

"COMING UNDONE"

An original screenplay

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SMALL-TOWN PLAYGROUND - DAY

TITLE OVER: "1967"

Black-and-white image of a dug-out type shelter, the playground staff headquarters. In there, TOP 40 RADIO PLAYS.

A sudden summer storm is brewing. TEENAGE WORKERS race around gathering up equipment. KIDS flee, CRYING OUT to each other.

MARGARET, 18, wholesome looking in white shirt, navy shorts, juggles an armful of basketballs, and locks them in a trunk in the dug-out.

EUGENE, 21, playground supervisor in nerdy black glasses and official name-tag, checks off the equipment on a clipboard.

Margaret stops, transfixed, as a '57 CHEVY pulls slowly to the curb. It is dripping water, fresh from a car wash.

OVER THE RADIO: a sultry song that will become the theme-song for Margaret and the boy in the car (e.g., "Nights in White Satin").

She leaves the shelter and stands still in the wind, staring at the car.

Eugene, smitten with Margaret, takes note of her fascination with the Chevy.

EUGENE

Uh, Margie--

He breaks her rapt concentration. She returns to the dug-out.

EUGENE

You need a ride home? We could stop at the Eat 'n Park and get a bite--

Margaret retrieves her knapsack, rummages for a brush, and releases the barrettes holding back her long brown hair.

Eugene watches her intently.

MARGARET

Actually, Eugene, my ride just pulled up. Thanks anyway.

She looks around Eugene at the Chevy. She brushes her hair, drops the barrettes into the knapsack.

EUGENE
 You look better with your hair
 pinned back. Your mother says "keep
 the hair off your face."

The driver of the Chevy HONKS.

MARGARET
 I gotta go.

Margaret dashes out, hair blowing wildly. Eugene watches.

EUGENE
 Her ride, she calls him! He's
 taking her for a ride all right!

CUT TO: Margaret getting into the Chevy.

EUGENE (V.O.)
 What could a juvenile delinquent
 like him possibly offer a quality
 girl like Margie Parks?

CUT TO: Eugene scowling.

EUGENE
 Five brats by the time she's twenty-
 five, that's what. I'll graduate
 from college next year and retire
 rich by the time I'm forty!

Eugene steps out of the dugout.

EUGENE
 He'll never know what the inside of
 a college looks like except to
 clean it...

The Chevy pulls away.

EUGENE
 And us practically engaged!
 (running toward the car)
 Margie!

INT. CHEVY - DAY

ON THE SOUND-TRACK, their theme-song (now instrumental)
 throughout black-and-white scenes.

The rhythmic PURR of the motor is the only sound in the car.

ANDY, 18, drives. He's slight, projects innocence coupled with smoldering sensuality.

Margaret sits next to the door. They don't look at each other, but the atmosphere is charged.

MARGARET
Darlene let you use her car.

ANDY
(OKLAHOMA drawl)
Have to wax it first. Then it's
ours for the whole night.

MARGARET
Wax it now? It's gonna rain.

He shrugs.

ANDY
You have to get home?

MARGARET
No...Not for awhile.

They drive through the streets of a small farming community.

ANDY
My dad says we're starting home in
the morning.

MARGARET
But, Andy, you said Monday!

ANDY
Changed his mind. Fed up with all
the squabbling after the funeral
over Uncle Ray's stuff.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

The Chevy pulls into an alley and stops in front of a tin-roofed garage with padlocked double doors.

MARGARET (V.O.)
I thought we'd have the weekend.

ANDY (V.O.)
We have now.

Andy jumps out and unlocks the doors. He ducks into the garage and signals to Margaret to pull in.

Margaret drives in too fast and off-center, nearly pinning Andy to the driver's side wall. He nicks his head on a shelf as he jumps clear and flattens himself against the wall.

Margaret rolls down her window.

MARGARET

Oh, migosh, I'm sorry! It just shot forward--are you hurt? I'm so sorry!

ANDY

(still flattened)
Slide out.

Andy squeezes around the car as Margaret slides over and gets out the passenger door.

Andy grabs a towel and a can of Turtle Wax. His t-shirt is torn, his forehead bleeding.

Margaret yanks the chain on the overhead bulb.

MARGARET

Oh, Andy, you're bleeding!

He grins at her.

ANDY

Yeah...and it's all your fault!

She takes a rag and begins to dab at his wound.

MARGARET

Oh, I'm really sorry! So sorry.

He loops a towel around her neck and sings, drawing her in.

ANDY

"That I was such a fool...I didn't know love could be so cruel."

Margaret resists, then gives in to Andy's kiss.

Suddenly, a freight-train CLATTER OF RAIN on the roof. Andy turns to watch the wild downpour in the alley.

ANDY

Let's get wet!

He grabs her hand. Margaret pulls back.

MARGARET
My mom'd have a cow!

Andy looks at her with regret, then dashes into the deluge.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Andy dances wildly, pulls off his shirt. From the garage, Margaret watches in wonder, too inhibited to join him.

Andy comes for her, and drags her, protesting, into the rain.

MARGARET
Andy, I can't. I'll catch pneumon--

He tilts her face up to the rain. She sputters, mad, then laughs and her defenses come down. They cavort in the rain.

DISSOLVE TO:

RAINDROPS ON WINDOWS.

INT. MARGARET'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT (1993)

MARGARET, dry and in Technicolor, respectable and matronly at 43, stands by the windows, remembering.

Behind her, the aftermath of a party. On the walls, BANNERS: STANFORD BOUND! GOOD LUCK, ERIC!

She turns and starts to clear the table. A brightly colored PAPER on the sideboard catches her eye. She studies it.

ON PHOTOS ON SIDEBOARD

Margaret and Eugene's wedding day. Their son Eric at various ages. Margaret and her mother, cheek-to-cheek, a black mourning ribbon on the frame.

BACK TO SCENE

She puts down the paper. Absently, she picks up a large antique SPOOL, and walks away.

INSERT ON PAPER: !!!OH MY GOD IT'S BEEN 25 YEARS!!!

INT. EUGENE'S STUDY - NIGHT

Light comes from a desk lamp. EUGENE, 46, a grayer version of his nerdy young self, is hunkered over the desk like a monk.

Margaret stands tentatively in the doorway, tapping the spool in her palm.

He doesn't look up right away. When he does, he's impatient.

EUGENE

Well?

MARGARET

Eugene, I'm sorry to bother you, but--

EUGENE

These essays are as disgraceful as last year's! If this is typical of the pathetic product public high schools are turning out, we can commend ourselves again for sending Eric to private school.

MARGARET

So he could get into a university a thousand miles away?

EUGENE

Oh, no! Not another bout of empty nest hysteria!

MARGARET

Stop calling it hysteria. My only child is leaving, my mother died six weeks ago, my job seems silly. I'm trying to take stock, Eugene.

He looks at her with irritation.

EUGENE

Fine. Take stock and then get on with it!

MARGARET

Once I know what "it" is, I'll get on with it.

EUGENE

It's those books Lydia's got you reading. All that awaken your creativity claptrap! Running with wolves and madwomen! Morbid, narcissistic navel gazing--

MARGARET

(waving the spool)
That's it, trivialize it, leach the
meaning out of it!

EUGENE

Look at you. Your eyes are bulging!
You look like a wild woman!

MARGARET

Could we not do this tonight,
Eugene, please? I know you said
you're too busy, but I want you to
take me to my high school reunion--

She breaks off, pulls her hair back with both hands, tugs at
her collar. A hot flash is beginning.

MARGARET

Oh, damn these hot flashes!

EUGENE

If you ask me, THAT'S a lot of what
this craziness is all about.

MARGARET

(unbuttoning, wild)
What?

EUGENE

Menopause! Your losing your
desirability--drying up!
(pause)
Even though you're soaking wet a
lot of the time!

Furious about the joke at her expense, Margaret throws her
spool over his head at the wall. CRACK! It breaks and falls
in pieces.

Eugene looks shocked, then disgusted.

Sweating and disheveled, Margaret rushes from the room
removing her shirt. FOLLOW to the front door and out to the
porch.

EXT. PORCH - SAME

Early September RAIN falls steadily on an old, genteel
neighborhood. Big trees, wide yards.

Margaret wipes her face and chest with her shirt. She sinks into a chair and weeps.

MARGARET

I'm too young for menopause!

She blows her nose in her shirt.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Later the same night. RAIN lashes the windows.

In bed Margaret pretends to be asleep while Eugene prepares for bed (and lovemaking) in the bathroom.

EUGENE

(flossing)

Hey, Margaret, about your reunion.

Of course, I'll take you!

(to himself)

When you see those losers, you'll know how lucky you are.

Finished, he checks out a Bill-Clinton-smile in the mirror, then turns out the light.

ON MARGARET'S FACE

Chagrined, she knows what's coming.

Eugene slips into bed. Margaret's back is to him.

EUGENE

You asleep? Sorry if I was insensitive earlier.

Margaret keeps still. Eugene strokes her neck and back.

EUGENE

I know you'll get over this bad patch and be my sweet Margie again. I think you ought to see Frank and get him to give you something to take the edge off. Prozac...wasn't that what you took before?

MARGARET

Nobody takes that anymore. Now, it's Celexa that takes the edge off.

Margaret does not respond as Eugene's hand travels south.

EUGENE

I need a little something, Margie.
Been so tense and focused. Just a
little something.

She stares straight ahead, eyes sad. RAIN on the window.

MARGARET

I'm too dried up.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The following morning. Margaret flips on the GARBAGE DISPOSAL, which GRINDS as she scrapes in refuse from the dishes.

She examines an antique Humpty Dumpty egg cup with hardened yolk on it. Impulsively, she tosses it into the disposal. It makes a terrific RACKET.

Her friend CHARLOTTE--chunky but stylish at 50--is suddenly behind her and yells over the grinding.

CHARLOTTE

You drop a fork--?

Margaret jumps in fright.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry! I knocked and knocked.

Margaret turns off the disposal. Peers in.

MARGARET

Eugene's antique Humpty Dumpty egg
cup. Had it since he was a baby.

(pause)

I accidentally scraped it in.

Charlotte peers in.

CHARLOTTE

Right. He shouldn't eat eggs
anyway.

HALLWAY

Margaret leads, Charlotte follows.

MARGARET
 Friday is egg day. Thursday,
 shredded wheat. Wednesday, Grape
 Nuts. Tuesday is--

Margaret disappears into her study.

CHARLOTTE
 So he's an orderly, dull guy. But
 he keeps the gutters clean and has
 a 401(k). What more do you want?

INT. MARGARET'S STUDY - SAME

Her office is jammed with sample books and other decorator paraphernalia. Compared to Eugene's study, it's a mess.

Margaret is rummaging through papers on the desk. Charlotte watches from the doorway.

CHARLOTTE
 Last week you ripped down that
 little ball he hung in the garage
 to show where to stop the car, and
 now you destroy his Humpty Dumpty--
 I see the signs.

Margaret looks through a mail organizer.

MARGARET
 Signs of what?

CHARLOTTE
 The signs of somebody thinking, how
 did it come to this and will it
 ever be thus? Eric leave yet?

MARGARET
 Yes. Ah, here it is!

Margaret looks at the PAPER and dials the phone.

MARGARET
 You know these signs yourself?

CHARLOTTE
 I nipped them right in the bud!
 They mean trouble.

MARGARET
 (into phone)
 Oh, hi, Darlene? This is Mar--

CHARLOTTE
I didn't want that kind of trouble
and neither do you!

MARGARET
(waving off Charlotte)
This is Margaret Olsen--Parks,
Margie Parks I used to be in high
sch--

A SQUEAL from the phone and Margaret holds it away from her ear. Charlotte's eyebrows raise.

MARGARET
(into phone)
...It's good to hear your voice,
too!...No, that's why I called. I
can't make it...No...Who? Your
cousin?...Andy's coming?

BLACK-AND-WHITE FLASHBACK

Andy and Margaret kissing passionately in the pouring rain in front of the garage.

BACK TO SCENE

Margaret, dazed. DARLENE'S VOICE still chattering over phone.

MARGARET
(into phone)
Umm, yes, I'm here...That sounds
wonderful. Of course, I'll be
there...Me, too!

Margaret hangs up and turns to Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE
Well?

A shocked smile spreads over Margaret's face.

EXT. CAR - DAY

FOLLOW as car travels across the early-autumn campus of a small college, picturesque, serene, and sunny.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Do you know what middle age is
really all about, Margaret! Because
it's not about finding a lost love.

MARGARET (V.O.)
 So, what is it? Disappointment?
 Loss and falling apart?

EXT. LYDIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

They stop in front of an old Victorian, whimsically painted, and landscaped with topiary.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
 Money. It's about money!

The two women exit the car and approach the front door.

An ANGRY OUTBURST explodes from within.

LYDIA (O.S.)
 --usque ad nauseam with your
 superior attitude! I pay you to
 DUST the books, not read them!

A young college student, GRETA, in no great hurry, comes to the door. She is followed by LYDIA, 37, in an imperial snit.

LYDIA
 I know you ate some of my truffles,
 too! I COUNTED them!

Greta comes out the screen door, putting on her jacket.

GRETA
 Excuse me, ladies.

Greta starts down the porch steps and Lydia bursts out the door. She wears a quasi-gypsy get-up.

LYDIA
 You sniveling wench--you talk on
 the phone on my time, too! I've
 heard you, with that cheap
 seductive tone you affect. "Oh,
 Sandy, oh..." Maybe you can get a
 job giving phone sex.

Greta continues casually down the walk. Margaret and Charlotte exchange "she's-out-of-control" looks.

LYDIA
 (shouting after her)
 I looked up your GPA--a miserable
 2.6! You're not even smart enough
 to read that book!

Greta saunters to the end of the walk, then turns. Charlotte watches her with bemused interest.

GRETA

Dr. Grannon, I suggest you get a
life poste haste.

LYDIA

Woo, "poste haste"! A smidgen of
classical learning to dress up that
tired old cliché!

Margaret and Charlotte turn Lydia around mid-sentence and steer her back into the house.

LYDIA

(screaming over her
shoulder)

"Lupo affamato mangia pan muffato!"

CHARLOTTE

Lydia, get a grip!

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

It's a hodge-podge of antiques, bric-a-brac, objects d'art. Lydia slumps onto a settee.

CHARLOTTE

What was that parting shot?

LYDIA

"A famished wolf eats moldy bread."
A non-sequitur but it's all I could
think of.

MARGARET

Good one, Lydia. Isn't that the
third student you've fired since
classes started?

LYDIA

I am losing it. She's in my
Expository Writing class, too.

(pause)

But they are ALL so impossible!
Arrogant and slip-shod--

CHARLOTTE

You just can't get humble help
anymore.

MARGARET

I wouldn't want to dust this place.

CHARLOTTE

Not if you had a knack for phone sex, that's for sure.

Lydia gets up. FOLLOW, as the three proceed through the house.

LYDIA

The sorry truth is I do need a life!

MARGARET

You have a life. A rather bizarre one...

CHARLOTTE

Built around junk and make-believe, but a life, none the less.

They exit the back door.

EXT. GARDEN - SAME

The women follow a path through an Elizabethan flower garden, toward a converted garage.

LYDIA

What kills me is they all have boyfriends! How do they do it? Do you know I have never in my whole life had a real--a STEADY--boyfriend!

Lydia enters the garage (a ceramics studio).

LYDIA (O.S.)

This is preposterous, is it not? What do they do that I don't?

INT. CERAMICS STUDIO - SAME

Shelves are lined with greenware. A large worktable holds a jumble of paints and works-in-progress.

The women put on their smocks, gather supplies.

MARGARET

I can tell you what they don't do.
Administer a quiz that scares
potential candidates away.

LYDIA

I can't afford to waste time with
incompatible men. My biological
clock sounds like Big Ben.

CHARLOTTE

What you don't get, Lydia, my dear,
is that they're ALL incompatible--
just equipped with a complementary
docking system.

LYDIA

Your cynicism is really getting
nasty.

The women set to work on their projects: Margaret's lumpy
elephant, Charlotte's realistic duck, Lydia's winged iguana.

MARGARET

It's just a cover for her
disappointment.

CHARLOTTE

I'm not disappointed--well, not any
more than any married woman my age.

LYDIA

I'm already disappointed--albeit
premature, faux disappointment--
that I may never get to experience
the true, deep disappointment of
married middle age!

CHARLOTTE

Look, just define what you want--
or, more accurately, what you'll
settle for--and then cast a cold
eye for it. Money, brains, genes,
sex, whatever--

MARGARET

(sounding like Charlotte)
Bearing in mind that you'll never
get it all in one package!

Charlotte smiles at Margaret in appreciation.