman's stand,  
 takes the keys for Apartment 512 from their hook.

AMERICA (V.O.)  
 And there but for God go we and it's  
 just...

Simpson turns to Charlie, holds up the keys, points to the  
 elevator, and smiles at him. Charlie smiles back.

144 EXT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA -- HULLIHEN HALL -- DAY

America pauses a scant moment for emphasis, then...

AMERICA  
 That it may take nothing more than a  
 smile.

America stops, folds the paper. When they realize she's  
 finished, the audience erupts, as do the VIPs. Orrin beams,  
 looks to Regent 1, who nods his head.

Orrin takes a step toward America, but realizes she hasn't  
 moved from the podium. She stands unmoving, hood still pulled  
 over her head.

ORRIN  
 Miss Fanning?

AMERICA  
 (leaning to Orrin)  
 If you don't mind, I have something  
 else to say.

ORRIN  
 Of course. Please.

America waits for the applause to die down. When it doesn't,  
 she puts up her hands in an attempt to quell it.

AMERICA  
 Please. Don't. I don't deserve it.

This guts the applause, and it dies quickly. Many in the  
 crowd look at one another, uncertainty on their faces.

AMERICA  
 See, you liked that poem, and I  
 appreciate it. I really do. I've  
 tried to get my poems heard for a  
 long, long time now.

Mills looks to Wallings, who looks to Orrin, whose eyes are  
 riveted on his Wordsworth poet, Roberta Fanning.

AMERICA

But you see...

(a tough swallow)

Roberta Fanning didn't write that poem. Or any of them in that book. 'Cause she couldn't. Roberta Fanning's in Jefferson Hospital. She's been there a while. Ever since she turned to look at me in the street. My name...

America reaches up and grabs the hood.

AMERICA

...is America Morrison.

America drops the hood back onto her shoulders.

A collective gasp rises from the crowd. America turns and looks at Orrin, who's been figuratively gut-punched into immobility, his eyes wide, his jaw dropped open.

MILLS

What the hell...?

America turns and speaks to Orrin, but the microphone picks up her words.

AMERICA

I'm sorry. I could tell you how all this happened but it doesn't matter now. Not to you, and frankly, not to me anymore. I just can't take Miss Fanning's life from her more than I already have and I don't want you to be left holding the bag for a lie I created because I was fucked up, alone, and afraid.

AMERICA

But I'm not afraid anymore, because I'm not alone anymore. Somebody smiled at me and taught me that you and me are just the best we can be, and we'll both have to accept that.

America takes off the ribbon and amulet, hands it to Orrin, who looks down at it, then back to his daughter.

ORRIN

America, I --

AMERICA

Thanks for thinking I was good enough for this. Mom would have liked that.

America turns and walks down the stairs and into the crowd, where Whisper, Little Jeannie, and the rest wait for her.

As they move off toward the street, a clap is heard. Then another, then another and another.

As America and her friends turn onto Market Street, the applause has become thunderous.

145 INT. STANZAS -- NIGHT

A packed house. A single spotlight aimed at the stage.

SUPER -- "ONE MONTH LATER"

146 INT. STANZAS -- ON STAGE -- NIGHT

The spotlight is trained on America Morrison. She stands tall at the mic, dressed in crisp, stylish corduroy skirt and cardigan sweater, her dreads pulled back and bundled neatly behind her head.

AMERICA

...And so you and I tonight,  
As we love,  
And sit laughing at fate;  
Time is lost for us --  
Sent away --  
The hours can wait.  
You ask to know me.  
Very well.  
I'm open to you,  
I am now willing.  
Travel me,  
And do what you'll do.

America steps back from the mic, bows. The audience applauds enthusiastically.

America moves from the stage as the Emcee comes to the mic to introduce the next poet. As she steps off, a WAITRESS approaches her.

WAITRESS

Some people over in the far corner  
would like to see you. Say they  
know you.

America looks, but it's dark in that section of the club.

AMERICA

Okay. Thanks.

America makes her way through the tables toward the corner. As she draws close, and her eyes adjust to the light, she stops.

147 INT. STANZAS -- CORNER BOOTH -- NIGHT

In the corner booth sit Orrin Stanley and Roberta Fanning.

AMERICA

What are you...?

Orrin stands, smiles sincerely.

ORRIN

Please, America. Join us.

America hesitates.

ORRIN

Please.

America looks to Roberta. She smiles and nods. America sits.

ORRIN

I hope you don't mind our coming.

(indicates Roberta)

You know Roberta Fanning of course.

America looks to Roberta and offers her hand.

AMERICA

In a way. Hi, I'm America.

Roberta takes her hand, smiles warmly.

ROBERTA

I've heard a lot about you.

AMERICA

You look better than when I last saw you.

ROBERTA

I'm doing okay. A little stiff, walk a little funny, but okay.

AMERICA

Look...I...I think I owe you an apology. A lot of 'em, really...

ROBERTA

You've already apologized. Unnecessarily, I might add.

AMERICA

I have?

ROBERTA

Mm-hmm. Several times. In the hospital.

AMERICA

How could you know that? I thought you were...

ROBERTA

Part of me was. But some part of me heard you, and your concern for Charlie. I'm convinced that's what brought me back. You don't need to apologize to me, America. It's me that owes you a great debt.

AMERICA

But I stole your name, your life.

ROBERTA

You just borrowed it. Until you found your own.

Roberta holds up a copy of *Lying Down Among Those Dying*, the name below the title being America Suzette Morrison.

ROBERTA

And judging from this, I'd say you've found it. Congratulations.

AMERICA

Thank you.

(looks to Orrin)

But you didn't come all the way down here to just tell me that.

ORRIN

No. No, we didn't. America, there is no reason on earth for you to consider what I'm about to ask you. Because I have failed you as many ways as a father can fail his child. All I can hope is that perhaps we can find a way to each other, if you're willing.

AMERICA

We can try.

ORRIN

Then perhaps you'll also consider this: Roberta has refused to accept the Wordsworth Chair. She says the critical and commercial success of *Lying Down Among Those Dying* makes you far more worthy than she.

America looks to Roberta, surprise on her face.

ROBERTA

Your voice is the voice of today, America, not mine. It's a voice that needs to be heard clearly.

America looks back to Orrin.

ORRIN

She's right, America.

This recognition from her father moves America.

AMERICA

I don't know what to say.

ORRIN

Say you'll accept the Wordsworth  
Chair. It would be a personal honor  
to me if you would.

America sits stunned. She looks down at her hands on the table for several moments, then looks up at Roberta, then Orrin.

AMERICA

On one condition. And it's non-  
negotiable.

ORRIN

Yes?

AMERICA

We share it. Roberta Fanning and  
America Morrison. Together. It's  
the only way I'll do it. You always  
told me we can't ignore what's come  
before -- that history and tradition  
are as valuable as what we hold dear  
today. That's a lesson we can only  
teach together, the way I see it.

America meets Roberta's eyes.

ORRIN

Roberta?

Roberta smiles at America, nods at Orrin.

ROBERTA

I accept.

ORRIN

(smiling broadly)  
Wonderful! The best of both worlds...

Orrin is interrupted by the Waitress approaching the table.

WAITRESS

Miss Morrison? They want you on the  
stage. Time for your last recitation.

AMERICA

Thanks.

(to Orrin and Roberta)  
I'll see you later, okay?

ORRIN

We'll be here.

148 INT. STANZAS -- ON STAGE -- NIGHT

America approaches the mic.

AMERICA

I'd like to dedicate this poem to my  
father, and my friends Roberta and  
Charlie.

The spotlight focuses on America. She begins, her voice  
strong and resonant.

AMERICA

You're the light in a darkened room;  
You're new life in a barren womb;  
You're the crack in a hard cocoon;  
You're the notes of a forgotten tune.

149 EXT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA -- CAMPUS ROW HOME -- DAY

America's recitation continues under:

The door opens and America emerges from the house, a backpack  
slung over her shoulder. She closes the door, locks it with  
the keys in her hand, steps off the porch, moves up the  
sidewalk.

AMERICA (V.O.)

You're new blood in a bloodless world;  
You're new wind to help a flag  
unfurl...  
You're new eyes that remove the blur  
You're the kiss of a lover's word.

America waves at two students who call out to her as she  
crosses the street, walking toward the main campus.

150 EXT. UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA -- QUAD -- DAY

The recitation continues under:

America and Roberta sit on the grass, surrounded by students,  
books open on their laps, engaged in animated conversation.

AMERICA (V.O.)

You were a map for a woman lost;  
You were solace when the tempest  
tossed;  
You were hope when the stars got  
crossed;  
You helped me find the things I lost.

151 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- LOBBY -- DAY

The recitation continues under:

America enters, waves to a new DOORMAN, who smiles and waves back.

AMERICA (V.O.)  
So if in this life you find,  
Too many moments cold and unkind...

152 INT. SYMPHONY HOUSE -- HALLWAY IN FRONT OF APARTMENT 512 --  
DAY

The recitation continues under:

America knocks on the door, waits.

AMERICA (V.O.)  
Remember that for me you shine...

The door opens. A radiantly smiling Charlie Emson welcomes America in as a puppy jumps and runs around his legs.

AMERICA (V.O.)  
You are the dearest friend of mine.

FADE OUT:

THE END