

DON'T INTERRUPT THE SORROW

Based on Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play
"A Doll's House"

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FADE IN:

On a black screen: **"It takes a heart like Mary's these days, when your man gets weak." ~Joni Mitchell, "The Hissing of Summer Lawns."**

CUT TO BLACK.

OVER DARKNESS:

RADIO COMMENTATOR

This is Don Steele, giving you Sounds of the Summer. Our next song sailed to No. 1 for the week of March 19th, and it's one of our favorites here at 93 KHJ. Here's "Sister Golden Hair" by America...

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL LOUNGE - NIGHT - LOS ANGELES, MAY 1975

An image: NORA HELMER's (31) lips, slightly parted. Tinted with rouge.

RADIO JINGLE

93 KHJ! LOS...ANGELES...

Her shaking hand brings a cigarette into view -- pinched into place by her mouth -- before attempting to activate a lighter. It sparks sporadically.

She sits in a freshly-upholstered, mustard-colored chair, well-dressed but visibly exhausted. A young HIPPIE MAN (20s) sleeps two chairs away from her as she struggles to make the lighter work.

"Sister Golden Hair" is broadcasted, faintly, from a nearby hospital radio.

DOCTOR

(O.S.)

Where's Mrs. Helmer?

NURSE

(O.S.)

She's in the smoking lounge.

Footsteps, growing louder. Nora exhales and taps her cigarette into an end table ashtray. The sound of a door opening:

DOCTOR
(O.S.)
Mrs. Helmer?

Nora's eyes dart up. The DOCTOR (middle-aged, prickish but blasé) enters the lounge.

NORA
Call me Nora.

DOCTOR
Nice to meet you.

He shakes her hand and remains standing.

NORA
How's he looking?

DOCTOR
(strictly business)
Your husband suffered a panic attack,
Mrs. Helmer.

NORA
(under her breath)
Jesus.

DOCTOR
He's approaching 40, no?

NORA
Yes. Next May.

DOCTOR
His blood pressure's off the charts.

NORA
Was that causing the chest pain?

DOCTOR
(writing on his clipboard)
It's a typical panic symptom, but
he'll need to see a cardiologist. If
your question is, "did he have a heart
attack?", no. He didn't.

The Doctor rips off a piece of his notepad and hands it to her. Nora looks at it quickly.

DOCTOR
Is your husband a particularly anxious

man?

NORA

He's a bit of a control freak, if that's what you mean.

(laughs)

Damn Italians.

Unamused, the Doctor doesn't respond. Nora's laughter subsides. She takes a drag, embarrassed.

DOCTOR

You have any idea what might have caused this?

NORA

We moved in from Nevada not too long ago. My husband's an investment banker and had a job lined up here.

(nervously)

It fell through, so you can imagine he hasn't been feeling particularly sanguine.

DOCTOR

And I'm assuming you don't work?

NORA

(quietly)

No.

DOCTOR

Just a housewife?

(she nods, more hesitant now)

Children?

His eyes trail to her hips. She bristles.

NORA

Is this a job interview or something?

The Doctor grins to himself and begins toward the door.

NORA

(a bit incensed)

Excuse me?

DOCTOR

Yes?

NORA
Are you prescribing him anything?

DOCTOR
The cardiologist will take care of
that. For now, paroxetine, rest...a
vacation, perhaps.

His eyes travel from Nora, to the sleeping hippie, back to
Nora. Then...

DOCTOR
(scoffingly)
Welcome to L.A.

TITLE CARD: **DON'T INTERRUPT THE SORROW**

INT. HELMER CAR - NIGHT

Nora drives TONY (35) home in their upscale Volvo station
wagon. He sits passenger, quiet.

NORA
Want me to make you something when we
get home?

TONY
(half-sarcastic)
How about a gin and tonic?

NORA
How about soup?

TONY
Nah.

NORA
Why?

TONY
I'm not hungry.

NORA
You should eat something.

TONY
I said I'm not hungry.

Nora doesn't respond. Tony sighs bitterly.

NORA
I'm not going to a cardiologist.

NORA
Tony--

TONY
(loud)
I'm not going to a fucking
cardiologist, Nora, that's ridiculous.
(faces her adamantly)
And I don't want this getting out,
either, not while I'm trying to find
work.

NORA
Who would I tell?

TONY
I dunno, you're always running your
mouth. But you can't this time. It'll
wreck me.

NORA
(laughs, disbelieving)
Wreck you?

TONY
You bet your ass.

Nora quiets again and revs the motor.

INT. HELMER GARAGE - NIGHT

The garage door opens, headlights appearing behind it. Nora parks the car. ANNE-MARIE (60s), the Helmer's nanny, appears at the inside door.

NORA
(whispering)
The kids asleep?

Anne-Marie nods. Tony ambles past her, into the house. Nora follows.

INT. HELMER MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nora sits on the edge of the master bedroom bed, Tony asleep under the covers. Light from the ensuite illuminates her silhouette.

She places her hand on his shoulder, before leaning in to plant a kiss on his forehead.

INT. HELMER KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The house is midcentury modern, with bright mustard and cream-colored furniture.

The kitchen is neat but sparse, with empty countertops, fresh (albeit generic) wallpaper, and a few low-hanging ceiling plants that add pops of green to the tawny tackiness.

Anne-Marie boils a pot of coffee on the stove. Nora enters from the main hallway, and sits down at the table, Anne-Marie after her. She hands her a cup of coffee.

ANNE-MARIE

Tony asleep?

NORA

Yeah.

ANNE-MARIE

He's gonna be fine, Nora.

NORA

I know.

ANNE-MARIE

Whenever you need me out of here, just say it.

NORA

No, out of the question.

ANNE-MARIE

I could still visit. Find some work in Brentwood, maybe, it's not far.

NORA

(in jest)

Oh yeah? Go nanny for a big star?

ANNE-MARIE

(smiles)

Maybe.

NORA

You can find plenty of them in Laurel Canyon.

She takes a sip of coffee, sighs.

NORA
The kids need you.

ANNE-MARIE
Like when you were little?

NORA
Exactly.

ANNE-MARIE
Except you're a good parent.

Looking at Nora's anguished face, Anne-Marie sighs and picks up her coffee cup.

ANNE-MARIE
Are you gonna finish this?

Nora shakes her head. Anne-Marie crosses to the sink and dispenses the rest of the coffee into the drain. Nora lights a cigarette, exhales tiredly.

INT. HELMER MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tony lies asleep in bed. Nora slips under the comforter, nestling beside him. She does not close her eyes at first, gazing at her husband instead.

After a moment, she resolves herself to sleep.

INT. HELMER MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Tony lies asleep, hair tousled, blankets and pillows around him similarly disheveled. Morning light falls over his visage, slatted by half-skewed Venetian blinds. He comes to.

Nora stands above him, holding a breakfast tray with eggs, toast, and a glass of juice.

NORA
(gently)
Morning.

Tony sits up in bed, rubs his eyes.

TONY
What's this?

NORA
Breakfast.

She sits on the edge of the bed and places the tray over his legs. He leans in and kisses her.

TONY
Thank you.

Tony begins eating, wordlessly. Nora watches him almost ritualistically as he devours his food.

INT. HELMER KITCHEN - MORNING - LATER

Nora and Tony's three kids: IAN (9), BOBBY (7), and EMILY (5) eat breakfast and run around the kitchen.

Anne-Marie washes dishes as Bobby chases Emily into the dining room in a game of tag. A handheld radio, propped in the sink window, blares.

RADIO JINGLE
93 KHJ!

RADIO COMMENTATOR
*And now, ladies and gentleman, the
real Don Steele!*

RADIO JINGLE
93 KHJ! LOS...ANGELES...

IAN
(sitting at table)
I wanna be "it" next!

BOBBY
It's not your turn yet!

ANNE-MARIE
Shh, your father's just getting up.

BOBBY
(to Emily)
You're "it!"

EMILY
You didn't tag me!

Emily climbs up onto the kitchen table, bumping a ceiling plant pot with her head.

ANNE-MARIE
Settle down.

NORA
(O.S.)
What are you doing today?

TONY
(O.S.)
Got that interview with Morgan Stanley.

Nora and Tony enter the kitchen, Tony in a tailored, grey, pin-striped suit.

NORA
You should see if they can reschedule.

TONY
I can't do that.

NORA
You just got out of the hospital--

TONY
Nora, please.

Tony sighs and kisses each of the kids on the forehead before retreating to the counter. He begins putting paperwork in a briefcase.

Nora grabs the pot of coffee off the stove and pours him a cup. He scans the newspaper as she hands it to him.

NORA
You want milk in that?

TONY
No.

Emily hops off the table and tugs at her father's pant leg.

EMILY
I want a piggy-back ride!

Tony looks at Nora, irritable. She glances back at him before squatting down in front of their daughter.

NORA
I can give you a piggy back ride! Grab onto my shoulders.

Emily climbs onto her mother's back, Nora rising to her feet. Anne-Marie turns off the sink.

ANNE-MARIE

No time for piggy-back rides, today,
silly. We've got to catch the bus.

She picks Emily off Nora's back and sets her on her feet. The kids grab their lunch bags off the counter and race out of the kitchen.

ANNE-MARIE

I'll bring them down to the stop.

She exits. Coffee in hand, Tony keeps scanning the paper as Nora walks up behind him, wrapping her arms around his torso and leaning her head into his back.

TONY

(tender, but whiny)
Come on, babe.

NORA

What?

TONY

It's too hot.

Nora pulls away, dismayed.

NORA

A kiss, then?

Tony sighs, turning his head toward her. She plants a kiss on his cheek. He downs another mouthful of coffee, throws the paper onto the countertop, and starts out of the kitchen.

TONY

I'll see you tonight, okay?

NORA

Okay. Love you.

Nora looks on longingly. The slam of the front door pulls her into solitude. She yearns for him, even his prickishness.

Eventually, another cigarette comes out. She lights it.

INT. NORA'S CAR - MORNING

Nora coasts through Laurel Canyon, light glinting through her

windshield. Sun-dappled home fronts and foliage whiz past her open window as she careens down winding roads, "Shades of Scarlett Conquering" playing on a cassette tape.

Affluence and "earthiness" commingle as she soaks in the Edenic landscape and infrastructure:

In one front yard, a middle-aged man cuts his grass. In another, a young woman sits on a blanket and plays a dulcimer.

Further down, stone driveways cut into the earth, veering up to elegant, two-story houses with swimming pools.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - MORNING

Nora's car peels through Downtown Los Angeles.

Movie posters on theatre fronts fly by (*Tommy, Nashville, Shampoo*), amid a montage of billboard advertisements (Coca-Cola, Chevrolet, "The Rolling Stones 1975 Tour,"), businesses (Levi's, Chevron, Woolworths, Bottle Bar Mini-Mart Liquor), and restaurants (Jim Dandy, Alpine Village, Casita del Campo).

This visual smorgasbord interweaves with myriad, sun-kissed passerby, many of them young people: tan, beautiful, donning sunglasses and fringed attire.

As she gazes through her windshield, a raised green sign: *Broadway Federal Bank*, appears amid building facades and palm fronds.

INT. NED KROGSTAD'S OFFICE, BROADWAY FEDERAL - DAY

A loan officer, NED (early-40s), with a strange handsomeness, opens his office door for Nora, who steps inside and surveys her surroundings with a mix of performative confidence and internal apprehension.

NORA

Thank you.

A name plaque on the desk reads: NED KROGSTAD, with the subtitle: LOAN OFFICER. A picture of a young man (late-teens, smiling) sits in a frame at the edge of the desk.

NED

Please, have a seat.

NORA
(looking at the photo)
Is that your son?

NED
Yeah.

NORA
What's his name?

NED
Toby.

A look of confusion. She gazes at Ned through squinted eyes.

NORA
How old are you?

NED
How old do you think I am?

NORA
You can't be a day over 30.

NED
(laughs)
I wish. I'm 42 next year.
(business now)
How can I help you, Mrs...?

NORA
Helmer. I'm looking to take out a
loan.

NED
That I've gathered.

NORA
(sitting down)
It's a complicated situation.

NED
Oh?

NORA
I'm trying to take a loan out in my
father's name. I'm his executor.

NED
Okay...

NORA

He's in the hospital right now. The prognosis is fine and everything, but he's running out of money.

NED

What happened?

NORA

(hesitant)

To my father?

NED

Yes.

NORA

He...had an accident.

NED

Oh. I'm sorry to hear that.

NORA

(stuttering)

It was a nightmare. Broken leg, stitches. Awful.

NED

Hm.

(beat, clears throat)

If you're looking to cover hospital bills, I'm sure there's something you can work out with his insurance company.

NORA

No, no. Not that. We're putting his house up on the market and we'll need to take out a bridge loan.

NED

And he'll be going where?

She hesitates, not expecting the question.

NORA

We're gonna put him in a home.

NED

Oh.

NORA

I'd take him in, you know. But I've got three kids I'm trying to raise, and my husband's out of work, and it's not like we have the room...

Another pause. Ned remains silent, stone-faced.

NORA

...but he deserves to be comfortable. Being his executor...well, his daughter first. Then his executor, of course...I've got to make the best decision I can for him.

NED

And that means selling the house?

NORA

He can't be alone.

Ned continues to stare for a while before pulling out a pack of cigarettes and lighting one.

NED

Smoke?

Nora nods. He hands her a cigarette.

NORA

Thank you.

He leans in, lighting it for her. She exhales deeply, letting out a dark plume, then continues to gaze at him, curious if he's buying the bullshit.

NED

I'm really quite sorry about all of this.

She shrugs, staring down into her lap.

NED (CONT'D)

Same thing happened to my mother last year, actually.

NORA

Really?

NED

(nods)

Mhm. Now she's away in a home, too.
Just me and my son left.

Nora doesn't know what to say. Ned ruminates a moment more, then...

NED

I think we can work something out for you.

NORA

(astonished)

Really?

He begins handing her paperwork.

NED

You'll need to bring in the necessary documents. Fill these out, come back tomorrow, we'll get the ball rolling on the application. How's that sound?

Nora nods, grateful, a bit stunned. She shuffles through the papers a bit before returning her gaze to him.

NORA

Thank you, Mr. Krogstad.

NED

(warm)

Ned.

EXT. BROADWAY FEDERAL - DAY

Nora exists the bank, handbag and paperwork in tow, hyperventilating with a mix of anxiety and enthrallment.

She stuffs the paperwork under her arm, throws on a pair of sunglasses, and pulls out a cigarette.

CUT TO BLACK.

On a black screen: **ITALY, A MONTH LATER.**

NORA

(V.O.)

Maybe he wasn't too much of a bastard after all.

TONY
(V.O.)
Your father?

CUT TO:

INT. ITALIAN VILLA - DAY

Nora lies on a white, linen comforter. Tony stands by the window, smoking a cigar and looking into the greenery below. Natural light caresses their bodies.

NORA
Yeah.

TONY
The 25 grand was pretty nice.

NORA
Can you believe it!?

TONY
Smart of you to check that old
account.

Tony puts out his cigar and sits down on the bed.

TONY
And I'm sure he knew, deep down, you'd
find it. Granted, I don't think he
could swallow his pride enough to
leave it in the will for you...

NORA
Oh, no way.

TONY
But he knew how smart his girl was.

She chortles. He stares at her intimately, a gaze she returns.

TONY
I love you.
(kisses her forehead)
Thank you for this.

Nora plucks a glass of wine off of the neighboring end table.

NORA
Well, you've always talked about

coming here. And now we can put the rest of that money toward the house.

(raises glass)

Can finally thank the old man for something.

TONY

Mm. That'll be a nice cushion.

Nora smiles, kisses him on the mouth, and climbs to his other side to begin a shoulder massage. The phone rings. Nora pauses to grab the receiver.

NORA

(into phone)

Hello? Yes, we'll accept the charges.

(beat)

Anne-Marie?

Nora pulls the receiver from her ear, looks at Tony.

NORA

It's for you, honey—

Tony takes the receiver and carriage, rises from the bed, and paces toward the window. Nora watches with anticipation.

TONY

(into phone)

Anne-Marie? Is that you?

A stretch of silence as Anne-Marie responds.

NORA

Are the kids okay?

TONY

(into phone)

You're kidding!

NORA

What is it?

TONY

(facing her, breathless)

Morgan Stanley's wants to take me on as an investment banker!

The opening guitar in "In France They Kiss on Main Street" plays as Nora leaps up and throws her arms around Tony's neck...

EXT. LAUREL CANYON - MIDDAY - TWO DAYS LATER

A car, veering through the lush Laurel Canyon topography. It pulls into the Helmer driveway. The song becomes diegetic, playing on the car radio; Tony turns off the ignition.

EXT. HELMER HOUSE - MIDDAY - CONTINUOUS

Anne-Marie stands on the front porch, the kids behind her. Nora steps out of the passenger side, wearing a new headscarf and blouse. Tony sports a new polo and bellbottoms.

ANNE-MARIE

You cats belong in *Harper's Bazaar*.

Nora pulls off her sunglasses, trotting over to the porch.

NORA

My babies!

The kids run to give her a hug. She greets them all, before scooping Emily into her arms.

TONY

(to Anne-Marie)

Did they behave themselves?

ANNE-MARIE

They always do, Pop.

(hugs Tony)

Congratulations.

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

Tony and Nora nurse drinks at a bar in a hip restaurant, populated with attractive young hippies.

Nora wears a flashy kimono dress and hoop earrings, her hair cascading behind her. Tony is handsome as ever, with slicked-back hair.

NORA

You ever imagine we'd be drinking at a place like this?

TONY

That's why I wanted us to move to L.A.

NORA

So you did.

TONY
Mhm. Didn't you?

She smiles and nods, taking a sip of her drink.

TONY
I think we're made for this place,
Nor.

NORA
Yeah?

TONY
Yeah.

He looks around, lustfully, at the flashy free-spiritedness.

TONY
We never coulda gotten this in Nevada.

NORA
No? Not with those nights in Reno we
used to do?

He smiles, remembering fondly.

TONY
Those were good.

NORA
Then the babies came.

EXT. BEACH - AFTERNOON

As if on her words, the kids run around the beach, laughing, Anne-Marie corralling them.

Nora and Tony walk some distance behind. She stares out at the crashing water, his arm slung around her neck.

TONY
You want to have another kid?

She snaps out of her reverie, startled and humored all at once.

NORA
What?

TONY
I said, you wanna have another kid?

NORA
You want more?

TONY
Sure!

NORA
(stunned)
Wow! Someone's become quite the domestic.

He laughs, she leans in closer to him. He kisses her on the top of her head. After a moment of contemplation...

NORA
You want another, I'll give you another.

TONY
(chuckles)
You make it sound like a chore.

NORA
(incredulous)
Have you ever given birth?

TONY
All the time!

NORA
Good. You can deliver the next one.

He pulls her in toward his chest, almost aggressively, until they're staring each other, faces inches apart.

TONY
(playful, suave)
Deal.

He plants a long, dewy kiss on her mouth. Nora melts.

INT. HELMER ENSUITE - AFTERNOON

Nora showers, under a heavy, steaming spray, from the beach, before turning off the faucet, stepping out, and drying. Suddenly, the phone rings.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Nora enters the bedroom and grabs the receiver off the end table.

NORA
 Helmer residence.
 (beat, surprise)
 Ned?
 (beat)
 What are you talking about?

Silence. The color drains from her face.

NORA
 I can't leave now.
 (beat)
 What?

She turns again to the bedroom door again, then back to the receiver, in completely hushed tones.

NORA
 (submitting)
 Okay. Give me 20 minutes.

She chews on her lip, returning the receiver to the carriage.

NORA
 (calling)
 Anne-Marie?

INT. HELMER KITCHEN - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Nora enters the kitchen from the hall, dressed and still drying her hair with a towel. Tony stands on the back porch, visible through the sink window, smoking a cigarette.

Anne-Marie cleans as the kids dart in and out of the kitchen and living room.

NORA
 I've gotta make a run to the grocery store, I forgot a few things for dinner.

ANNE-MARIE
 You want me to run out?

NORA
 No, that's okay. Stay with the kids. And water the plants for me, will you?

Without another word, Nora grabs her scarf, glasses, and purse, and takes off through the front door.

INT. NORA'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Nora grips to the steering wheel, peeling through Downtown L.A., sweating. The radio blasts.

RADIO COMMENTATOR

This is Don Steele for 93 KHJ, Los Angeles. We're about to take a commercial break, but don't go anywhere. We've got new music for you coming up; she's a fascinating new personality out of New York. Her name's Patti Smith, and she's just put out an album called *Horses*, and her song "Free Money" is up next. Only on 93 KHJ...

Nora chuckles to herself, dreadfully. The irony.

RADIO JINGLE

93 KHJ! LOS...ANGELES...

EXT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

Ned sits at an outdoor table under a blue-and-yellow sign that reads THE GALLEY. He wears sunglasses and a floral button-up, unbuttoned midway down the chest; business casual minus the business.

Nora anxiously clutches to her handbag as she approaches the table, looming over him.

NORA

What's this all about?

NED

(looking up, smiling)
There you are.

NORA

What's going on?

NED

Come on, take a load off.

Nora traipses over to the open seat and sits across from him, arms slumped in her lap as he coolly grabs a menu and begins reading. A waitress comes over.

WAITRESS

Can I get you folks started with

drinks?

NED

Yes, I'll have the blackberry-cucumber gin and tonic, please.

WAITRESS

For you, ma'am?

Nora stays silent.

NED

She'll have the same.

WAITRESS

Two blackberry-cucumber gin and tonics, coming up.

Ned resumes looking at the menu.

NED

(performative)

Mmm. The garbage burger looks fantastic.

NORA

(quiet, anxious)

Cut the bullshit, please.

NED

I'm not the bullshitter, Nora.

Her face flushes. Silence. The waitress returns with their cocktails.

WAITRESS

Are you ready to order?

NED

Two garbage burgers.

NORA

One.

Ned smiles at the waitress and hands her their menus. She takes off. Nora stares at her cocktail, a nauseous look on her face.

NORA

I'm not paying for that.

NED
No? Not with the 25 grand?
(beat)
Explain this.

He pulls out a manila folder and places it onto the table.
Nora remains frozen.

NORA
What is that?

He sips on his cocktail broodingly. Nora nervously opens the folder, looking at its contents.

On the top of the stack: her father's out-of-state death certificate. Below, photocopies of the false documentation furnished for the loan, and her signature.

NED
Your father's been dead for six months?

NORA
You had to have known this before you gave me the money.

NED
There's nothing you can prove.

NORA
Ned--

NED
Why'd you do it?

NORA
I needed to get my husband out of town.

NED
What?

NORA
A vacation. He needed to get out of L.A.

Ned bursts into laughter.

NED
All this? For a trip?

NORA
His health's deteriorating, you
bastard, we're both out of work--

NED
God, how stupid.

NORA
Oh, fuck you!

Nora slaps the folder shut. The waitress returns with Ned's
burger.

WAITRESS
Here you are.

NED
Thank you.

She takes off. Nora crosses her arms, tears in her eyes.

NORA
(adamant)
My husband was gonna die.

NED
Are you serious, Nora?

NORA
It's true!

NED
God, you Canyon women. So obsessed
with your perfect homes, perfect
husbands, perfect little gardens...
(leaning in)
It'd scare you shitless if he found
out, wouldn't it? What'd you tell him?
You won the lottery or something? What
bullshit'd he buy?

She gets up from her chair, loudly.

EXT. RESTAURANT PARKING LOT - DAY

Nora stalks to her car, begins unlocking the door. Ned
advances toward her.

NORA
Leave me alone, you bastard!!

NED
You can't run away from this, Nora!

NORA
Stop it!!

He grabs her arm, thrusting the folder in her face.

NED
This isn't going anywhere!

NORA
(submitting)
What do you want!?

She waits for a reply, exasperated. Ned brings the folder down, loosens his grip on her arm. He laughs to himself.

NORA
(breathless)
What?

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

In slow-motion: Ned leans in toward Nora and kisses her. They begin to have sex. The thunderous, purplely, percussive sounds of "The Jungle Line" take over...

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Ned lies in bed and smokes a cigarette. Nora sits up next to him, sheets wrapped around her.

NORA
I feel like Maria Wyeth.

NED
You're not Maria Wyeth.

NORA
(disbelieving)
You read Joan Didion?

NED
Of course.
(takes drag on cigarette)
California belongs to Joan, baby.

NORA
You don't act like you do.

She stands up, sheets still wrapped around her, and heads toward the bathroom. The sound of the shower.

NED
(calling)
You want company?

NORA
(O.S., calling)
Fuck off.

NED
(calling)
You put yourself in this position,
Nora.

She says nothing as the shower continues to roar. He takes a few more drags on his cigarette before putting it out on the nightstand ashtray.

After a moment, the shower turns off. Nora emerges from the bathroom, wrapped in a towel.

NED
Was I good at least?

She says nothing for a moment. Then...

NORA
You?

NED
Yeah, me.

She climbs back into the bed, unresponsive. He rolls over, puts his arms around her.

NORA
So. How long does this go on for?

He props his head on one arm, pushing a few tendrils of hair out of her face.

NED
That's really up to you.

Nora stares at the ceiling blankly, marinating in it.

NORA
(full dread and surrender)
No. You've got my livelihood in your

hands. You call the shots.

Ned rolls onto his back again, facing the ceiling with her. He lets out a heavy breath.

NED

Wow.

(beat, diverting)

Well, if it makes you feel better, it's nothing to feel bad about.

NORA

What do you mean?

NED

No one's gonna go branding you with a scarlet letter. Not unless you tell your husband. He might.

NORA

Why would I do that?

NED

I don't know. Integrity?

NORA

Tony will never know about this.

Nora curls up under the sheets and stares away from him with confusion in her eyes. She says nothing.

The sound of crashing water...

INT. HELMER POOL (UNDERWATER) - DAY

Nora plunges into the blue, a rill of bubbles flying out of her mouth as she descends to the pool floor.

"Edith and the Kingpin" begins playing...

INT. GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Nora pushes a shopping cart through an aisle, under fluorescent lights. "Edith and the Kingpin" continues from the store speakers.

She pulls up to the produce section, grabs a head of lettuce, examines it, and places it into the cart before advancing forward. Then, a voice...

CHRISTINE
(O.S.)
Nora?

Nora stops dead in her tracks. She spins around, facing the direction of her name.

Behind her, CHRISTINE MAPLEWOOD (early-40s) stands with a shopping cart. She wears a bright kimono dress, exuding a Lynn Goldsmith-meets-Janice Rule kind of energy.

NORA
Christine?

CHRISTINE
Nora Helmer.

NORA
Oh my God!

The two women meet between their respective carts in a heartfelt hug.

CHRISTINE
You look amazing.

NORA
Me? Look at you!

Hands on Christine's shoulders, Nora steps back to gaze at her friend in full regalia.

CHRISTINE
You like it?

NORA
I love it!
(beat)
How long have you been in California?

CHRISTINE
About a month!

NORA
Jesus, everyone's racing West.
(beat)
Fred with you?

CHRISTINE
No, he's dead.

NORA
(in a stunned whisper)
What?

CHRISTINE
Heart attack. Isn't that how your Dad
went?

Her face pales a bit.

NORA
(nods)
Yeah.

CHRISTINE
Yeah. I don't miss Fred either.

Christine grabs a jar of salsa off of a shelf, reads the
price tag and ingredient label...

CHRISTINE
He gave me nothing, not even his loss
to grieve.

NORA
Jesus.

Christine begins pushing her cart.

NORA
(nostalgic)
God, Chris, it's been so long.

She stops, lovingly grabs Nora's hand.

CHRISTINE
I know it.

NORA
Come over for lunch.

CHRISTINE
Oh, I--

NORA
I mean it. Tony would love to see you.

Christine smiles gratefully.

RADIO JINGLE
 (V.O.)
 93 KHJ!

EXT. HELMER BACK PATIO - AFTERNOON

Nora, with damp hair, in a swimsuit and untethered bathrobe, and donning pastel pink-tinted shades, squeezes fresh lemonade at the table, a cigarette dangling out of her mouth. A handheld radio blares from the middle of the table.

RADIO COMMENTATOR
*And now, ladies and gentleman, the
 real Don Steele!...*

Christine exits, in her kimono and sunglasses, from the nearby sliding glass door.

NORA
 The water's beautiful.

CHRISTINE
 You making lemonade?

NORA
 Yeah.

She finishes squeezing, rattles the juice off her hands, and begins pouring Christine a glass. Christine stalks over to the table and takes a swig.

NORA
 Good?

CHRISTINE
 Delicious.

NORA
 Grab a seat, I'll make us sandwiches.

CHRISTINE
 Oh that's okay, I'm not that hungry.

Both women sit at the patio table, sipping their lemonade.

NORA
 Want a smoke?

CHRISTINE
 No thank you. I lit up in the car.

NORA
(under her breath)
Grass?

CHRISTINE
Oh, don't tell me you've never.

NORA
Only once or twice. Tony never liked
the smell of it.

CHRISTINE
Do it when he isn't home.

NORA
No. The man's like a dog, he can sniff
out anything.

CHRISTINE
When's he get off work?

Nora slips back her bathrobe sleeve, looks at her wristwatch.

NORA
He should be home soon, actually.

CHRISTINE
Mm.

NORA
So. Where're you living?

CHRISTINE
Fred left me enough to cover two
month's rent for an apartment in
downtown.

NORA
That's it?

CHRISTINE
Yeah, he was blowing it every night at
the casino. No wonder we were living
paycheck to paycheck -- my paycheck to
paycheck.

NORA
What about work now?

CHRISTINE
I dunno. Fat chance I could be

someone's secretary again.

NORA
Don't say that.

CHRISTINE
It's the truth, no one wants to screw
an old bag.

NORA
What?

CHRISTINE
Boss men love bedding their stenogs,
Nora, it's always been that way.

NORA
Not all boss men want that.

CHRISTINE
Most do.

NORA
Not Tony.

Christine coolly finishes off her glass of lemonade as Nora taps her cigarette into the ashtray, pensive, brooding even.

CHRISTINE
I'll be okay.

NORA
You can't be sure. Tony had it all
lined up when we came here and it went
to shit at the last minute.

CHRISTINE
Really?

NORA
Mhm. I've never seen a man get so
weak.

CHRISTINE
What happened?

NORA
He had a breakdown.

CHRISTINE
You're kidding.

NORA
Don't tell him I told you that.

CHRISTINE
Did he get another job?

NORA
Yeah, Morgan Stanley picked him up. We
got the call in Italy.

The sound of the front door opening, then...

TONY
(O.S., muffled)
Nora?

NORA
Speak of the devil.

Tony appears at the sliding glass door, stunned at the sight
of Christine. He opens it.

TONY
Christine Maplewood!!

CHRISTINE
Hey, you!

TONY
Christ, it's been so long!

She rises from her chair and meets him near the door for an
embrace.

TONY
You in town visiting?

NORA
She lives in L.A. now.

TONY
You're kidding!

He leans in and greets Nora, still seated, with a kiss.

CHRISTINE
Yep! Fred died 'round Christmas so I
decided to start fresh.

TONY
Fred's dead?

CHRISTINE
 (returning to her chair)
 You betcha.

NORA
 (quietly, to Tony)
 Heart attack.

TONY
 God, I'm sorry.

CHRISTINE
 Oh, it's no big deal. I'm free as a
 bird now.

Tony says nothing, disturbed, incensed even, at Christine's freewheeling nature. Nora interjects to break the tension.

NORA
 Go put on your swim trunks, honey, the
 water's beautiful.

TONY
 Yeah, I think I will.
 (comes back to Earth)
 Ooh, I almost forgot.

He paces back into the house, and returns with a small, white paper bag, which he places on the table in front of Nora, and accents with a kiss on the cheek.

TONY
 For you.

He takes off into the house again.

NORA
 Jeez.

She reaches inside of the bag and pulls out a black velvet box, opening it to reveal a diamond necklace.

NORA
 Holy shit.

CHRISTINE
 My God, look at that, Nor!

Nora flips her head back toward the house, then returns to the necklace, overwhelmed. Christine laughs, falls back into her chair.

CHRISTINE

(putting her feet up)

I guess some men are worth keeping.
 Though I'm not really the one to ask
 -- 20 years with Fred, I'm still in
S.C.U.M. Manifesto mode.

Both women laugh, Nora's undercut with an almost imperceptible uneasiness. The opening chords to "The Hissing of Summer Lawns" take over...

INT. HELMER MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Nora stares at her resolute visage in the vanity mirror and slings the diamond necklace around her clavicle. A series of images play out, synchronous with the lyrics.

He bought her a diamond for her throat, he put her in a ranch house on the hill...

INT. HELMER KITCHEN - MIDDAY

Nora stares out through the sink window.

She could see the valley barbecues, from her windowsill...

Nora's P.O.V., gazing through the glass: a montage of the Canyon hillsides, valleys, foliage, with houses and pools tucked among the green crests and folds like ornaments on a Christmas tree.

See the blue pools in the squinting sun, hear the hissing of summer lawns...

EXT. HELMER HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A fence looms tall. Through the slats, Nora is visible exiting from the back door of the house, rounding the perimeter of the yard, and trotting down to the driveway, where she gets inside her car.

He put up a barbed wire fence, to keep out the unknown, and on every metal thorn, just a little blood of his own. She patrols that fence of his, to a Latin drum, and the hissing of summer lawns...

INT. NORA'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Palm trees, in slow-motion, soar above her windshield, washed out by burning sunlight.

Darkness...wonder makes it easy...

Nora grips to the steering wheel, staring out at the road ahead in a trance.

Darkness...with a joyful mask...

Back to the palm trees, growing ominous, never-ending...

Tubes gone, darkness, darkness, no color, no contrast...

EXT. BEACH PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Horns take over as Joni drones entrancingly. Nora stands outside of her car, wearing sunglasses, watching the waves.

Ahead, a few young hippies gather on the sand. An impending sunset bleeds pink hues into the sky.

INT. HELMER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nora paces through her ornate but empty living room, the sliding patio door ahead of her. She holds a glass of wine in one hand and restlessly smokes a cigarette with the other.

A sky, colored with the reds and purples of evening, fills the door and surrounding windows, casting shadows and strange hues on the furniture.

Diamond dog, carrying a cup and a cane, looking through a double glass, looking at too much pride and too much shame...

INT. HELMER MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Nora lies in their bed in a nightgown, a ceiling fan spinning above her. It casts tiny breezes through tendrils of her hair, which stick with sweat to her neck.

There's a black fly buzzing, there's a heat wave burning in her master's voice, hissing summer lawns...

INT. HELMER LIVING ROOM - MIDDAY

Nora enters the house from the back patio, cigarette in hand. She crosses through the living room...

He gave her his darkness to regret, and good reason to quit him...

...and enters the kitchen, where a group of builders install brand new cabinets and countertops.

He gave her a room full of Chippendale, that nobody sits in...

She continues through the kitchen and into the adjacent dining room, landing before the hutch. Her and Tony's wedding picture sits center, bordered on either side by framed school photos of their children. She stares at it...

Still, she stays with a love of some kind...

An image: Nora and Ned having sex. Then, back to Nora staring.

...it's the lady's choice...

Another image: Nora and Tony in Italy, embracing each other, having just received the good news. Then, the image of Ned reaching orgasm. Back to Nora staring at the family photos.

...the hissing of summer lawns...

Fear, uncertainty, restlessness in Nora's eyes.

Darkness...darkness...