



PARAGON · ENTERTAINMENT · CORPORATION

May 7, 1990

Thomas Raddall
44 Park Street
Liverpool, Nova Scotia B0T 1K0

Dear Tom Raddall:

I am sending this along at the suggestion of Dan Petrie who is currently on location on another film. It's taken thirteen years, but I think Dan has written a screenplay which will make a wonderful movie. I hope you agree.

Sincerely,

~~Jon Slan~~
Chief Executive Officer
JS/sc

encl.

THE NYMPH AND THE LAMP

FADE IN:

CREDITS OVER

We're high over the Atlantic. The distant horizon shows streaks of dawn. Far below, the waves beat metronomically against a desolate, treeless ribbon of earth. It's as if God spit out a strip of sand and sea grass. From this height it's difficult to tell that the island is twelve ²⁰ miles long and hardly a mile wide. We move closer through wisps of cloud and begin to discern that from either end of the island two intermittent beams of light flash out into the early morning gloom. Otherwise, no movement, no sound. And then as we lower we become aware of an undulation in the dunes. Like maggots on a wound. Closer, and we can see that the movement is the result of a herd of wild ponies grazing in the dune grass. We descend among the herd. A mare with rounded belly lifts her head, sniffs the morning air. It appears as if she's listening to some inner voice. Slowly she detaches herself from the herd.

We follow her over one hillock and then another until she stops in an isolated hollow and lies down on a patch of moss and marram grass. She goes into labor. In a series of time lapses we see her give birth. When the foal is pushed out, instinctively both mother and offspring know what to do. The mare cuts the umbilical cord with her teeth and the foal finds the source of its mother's milk. They lie together in contentment.

We move away from them and there above, at the edge of the crater looking down, is a young girl, hardly sixteen but already of womanly proportions, astride a wild pony. Her expression is one of compassion. The girl flicks the rope she uses for reins and turns her pony away.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. WIRELESS OFFICE - LATE DAY

Two sailors, early 20's, bell ~~bottom~~ trousers and little white hats cocked at rakish angles, are loitering outside the office. The door opens disgorging Mr. Hurd, the superintendent, and two young women. Mr. Hurd glances at the sailors suspiciously and proceeds along the sidewalk. One of the women locks the office as her partner, a pretty blonde thing with hair bobbed in the latest 1920 fashion, approaches the sailors.

MISS BENSON
(whispering)
Go on, George, ask her.

George looks over at the tall, conservatively dressed girl locking the door.

GEORGE
Her, with the glasses?

MISS BENSON
She's a good dancer.

George shakes his head.

GEORGE
I'll take my chances at the
hall.

ISABEL JARDINE, her hair done up in a bun at the back of her head, approaches.

ISABEL
Good night, Flora. Have a
nice time.

She nods at the sailors who merely stare back at her.

MISS BENSON
Good night, Isabel.

When Isabel turns away, Miss Benson whispers to the other sailor.

MISS BENSON
(continuing)
William, go after her. She's
very clever. Goes to
lectures, studies art.

WILLIAM
(grinning)
That's her trouble.

His partner laughs.

MISS BENSON
Oh, you people -- all you
think about...

She leaves it unsaid. She looks off after Isabel,
inwardly pleased that she has the sailors to herself. She
takes each by an arm.

MISS BENSON
Which one gets the first fox
trot?

THE SAILORS
(in unison)
Me!

They all laugh.

ON ISABEL, paused outside a book store, hearing the
laughter from off. She glances in the direction of the
laughing threesome, then walks on.

EXT. LODGING HOUSE

Mrs. Pardee's establishment is on a lower street near the
harbour. The bottom floor is occupied by a grubby
restaurant. Isabel hurries past the restaurant windows,
enters the building.

INT. HALL AND STAIRCASE - NIGHT

As Isabel mounts the stairs, a door above opens and a
heavy-set teenage GIRL steps out. Her mother, MRS. PARDEE
the landlady, looms into the doorway. The girl starts
down the stairs.

MRS. PARDEE
(shouting from
the door)
Tell Aunt Eileen you must be
home by ten.

GIRL
Yes, Mama.

MRS. PARDEE
Have you got your tram token?

GIRL
Yes, Mama.

She passes Isabel on the stairs, gives a little nod. Isabel continues on up.

MRS. PARDEE
Don't eat too much.

GIRL
No, Mama.

She's out the door. Isabel smiles tentatively at Mrs. Pardee. She's an attractive woman in her early 40's. A no-nonsense queen of her domain. Her demeanor reeks of militant respectability.

MRS. PARDEE
I have had some complaints,
Miss Jardine. Too long in
the bathroom.

ISABEL
I'm sorry, Mrs. Pardee.

MRS. PARDEE
Well...(enough of that)

She closes the door. Isabel starts up the stairs to the third floor.

INT. ISABEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

It is sometime later. The room is meagerly furnished with a brass-knobbed iron bedstead, a chest of drawers, a mirror, a cane-bottom chair and a curtained closet. All are old and worn and yet the room exudes the orderliness, the femininity of its occupant. Isabel is covering her nakedness with a bathrobe. She takes a towel and a soap dish from the bureau, pauses for a moment to study her image in the mirror. Her expression is enigmatic, but the eyes do convey a wistfulness, a longing. She pulls herself away.

UPPER HALLWAY

Isabel comes out of her room. She's immediately aware of footsteps below. Simultaneously glancing down and retreating into the shadows, she sees a short stolid man wearing a top coat and bowler hat approaching Mrs. Pardee's door. He knocks and at the same time whips off his hat revealing a beaked nose and toothbrush moustache. Isabel continues on toward the bathroom but before she disappears Mrs. Pardee has opened the door for her gentleman caller and has caught a glimpse of Isabel's bathrobe through the bannister. Mrs. Pardee frowns.

INT. BATHROOM

Isabel luxuriates in the tub. Her soapings and towelings are intimate and sensual. Her mind drifts off in a contemplation of the wonders of her womanliness. There is a knock on the door. She splashes to attention.

EXT. BATHROOM

Isabel hurries out the door past a leering Mr. Klaus, a fellow roomer and all-too-apparent lecher. Klaus, beer-bellied and fifty, chuckles at Isabel's obvious discomfort.

INT. ISABEL'S ROOM - LATER

Isabel, fully dressed now - hat and gloves - picks up a book from her bedside table, starts out the door.

INT. LANDING

As Isabel proceeds downstairs, relieved that Klaus is not in evidence. When she's almost at Mrs. Pardee's door it opens suddenly and the man with the bowler hat steps out, smiling. Seeing Isabel, his smile fades. He quickly dons his hat, slips past Isabel and runs on down the stairs. Isabel is confronted by Mrs. Pardee who's appearance has only subtly changed in the interim.

MRS. PARDEE

One doesn't care for spying,
Miss Jardine.

ISABEL

(protesting)
But I wasn't...

MRS. PARDEE
(sarcasm thinly
veiled)

No, I'm sure you weren't.

She closes the door.

INT./EXT. TEA SHOP

Through the window we see Isabel alone at a table. A modest restaurant, just a few diners. The Waitress, middle-aged, uniformed in black dress, white apron and cap. Isabel, wearing spectacles, is reading her book. She comes to the last page, the last words. She closes the book slowly. She's crying. She looks around. Is anyone looking? No. Grateful, she removes her glasses and wipes at her tears with a napkin.

INT. LIBRARY

Isabel is sitting at a table engrossed in the early pages of another book.

LIBRARIAN
Miss. If you don't mind,
we're closing early - because
of the storm.

Isabel looks up, almost dazed, glances around. She's the only customer.

ISABEL
Oh. Forgive me.

LIBRARIAN
Would you like to check that
out?

ISABEL
Yes, please.

LIBRARIAN
Ah. Thomas Hardy. I've read
them all. I hope you brought
an umbrella.

ISABEL
No, I --

LIBRARIAN
I'm sure I can lend you one.
It's fierce out there.

EXT. HALIFAX STREETS - NIGHT

Isabel being buffeted along by wind and lashing rain. The streets deserted, sinister. She struggles with the umbrella.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE - STAIRWAY - NIGHT

As Isabel ascends, her shoes leave a little puddle at every step. She tiptoes past Mrs. Pardee's door, continues on up into the dimly lit corridor above. As she gets to the top of the stairs, a door off opens a crack, sending a finger of light into the hall. Isabel catches a glimpse of one of Klaus' leering eyes, hears his contemptuous snicker. She rushes to her door, fumbling with her keys. Klaus' door shuts with a click.

INT. ISABEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

She stands at her bureau toweling her hair, removing her soaked jacket. The rain slaps at her window. Something draws her to it. She walks over, pulls back the curtain, looking out. The camera follows her gaze through the window, past the wind whipped trees, over the boats at anchor in the harbour and beyond into the storm-churning Atlantic.

EXT. MARINA ISLAND - EARLY MORNING

The gale's ferocity seems to be increasing. Swirling sand. Shrill whistling of wind through the guy wires of the radio tower. We are among the herd of ponies in a sheltering hollow. Most of them are standing rock still, their backsides to the storm. Others move stiffly, trying to adjust to the vagaries of the assaulting downpour.

Out of the mist an apparition takes shape. A woman wearing a wedding dress seems to float toward us. Surely she must be the ghost of some drowned bride from one of five hundred wrecks along this shore. And yet as she approaches she becomes more and more material until it is quite clear that she is of this world, albeit distracted in her behavior to the point of being crazed, maniacal. She's slim, in her mid-20's and, in spite of features altered by her madness, quite attractive. Spooked by her presence, the ponies shift and whinny. MARY LERMONT leans against the wind, struggles up the side of the crater. She comforts the nearest pony.

MARY

Don't be afraid. I'm not.

At the top of the hollow she can see the ocean, the waves crashing on the shore. Back from the shoreline secured by chains attached to an old ship's anchor are two identical overturned rowboats. Mary runs toward the one marked "Marina 13." She unfastens the chain and with a strength well beyond the conceivable for one so frail she turns the boat upright. Underneath are oars and life jackets. She throws the oars into the boat and struggles mightily to push the boat toward the water.

EXT. WIRELESS STATION - DAWN

A man on horseback races toward the station. Since he didn't take time to don rain-protective gear, CHARLIE LERMONT, a slender, balding man of 27, is soaked to the skin. He jumps from the horse, runs stumbling to the door of the station.

CHARLIE

Matthew!

INT. WIRELESS STATION HALLWAY

As the door bursts open and Charlie runs toward the watch room.

CHARLIE

Matt, where are you?!

As he passes by, two doors open and GREG SKANE, 33, the second in command, and JIM SARGENT, 20, the apprentice, appear, puzzled.

INT. WATCH ROOM - DAWN

MATTHEW CARNEY, a blonde giant of 46, is sending a wireless message on a black knobbed transmitting key. He's wearing headphones. The racket of the morse code sparks is intense. Charlie bursts in.

CHARLIE

Matthew! Mary's gone!

But Matthew doesn't hear him over the noise and the earphones. Charlie moves so he can be seen. Carney catches the desperation on Charlie's face. He taps off the "SK" closing signal, whips off the phones. During the following, Shane and Sargent appear in the doorway.

CHARLIE
I can't find her!

MATTHEW
Who?!

CHARLIE
Mary. She's gone mad. She
got up in the middle of the
night, put on her wedding
dress, started singing hymns.
Crazy. I thought I got her
calmed down. Asleep. But
she climbed out a window. Oh
Jesus, Matt, help me.

Matthew is already up, heading to the door.

MATTHEW
Sargent, take the watch.
Greg, come on.

EXT. WIRELESS STATION - DAWN

The three men are on horseback in full flight. Matthew and Skane are wearing rain gear, Charlie is now in a borrowed poncho. They race back in the direction from which Charlie came. At the top of a hillock they pause to look frantically for the missing woman. They are about to rush on when Skane shouts.

SKANE
There's a lifeboat missing.

He spurs his horse. The others ride in quick pursuit.

EXT. THE BEACH - DAWN

As the men gallop up, dismount. They take everything in immediately. The tracks leading to the water's edge. Matthew and Skane undo the chain on lifeboat marked "Marina 14" as Charlie anxiously scans the shoreline, the roaring surf. They flip the boat over.

CHARLIE
(despairing)
She's drowned herself.

But Carney and Skane are already pushing the boat towards the water. Carney yells at the stricken Charlie.

MATTHEW

Push!

EXT. DUNES - DAWN

At the top of a rise the young girl, seen earlier, appears riding bareback on a wild pony. SARA GISWELL looks down on the activity on the beach.

SARA'S P.O.V.

As the men struggle to get the boat through the surf. Soon they disappear in the fog and rain.

EXT. ATLANTIC

Carney and Skane are rowing. Charlie kneels in the bow, shielding his eyes, shouting.

CHARLIE

Mary!

His voice is swallowed by the wind.

ON MATTHEW AND SKANE bending to the oars. We study their faces individually. Even though contorted by exertion we sense their personalities: Matt Carney strong willed, but with a poetic turn of mind even while grounded in the realities, sometimes harsh, of his life and job; Greg Skane, brooding, private, rendered cynical by experience. Skane swivels his head about, searching.

HIS P.O.V. - A FLUTTERING OF FABRIC ABOVE THE WAVES

SKANE

Over there!

Skane and Matthew heave on the oars to change direction. Charlie peers through the mist. There, fifty yards beyond, Mary's boat is being tossed viciously by the waves. Exhausted, soaked, freezing, she's trying to row out to sea.

CHARLIE

Mary!

She hears her husband's shout which only goads her to increase her efforts. But Carney and Skane narrow the distance.

CHARLIE
Mary, stop! Stay still!

A huge wave engulfs Mary's boat. One of her oars pops out, sending her sprawling backwards. She attempts to rise, struggles to bring the oar back under control.

CHARLIE
Leave it! Sit down!

Mary is upright, trying to keep her balance. Charlie watches in horror as another wave slams into her, carries her overboard.

CHARLIE
She's under!

Matthew rips off his life jacket and rain coat, dives into the water and swims toward the spot where Mary went overboard. Her drifting boat gets in the way. He pushes it aside. For a moment Mary resurfaces and he goes after her, but she's gone again. He dives under, looking, grasping. And then he sees the dress, catches a glimpse of her terror-stricken face. He reaches out and then suddenly nothing, a blur, blackness. Desperately he claws out for her. He surfaces for air and even here, above, everything has gone dark.

CHARLIE
There she is!

In a panic, Carney squints, shakes his head, and the spell passes as quickly as it came on. He sees Charlie, pointing. He turns and a wave kindly delivers Mary's unconscious body right into his grasp. He holds her tight in one arm and with the other swims back to safety. Charlie Lermont leans out, reaching, sobbing.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ATLANTIC - DAY

The Lord Elgin, a medium-sized government supply ship, cuts through a tranquil sea.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Mary lies in bed, propped up by pillows. Charlie is removing a tray with some dishes. Carney and CAPTAIN O'DELL stand near the door. O'Dell is a thin grey man of sixty with a haggard face and frosty blue eyes.

CHARLIE
Look at that, Matt. She ate
all her soup.

MATTHEW
Good.

Mary acknowledges the compliment, turns to Charlie.

MARY
I was wondering...

She hesitates.

CHARLIE
Yes?

MARY
My dress...is it...?

CHARLIE
It was ruined, Mary...torn...

MARY
Do you have...(it)?

CHARLIE
It's gone.

MARY
(crushed)
Oh.

Matthew and Captain O'Dell exchange a glance.

MATTHEW
I'll look in later, Mary.

CAPTAIN O'DELL
Anything you want, Mrs.
Lermont...(just ask)

MARY
(abstracted,
still thinking
of the dress)
Thank you.

EXT. DECK - DAY

As Matthew and Captain O'Dell walk toward the bridge.

CAPTAIN O'DELL

Lovely lass. Dammit, Matt,
no wonder she went bonkers.
Two years on that Godforsaken
island.

MATTHEW

Marina's not so bad. No,
Mary had a miscarriage last
fall. That's what took its
toll.

CAPTAIN O'DELL

Maybe. But a winter in that
hell hole exacts its toll,
too.

MATTHEW

I'll admit that, the winters
can be harsh. But there's
another side. In the summer
when the wind's warm and the
sea behaves it's Paradise.
They say if you could tow the
whole jingbang down off New
York somewhere you'd make a
fortune renting bathing suits
and beach umbrellas.

CAPTAIN O'DELL

Desolate. It's got to be the
loneliest outpost in God's
creation.

MATTHEW

Nonsense. There's all the
people you need. Nearly
forty of them.

CAPTAIN O'DELL

There's no talking to you,
man. I'd be worse off than
poor Mary.

He opens a door of a small cabin. Inside a radio operator
wearing headphones looks up at the visitors.

CAPTAIN O'DELL

Cronkhite!

CRONKHITE
(whipping off
the headset,
standing)
Yes, Captain!

CAPTAIN O'DELL
Say good day to Matthew
Carney.

Cronkhite's eyes shift to Carney, his mouth pops open.

CRONKHITE
Argh...from Marina?

Matthew puts out his hand.

MATTHEW
That's right.

The radio man shakes Matthew's hand briskly, his face a mask of wonder. O'Dell chuckles.

CAPTAIN O'DELL
Ha! I love to see their
faces!

DOCKSIDE HALIFAX - DAY

Close on Mary Lermont's face. She's smiling up at someone off.

MARY
I'm sorry to have been such a
bother.

We PULL BACK to reveal that Mary is being carried on a stretcher to a waiting ambulance on the pier. Flanking her are her husband, Charlie, and Matthew. She's been speaking to the latter.

MATTHEW
You just get well. You're
better already.

We see her face register doubt, briefly. She smiles again.

MARY
Yes. I am.

They arrive at the ambulance. The attendants slide the stretcher inside. It's a difficult moment for Charlie. He thrusts out his hand. Matthew takes it.

CHARLIE
Thanks, Matt. I wish...

MATTHEW
You climb on board.

Charlie nods, turns away and then back.

CHARLIE
You've got the address?

MATTHEW
R.R. #2 St. Joseph's,
Antigonish County.

CHARLIE
Right.

Awkwardly he again reaches for Matthew's hand. A quick shake, then a swift turn away and he climbs into the ambulance. The vehicle pulls away. Matthew watches its progress down the pier.

CAPTAIN O'DELL
(voice over,
shouting)
Matthew!

Matthew looks up to see the captain leaning over the Lord Elgin's rail.

CAPTAIN O'DELL
(continuing)
I'll see you in a month.
That is, unless you see the
light.

Matthew smiles, waves. He reaches down for his suitcase and proceeds along the pier, towards town.

INT. WIRELESS OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON Isabel, typing. She's wearing spectacles, her hair is done up in its characteristic bun. Her fingers beat a rapid tattoo on the keys. Her concentration on the job is complete.

Isabel pulls the completed letter out of the typewriter. In the office Miss Benson is at the switchboard generously showing her lissom legs to two young men in merchant marine outfits who are filling out forms. Judging from the amount of time devoted to the legs rather than to the forms it's going to be slow going. Isabel carries her stack of mail to a door which has a frosted top half on which are emblazoned the words, "H. Hurd, Superintendent, Atlantic Division." En route she takes note of the poor distracted young sailors, gives Miss Benson a look of amused disapproval. Miss Benson responds with a knowing wink. Isabel goes into Mr. Hurd's office.

INT. HURD'S OFFICE - DAY

He's bulky, red haired and wears a pince nez. Also, a carnation in his button hole. As Isabel enters he puts away a report, looks at his pocket watch.

HURD

No sign of Carney?

Isabel deposits the letters for his signature.

ISABEL

No, sir.

HURD

Blast. Can't wait to get a look at him.

ISABEL

May I bring you your tea?

HURD

There's a good girl. This is an occasion, you know. Carney's legendary.

ISABEL

(proceeding to
the door)

Yes, I've heard some of the ops...

HURD

(interrupting)

He was with Marconi in Newfoundland. Went to the Arctic with Perry. Been to sea in square rigged ships. He was on the key at Marina when the Titanic went down.

ISABEL

Yes, I believe I heard...

HURD

Some sort of Norse God of a man. Big, blonde. Rides those wild ponies out there like a Cossack.

(Again he flips
open his pocket
watch)

Well, bother. I thought he be here an hour ago.

ISABEL

I'll get the tea.

And she goes out the door.

EXT. HALIFAX STREET - DAY

Matthew wandering along, dazed by the differences his ten-year absence has brought. Motor cars honking and spewing out their noxious fumes. Women rushing about in short skirts and short hair, their faces painted, giving off exotic scents. And people staring at him. He realizes why when he catches his reflection in a store front window; his blue serge suit is hopelessly out of fashion. Uncomfortable, he walks on, looking for an address.

INT. WIRELESS OFFICE

The two merchant marine men have finished their forms. They are laughing and flirting with Miss Benson. Isabel is back at her typewriter, working. Her desk is situated so her back is to the door which now opens. Matthew Carney, with his suitcase and old fashioned suit, approaches the laughing threesome.

MATTHEW

Excuse me?

MISS BENSON

(out of sorts at
the interrup-
tion)

Can I help you?

MATTHEW

Is Mr. Hurd in?

MISS BENSON
I'm afraid he's rather busy.
Is there something I can do?

Isabel swivels around to look. She jumps to her feet.

MATTHEW
Well, I was told to report
here. My name's...

Isabel steps forward.

ISABEL
Mr. Carney?

Carney turns to her. Isabel is unsettled by the directness of his gaze.

MATTHEW
Yes. From Marina.

ISABEL
Mr. Hurd's expecting you.
Will you come this way. You
can leave your suitcase there
if you'd like.

MATTHEW
Thank you.

He puts down the suitcase and follows Isabel to the door with the frosted top. She holds the door open.

ISABEL
(calling)
Mr. Hurd. It's Mr. Carney.

Carney passes her. Looks into her eyes, gives a small nod.

HURD
(off)
Ah, Carney. The Legendary
Carney. Come in, come in.
Miss Jardine, a fresh pot of
tea, there's a good girl.

Isabel closes the door, stands there, thoughtful. She's startled to hear Miss Benson's voice.

MISS BENSON
So that's old Carney.

Isabel frowns.

ISABEL

He doesn't seem old to me.
His eyes are like a boy's.

Miss Benson digs in her purse for a compact as the two young men follow this exchange.

MISS BENSON

I don't see why Napoleon's
making such a fuss. If
you're going to make tea,
dear, may I have a cup?

Isabel smiles at her. She could never explain why she feels so kindly toward Miss Benson. Her smile widens.

ISABEL

Yes, of course.

EXT. WIRELESS OFFICE - DUSK

The scene quite the same as before. Isabel, Hurd and Miss Benson come out. Isabel locks up. "Good night, Ladies," Good night, Mr. Hurd." Like a Sergeant Major he marches off. Isabel and Miss Benson share a smile.

ISABEL

I'm going to stop off at the
Green Lantern. Join me?

MISS BENSON

Got a date.

ISABEL

Oh?

MISS BENSON

A bit young but very manly.
Not at all shy.

ISABEL

(a friendly
caution)

You'll have your hands full.

A wicked smile from Miss Benson.

MISS BENSON

I don't mind. In fact....
Mmmm.

She makes a face of sexual ecstasy.

ISABEL

Well. I just remembered it's
my art class at seven. I'd
have to eat and run anyway.
Good night.

MISS BENSON

Toddle-do.

They walk off in opposite directions.

EXT. SMALL WATERFRONT HOTEL - DUSK

Matthew Carney comes out, stands on the sidewalk a moment,
uncertain. A busy street. People scurrying. Horns
bleat. He starts walking to his left, stops, goes to his
right.

INT. THE GREEN LANTERN RESTAURANT - DUSK

Isabel is at dinner - the ubiquitous novel propped in
front of her. She looks up for a moment and something
catches her eye.

HER P.O.V.

Through the half-curtained windows we can see Matthew
studying the bill of fare.

ON ISABEL

Watching, hopeful.

HER P.O.V.

Matthew turns away, walks to the curb.

ON ISABEL

Disappointed. But then her expression changes. She
removes her spectacles.

HER P.O.V.

Matthew is coming through the door.

THE SCENE

Matthew looks around. A waitress passes.

WAITRESS
Sit anywhere, love.

Carney is about to pass Isabel's table when he sees her looking at him in recognition. He pauses.

MATTHEW
Ah, you're from the...

ISABEL
Wireless office, yes.

MATTHEW
But you wear glasses.

ISABEL
(gesturing with
them)
I do. For reading, typing.

He settles at a table next to Isabel's.

MATTHEW
It makes a difference.

ISABEL
Oh?

MATTHEW
Yes. You look better without
them.

The remark unsettles Isabel, but Matthew's face betrays nothing other than polite conversation. The waitress comes up to Carney's table.

WAITRESS
Got some nice mackerel in
today. Perch, haddock...

Isabel turns away, puts on her glasses and returns to her book although intensely aware of this new presence.

MATTHEW
The menu says leg of mutton.

WAITRESS
It's very good. Mashed or
French fries?

MATTHEW

I beg your pardon?

Isabel looks over.

ISABEL

It's a new way of fixing
potatoes, Mr. Carney. Try
them. I'm sure you'll...
(she leaves it unsaid)

MATTHEW

Thank you.

He nods to the waitress.

WAITRESS

(pleasantly)

Where've you been, love?

MATTHEW

(grins)

Away.

WAITRESS

(a little slap
at his
shoulder)

I'll say.

She walks off. Matthew, amused, turns to Isabel who is staring at him. Caught, she ducks back into her book.

Matthew turns away, toys with the silverware. Peers at a cheap copy of "The Angelus" hanging on the wall. He turns back to examine Isabel's profile. His gaze shifts to her hands. No rings. Again he surveys the lovely profile. Eventually she becomes aware of being studied. When she looks over at him:

MATTHEW

I don't know your name.

ISABEL

I'm the "J" at the bottom of
Mr. Hurd's letters. My name
is Isabel Jardine.

MATTHEW

Ah.

ISABEL
'Where've you been' indeed.
If she only knew.

MATTHEW
Yes. Civilization has passed
me by.

The waitress brings Carney's plate.

WAITRESS
There you be.

She walks off. Carney looks down.

MATTHEW
So this is a French fry.
Motor cars, short skirts,
women smoking tobacco and
this?

He bites into one. Isabel smiles.

ISABEL
You may want things back the
way they were.

MATTHEW
No. The French fries are an
improvement.

They both laugh.

THE NYMPH AND THE LAMP

The novel is, and the film will be, a study of the complexities of love and sacrifice in a unique setting so isolated and wild that nature in her fury and majesty is the dominant factor in people's lives. Sable Island - 27 miles 20 long, hardly a mile wide, a spit of sand and dune grass where wild ponies roam - is off the coast of Nova Scotia. The time is 1920. The Victorian Age has been kept on hold through World War I, but now North America is violently entering the 20th century. Women smoke! Hemlines are raised above the ankle! In the United States women have just won the right to vote. But the 45 inhabitants of Sable Island in their remoteness, some miles off shore, are still locked in a former time. In their isolation money, clothes, position mean nothing, petty meanness has no place, because "God has too good a chance to look at you."

The story begins with Isabel Jardine, a serious young woman who works as a secretary in the Government Wireless office in Halifax. We establish the drabness and loneliness of Isabel's spinster-like existence. We contrast her to the other secretary in the office, a leggy flirtatious Miss Benson whose social life is booming. We see Isabel in a series of spare, telling vignettes - alone with a book in a Tea Room, alone at the cinema, and at her dismal boarding house where she has the misfortune of earning the enmity of her landlady, Mrs. Pardee, by catching that righteous lady with her "gentleman caller."

Isabel's nightly, precise ablutions are not without the discomfort of "accidental" meetings with a leering Mr. Klaus, a fellow boarder, on her way to or from the bath down the hall.

In her meagerly furnished room, we see the intensity of Isabel's aloneness. She peers out her rain-spattered window. We see what she sees. The trees, buffeted by the wind and beyond the lowering clouds over Halifax Harbor. The lightening bolts, as a gale out of the Atlantic, lashes the city.

On Sable Island that same storm rages. And through the storm we see a distraught, deranged young pregnant woman running, tripping, falling, running again through a frightened herd of wild ponies toward the sea. She takes a skiff from the moorings and, intent on self-destruction, rows out through the turbulent surf. Her husband bangs at the door of the wireless shed, arousing Matt Carney, the man in charge of the island establishment, and his assistant, Greg Skane. The two men launch a boat and eventually rescue the young woman, but not before her boat has tipped over and Matt Carney is forced to dive down time and again until he

can find the drowning woman and drag her to the surface. Carney, we establish, is 46, a blonde, bearded giant who is a legend along the entire coast. He has not left the island in ten years. Part of the legend contends that he swims like a seal, rides the wild ponies like a Cossack, that he's the most fearless boatman alive, and that on stormy days and nights he likes to stride along the beach with his yellow hair blowing in the wind, shouting lines from Byron at the top of his wonderful voice.

But now Matthew Carney comes to Halifax, the capital of mainland Nova Scotia, on leave. His clothes are hopelessly out of fashion, drawing amused glances from passersby. He's astonished at the changes. The motor cars dodging among the horse traffic, blowing horns, stinking of gasoline fumes. Everyone is in a bewildering hurry. The women with painted faces, short hair and skirts up to their knees. He checks in at the government wireless office. He meets Isabel, an attractive, soft-spoken woman who wears her beautiful hair in a bun and peers at him through spectacles. She escorts him to meet her boss. She tries to hide her excitement at meeting this mythic figure.

Carney sees a doctor complaining of headaches and eye fatigue. The news comes with shocking bluntness. Matthew is slowly going blind. How long does he have? Two years at the most. In a five-and-dime we see Matthew digging into a bin and awkwardly trying on spectacles. He comes up with a pair that makes a dramatic improvement in his vision. With a sigh of relief he dismisses the Doctor's prognosis.

In a tea shop he chances upon Isabel again, and each manifests a fascination with the other. Matthew has never been with a woman - the desire has been there but held in check by a natural shyness and the fact that his nomadic and isolated existence has never exposed him to the kind of woman who would arouse both passion and pride. Isabel on her part has fantasized meeting the well-dressed, articulate charmers of her romantic novels. Matthew certainly is not cut to that fashion, but she senses in him an innate animal strength and an intrinsic worth.

Needing friendship, Matthew begins gently pursuing this serious young woman, and Isabel reluctantly allows herself to be courted. With ^{her} he sees his first motion picture show. They attend a band concert in the Public Gardens. She hints that on Sundays she sometimes goes to a beautiful park overlooking the sea, and sure enough the following Sunday Matthew, all innocence, comes upon her there. She's wearing a white dress, a wide brimmed hat, and her lovely hair falls down her back in braids. In the face of her exquisite femininity he finds himself more tongue-tied than ever, but still he manages to invite her to a special dinner. At

first she refuses, but seeing his dismay and his hurt she agrees to meet him.

Preparing for her date, Isabel bathes languidly. After her bath she hurries to her room, but before she can lock the door Klaus pushes his way in. He drunkenly, brutally attempts to rape her. Mrs. Pardee, the landlady, intervenes, and even though she accepts Isabel's explanation of what has gone on, she now wreaks revenge on Isabel for her "superior airs" by interpreting the rape attempt as having been brought on by provocative, unlady-like behavior. She orders Isabel out of the house.

An all-woman orchestra plays for the dinner guests at the Lord Nelson Hotel. Feeling violated and disgusted with her life, Isabel tries desperately to present herself to Matthew as calmly enjoying the meal and his company. But Matthew senses her inner turmoil, her vulnerability. Impulsively he offers marriage, and just as impulsively, almost hysterically, she not only accepts him but insists that they spend that night together.

In the hotel room it is Isabel who is the leader. Her arms go about Matthew in a fashion that is both a surrender and a command. She responds savagely to his first shy and blundering caresses, and both are consumed by a final passion.

The next day Matthew assumes that Isabel would want their lives together to be spent on the mainland, but because she knows of his devotion to his Island and because she's frantic to leave her old life behind, Isabel embraces the idea of sharing an exotic existence with him on Sable. As it turns out, they can't legally be married since the boat back to the Island leaves before the proper proceedings can be completed. But to Isabel it doesn't matter. She puts on the gold band he's bought for her - it's enough that she and Matthew have pledged themselves to each other.

Matthew's dear old friendⁿ Captain O'Dell greets Matthew and his new bride as they board the supply boat to Sable. His happiness for Matthew and his instant infatuation with Isabel is a source of both pleasure and relief to them both.

After her first wanton night of passion with Carney, the boat trip to the Island would seem to be the romantic setting for further erotic encounters. Isabel puts on a new sexy nightgown. But reality comes hard in the form of violent seasickness. Humiliated by her frailty, Isabel throws the nightgown overboard. Arriving at the Island, she is put ashore on a litter and, too weak to walk, she is bounced along over the dunes in a pony cart, all the while experiencing surrealistically the barren, ugly Island and its few inhabitants who mill about in their out-moded

clothes, gawking at her with a mixture of amusement and suspicion.

When they arrive at the dilapidated shack that houses the wireless station, a savage quarrel rages around her head. The cook is quitting, leaving suddenly, and she realizes that she is the cause. But Matthew is not at all daunted by these events. He bends over her, beaming. "My dear, we're home," he says.

ACT TWO

Confronted by the reality of her new existence, Isabel feels she needs time to evaluate her feelings. She asks Matthew to sleep alone until she can come to a new understanding of what has taken place. Matthew is sympathetic - he asks for nothing.

Isabel becomes the cook for Matthew, Skane and 21-year-old Sergeant, a new recruit who is counting the days until he can get out of this hell-hole. Isabel slowly adjusts to the Island - its bleakness, the wild ponies, the barking seals, the migrating birds, the boredom and the superstitions. Although Isabel doesn't believe in ghosts, she eventually feels that off there in the dunes she catches glimpses of a shadowy figure on horseback, watching. Later she realizes the ghost has substance in the form of a wild young girl, Sarah Giswell, who has developed a passionate yearning for Matthew's second-in-command, Skane.

During all this Isabel cooks, sews, carves out a purposeful existence. One night after a party at the home of the McBains, convivial Island residents, where there is laughter and music (Skane is an accomplished pianist - come-all-yas to Chopin), Isabel and Matthew walk home through an Indian summer night. He takes the shoreline because he knows it and can navigate despite decreasing vision. Isabel senses the extent of Matthew's feelings for her and again she asks him to share her bed. In a gesture of trust Isabel allows her radiant hair to be unloosed. Both the literal and symbolic beauty of the event touches them both. For Isabel it is a moment of deep emotional release. They open up to each other completely, their lovemaking tender and deeply satisfying, growing night after night in its intensity and depths of discovery. Isabel feels ripened and fulfilled until the onset of a ferocious winter when Matthew inexplicably begins to withdraw from her emotionally. We see hints (although Isabel does not) of Matthew's increasing blindness. We begin to understand that his pulling away from Isabel is his way of punishing himself for bringing this vulnerable young woman to a desolate place to live with a blind man.

As the winter rages on Isabel, with the help of Skane and young Sergeant, learns Morse Code and how to use the transmitter. She takes the watch and on one occasion handles a ship wreck emergency with dispatch. But she can barely cope with her growing sense of physical, emotional and spiritual isolation as Matthew distances himself from her. It is her fault, she knows, but what has she done?

She sees that the Island has a pressing need - someone to teach the six or seven children whose parents are ill-equipped for the job. She resolves that with the coming of better weather, she'll start a school.

One evening Skane lights a cigarette for Isabel when they're alone in the kitchen. She is suddenly aware that this self-pronounced woman-hater is sexually attracted. And she is surprised at the surfacing of her own sexual needs. The tension between them erupts into passionate love-making one day on a visit to an old house half buried in the dunes.

Through the winter Isabel and Skane meet again and another kind of tension builds as all three wrestle with consciences and guilt.

Spring comes to the Island. Sarah Giswell, desperately in love with Skane and jealous of Isabel, follows them to a trysting place and shoots Isabel. Skane passes the incident off as a hunting accident as Matthew contacts a ship to take Isabel to the hospital. He wants to accompany her, but she begs him not to. Each feels that this will be best for the other. She's punishing herself for her infidelity; he's found a way to save her from a life to which he believes she feels herself condemned. Sadly, she returns the wedding ring.

Matthew transfers Isabel from his rowboat to the ship with great gentleness. We sense their deep caring and feelings of ultimate loss as the ship carries her away and Matthew watches from the dunes until she is long out of sight.

ACT THREE

The Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia is a land of exquisite vistas. It is one year later - the following spring - and the valley is garlanded with apple blossoms. Isabel has recovered. She has a new life, a new job - the secretary/spinster hair-in-a-bun and spectacles look is back. Emotional wounds are also healing with time. But when she sees geese flying or hears a telegraph key, memories, painful, are stirred. Once a week, she sunbathes nude by a deserted old mill.

In counterpoint with our depiction of Isabel's new life, we go back to the Island. Matthew and Skane live in an uneasy peace, even though Matt knows the truth of what has happened, and Skane knows that he knows. But as the days go by, an underlying fury is unleashed. Eventually, over something trivial, a violent fight breaks out. During the struggle, Skane learns of the nature and extent of Matthew's affliction. He leaves the Island to search for Isabel.

While Skane attempts to track Isabel down, we see Matthew courageously and without self-pity keeping the station going. He has taught himself to negotiate the building and its environs by touch. Around his neck on a chain he wears Isabel's wedding ring.

Skane finds Isabel. For him, their affair has not been a dalliance; he loves her and wants to marry her. He promises a comfortable existence in Montreal. He is as handsome and irresistible as ever, and as he woos her, Isabel becomes more persuaded. One argument: that she should not feel guilty about betraying Matthew because he didn't deserve her in the first place - the poor devil should have told Isabel before he married her that he was going blind.

Isabel is staggered by this news. A whole new panorama of knowledge opens up to her. She rejects Skane out of hand and goes into action. She knows now that Carney had given up his own happiness for her sake - a selfless love that Skane, for all his devotion, could never comprehend.

But there are preparations to be made. She phones her old office. Miss Benson is shocked to hear Isabel urgently enquire about the schedule of boats to Sable. Captain O'Dell sails tomorrow and then again in July. When tomorrow? At high tide. What time?! At four p.m. A frenzy of packing, of leave taking. A nail-biting train ride to Halifax. The taxi to the pier. Stop here! Into the bookstore. School books, please. What grades? All grades! At the pier, Captain O'Dell shouts his orders to prepare to sail. He sees a taxi careering along the dock. A blonde haired beauty jumps out and waves at him vigorously. O'Dell beams. "Great God Almighty, it's herself."

What follows is excerpted from the book:

The brown men on the beach stared at the slender figure coming out of the sea with a wet dress clinging to her legs. Carney was at the beachhead by the pile of stores. "Matthew!" she cried. Carney started, threw up his hand to protect his eyes from the water glare. His clipped golden beard and hair gleamed in the sun. When the girl was almost up to him, suddenly the frown dissolved and became a look of wonder, of incredulous delight.

Then she was sobbing against his breast, held in those great bronze arms as if he feared the sea might take her back again.

INT. WIRELESS OFFICE - DAY

Isabel pulls the completed letter out of the typewriter. In the office Miss Benson is at the switchboard generously showing her lissom legs to two young men in merchant marine outfits who are filling out forms. Judging from the amount of time devoted to the legs rather than to the forms it's going to be slow going. Isabel carries her stack of mail to a door which has a frosted top half on which are emblazoned the words, "H. Hurd, Superintendent, Atlantic Division." En route she takes note of the poor distracted young sailors, gives Miss Benson a look of amused disapproval. Miss Benson responds with a knowing wink. Isabel goes into Mr. Hurd's office.

INT. HURD'S OFFICE - DAY

He's bulky, red haired and wears a pince nez. Also, a carnation in his button hole. As Isabel enters he puts away a report, looks at his pocket watch.

HURD
No sign of Carney?

Isabel deposits the letters for his signature.

ISABEL
No, sir.

HURD
Blast. Can't wait to get a
look at him.

ISABEL
May I bring you your tea?

HURD
There's a good girl. This is
an occasion, you know.
Carney's legendary.

ISABEL
(proceeding to
the door)
Yes, I've heard some of the
ops...