

# LODI

Written by

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FADE IN:

A bundle of GRAPES fills our view.

We pull back and see a field stretching out into the horizon.

EXT. VINEYARD -- EVENING

... as the sun begins to set. An SUV drives along the road that cuts this field in half.

EXT. SUV -- EVENING

Looking out the window at the expanse of vines, a young boy of about 13 sits, pensive, somber. This is MARTIN HECHT. Martin, unlike his brother whom we will soon meet, has at least two brain cells to rub together. Unfortunately, he's at the point where he's thinking about rubbing other body parts together.

The moment of reverie is lost when a bump in the road sends him flying. Martin hits his head against the window, scowls, and rubs his head.

MARTIN

Carl!

INT. SUV -- CONTINUOUS

Behind the wheel, CARL HECHT gives new meaning to the expression bumpy ride. Already a strong, burly man at 18, Carl likes to say what he means and mean what he says. With a two-word vocabulary, that's not hard.

CARL

What, you can't take it?

MARTIN

I can take it.

EXT. HECHTS' RESIDENCE -- CONTINUOUS

The SUV pulls to an abrupt stop in front of the mid-sized home of the Hechts, grape farmers to the stars of wines.

Martin comes careening out the passenger door, courtesy of a grinning Carl behind him.

CARL

Wuss camp made you soft?

Martin stands up to collect himself, only to find Carl looming over him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

I would make you take it back, but I'm a bigger person. Or you are.

CARL

Wuss camp.

MARTIN

Science camp.

A push, a shove, and soon Carl has sent Martin rolling back to the ground. Martin continues rolling, however, and soon disappears into the vineyard to escape Carl.

CARL

(yelling)

Martin?

EXT. VINEYARD -- CONTINUOUS

Martin runs through the grape vines, coming across a fork in the road. He takes the one less traveled by.

CARL (O.C.)

Dad wants you on time for dinner so that you can meet the cousin.

MARTIN

Oh, God, not him again.

CARL (O.C.)

It's a distant, distant cousin. No pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey this time. I promise.

Martin wanders deeper into the vineyard, smiling as he leaves Carl further behind. At first, Martin doesn't notice that his shadow is growing longer and longer, and the back of his head is getting brighter and brighter until he turns to see

A BRIGHT LIGHT

Obliterating all other sight. It shines into Martin's wide eyes until he must close them or go blind.

MARTIN

What in the world...?

CARL

works his way through the vines, oblivious to the light behind him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARL  
Maaarrtin? Tinny!

The bright light fades as Carl takes a step forward and promptly tumbles out of frame.

CARL (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
What the hell are you doing down here?

He staggers back to his feet, pulling a disheveled Martin from the vines.

MARTIN  
What was that?

CARL  
You mean that big light that shines into your eyes so bright that you don't know whether to scream or go blind?

MARTIN  
Yeah.

CARL  
Didn't see it.

MARTIN  
Wha- Okay, what about this?

Martin holds up a fist-sized white pod. It appears to be attached to a vine that has fallen onto the ground.

CARL  
So?

Carl throws the offending bit of vegetable on the ground and begins to drag little Martin behind him.

MARTIN  
(struggling)  
But wait... that's not normal!

Carl picks Martin up and carries him off toward the house in the distance, with Martin's protests fading gradually away.

MARTIN (CONT'D)  
What's it doing in our field?

CUT TO:

EXT. HECHTS' HOME -- EVENING

The perfect American home, complete with the SUV in front.

INT. DINING ROOM -- EVENING

A comfortable, country room is host to the Hechts' dining experience today. MARY HECHT, in her 50s, plays the quintessential mother as she prepares the centerpiece of the table, a loving array of grape leaves.

MAN (O.C.)

(on phone)

I need something with extra oomph.

INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Camera travels past Mary to find, 14-year-old BETSY, the cousin from Back East. She appears to be a soft-spoken girl well on her way to becoming a woman. Something about her eyes, however, recalls the old adage: It's always the quiet ones...

BETSY

I can definitely make it worth your while.

MAN (O.C.)

(on phone)

Listen kid, stick to lollipops and ice cream.

A SLAM is heard off-screen. Carl and Martin have returned.

MARY

You boys better get washed up!

CARL (O.C.)

Right away, Mom!

BETSY

Then you can stick to... to old people's food.

Betsy hangs up unhappily.

MARTIN (O.C.)

Let me go!

MARY

Boys!

(to Betsy)

Don't ever have boys if you can at all possibly avoid it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Betsy hides the phone and smiles noncommittally.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BATHROOM

Carl and Martin wash up, although they spend more time taking a swipe at each other.

CARL  
Good to have you back.

MARTIN  
Really?

CARL  
I need help in the 'yard.  
(then, proudly)  
Dad gave me extra responsibility with the chickens.

MARTIN  
You already know how to handle the chickens.

CARL  
Yes, but now I handle the chicken then get the egg. Or was it get the egg then handle the chicken? Anyway, that's what you're for.

MARTIN  
Great. Just what I wanted to do with the rest of my summer.

CARL  
You can't play in camp forever.

MARTIN  
We were learning.

CARL  
Right, like I was "learning" when I drove the car into the lake.

MARTIN  
If I finish a special project by summer's end, I can skip a grade.

CARL  
You're too short for your grade as it is.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Only if you factor in the girls too.  
Hey, there's no height requirement for  
9th grade.

CARL

If you don't help me in the yard, you get  
the cousin.

MARTIN

Why do I get the cousin?

CARL

Dad and I are busy and you know Mom is...  
well, Mom.

MARTIN

Who cares about some dumb relative from  
Timbuktu? Like we don't have a million  
of them here!

CARL

We don't have that many. Oh wait, Sally  
did just have twins. So let's see.  
There's Bob and Sally--

MARTIN

Welcome to Lodi.

CARL

Jim, Little Jim, Jimmy, --

MARTIN

Don't forget Big Pussy and Don Corleone.

Before Carl can answer-- or smack-- back, the door swings  
open to reveal

CARL HECHT, SR.

Carl, Sr., more commonly referred to as Ca for short, is the  
embodiment of the American dream. In his 50's, Ca is a self-  
made man, quick to state his opinion and to make a buck.

CA

Supper. Now.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM

Ca and Carl enter, the latter only slightly more presentable  
than before. Martin slinks toward his chair, head down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CA  
Betsy, Martin. Martin, Betsy.

Betsy slowly turns her bright eyes on Martin. Ever so slightly, she brushes aside a stray hair. Martin forgets to breathe.

BETSY  
Hi.

MARTIN  
Hi. I like your... uh...

A steaming ham materializes in front of Martin.

MARY  
Ham. I hope this tastes okay. It was ready an hour ago, so to warm it up I threw it in the microwave. I'm not sure it will taste that good.

While Betsy sits blithely ignorant opposite him, Martin notices several of her... attributes.

MARY (CONT'D)  
So Betsy is our... our cousin through...

Mary obviously has no idea how Betsy is related to the family. She pleads silently with Ca to help her out.

CA  
Betsy is hoping to move out west some day, so we thought she'd like a taste of the heart of California, right, Betsy?

MARY  
So how does it taste? The ham, I mean, not the heart of California!

ALL EXCEPT MARTIN  
It's great. / Wonderful!

Betsy's smile draws Martin's eyes to her lips.

MARY  
Martin?

Betsy lifts a forkful into her mouth and chews slowly. Martin is gaining another sort of sustenance just by watching.

Carl smacks Martin to make him pay attention.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Hey!

Ca smacks Carl to stop the violence.

CARL

Hey!

CA

Martin, what is so important there that you can't even listen to your mother asking you a question?

MARTIN

Well... it's uhh...

Martin casts about as his eyes fall upon the centerpiece.

THE CENTERPIECE

It's a bunch of grape leaves.

CLOSE ON

Martin's desperate eyes, searching. Suddenly, they focus in on --

THE CENTERPIECE

Which boasts another white pod similar to the one he found in the vineyard. Martin's hand pulls it out of frame.

BACK TO SCENE

Martin displays his find with a look of relief.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Look! I found another one! What is this?

Everyone leans in for a closer look. Ca shrugs.

CARL

How many guesses do we get?

MARTIN

I don't know, Carl, but it is about the size of your missing brain.

CARL

My brain already knows what it is. It's an alien pod.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CA

Oh, did one of those get in there again?

MARY

I don't know, Ca. I think they're kind of pretty, in a weird sort of alien pod way.

MARTIN

Hold it!

Everyone stops and stares at Martin.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

What do you mean "alien pod?"

CA

Well, shit -- I'm sorry Betsy -- what with all those mysterious, unexplained lights that Betsy's been seeing--

MARTIN

I saw those too!

CA

--Carl called them alien pods.

MARTIN

Great, Carl. You never thought to, I don't know, examine the other possibilities?

CARL

It's definitely not little baby corn on the cob.

Carl holds his stomach.

CA

I showed it to my friend Earl. He didn't know anything about it, so we left it as is.

MARTIN

Come on, Dad. Earl? He diagnosed the cat with ADD.

CA

That cat does run around the house an awful lot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Cats run around a lot. That's what they do.

MARY

Tinny may have a point, dear. Earl does get drunk from drinking grape juice.

CA

Fine. But them pods don't hurt the 'yard any. No harm, no foul.

MARTIN

So no one's even the least bit curious or interested in what these things are? Why they're there? What they could be doing to our vineyard?

CA

Nope.

MARY

No, honey.

BETSY

(despondent)

Nope.

MARTIN

I want to know what they are.

MARY

That's nice, dear.

MARTIN

They could be my summer project.

CA

No projects until after harvest.

MARTIN

But harvest isn't over until after school starts.

CA

Which is more important, your family or some project? A boy's gotta have priorities.

Discouraged, Martin glances over at Betsy and realizes she is taking a good look at Martin for the first time. Is that a hint of interest in her eye, a glint of a kindred spirit?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Martin, suddenly self-conscious, becomes very interested in the centerpiece once again.

CA (CONT'D)

Speaking of family, if you want to know more about California, Betsy, I think it's time we show you around Lodi here.

BETSY

(unconvinced)

Sure, that would be great.

CA

Why don't we take you into town later and show you around? That is... show you what the town is like.

CARL

Dad, we never go into town ourselves.

CA

Nonsense. Tinny, didn't we go into town for that bugle of yours?

MARTIN

Yeah, maybe four years ago.

CA

You know Betsy, my boys are a chip off the old block. My namesake Carl here is proud to work in our 'yard, and Martin loves to play jazz just like his dad did at his age.

CARL

What about Abel?

MARTIN

Yeah, where does a Director of Photography fit into it?

BETSY

Director?

CA

Is that what he calls himself these days? Well, I... I like to take photographs of people.

MARY

That you do. You're a fine photographer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Yeah. Including people's heads in a photo is so over-rated.

CA

Martin --

MARTIN

(can I get the hell out of here?)  
May I be excused?

MARY

(sighing)  
Alright. Perhaps you can show Betsy your bugle.

MARTIN

It's a trumpet, and I haven't played it in years.

MARY

Well, whatever it is, go show it to her!

MARTIN

Okay. Betsy, would you like to uh...  
Want to come ummm...

BETSY

Sure.

INT. MARTIN'S BEDROOM

A bit of a mess, but not embarrassingly so. Martin rummages through a closet, throwing out a number of trophies.

MARTIN

Excuse the mess. So, um, what do you think about the "alien pods?"

BETSY

(re: trophies)  
What are those?

MARTIN

Oh, nothing. They're just old trophies.

BETSY

They don't look that old... what are they for?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Um. They're for math, but it's no big deal. It's not like they're important or anything.

He tosses one aside. Betsy catches it and places it carefully on Martin's desk. Martin watches her, then turns back to discover his trumpet beneath the rubble of his room.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Well, here it is.

The formerly shining trumpet displays a fine coat of dust and a suspicious bit of grime near the horn opening.

BETSY

It really does look like you haven't played that in years.

They laugh. Martin nervously laughs a bit too long.

MARTIN

(Nervous, babbling)

Uh... yeah. It has seen better days, hasn't it? I used to keep it pretty by rubbing it softly... umm... well, I would put my fingers in this gel and run my fingers up and down its body... umm.

(Now thoroughly embarrassed)

Yeah, well, it's pretty much gone to pot now.

As Martin talks, Betsy wanders around the room, a faint smile on her lips. She picks up a glossy flyer from a pile filled with glossy photos, magazines, and leaflets.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Press kits.

BETSY

What?

MARTIN

These are all press kits for movies. I'm really into movies. That promo there is for a film my other brother, Abel, worked on. He works in Hollywood.

(to himself)

Obviously.

BETSY

Abel? He's the director?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Abel's a cinematographer. Well, that's what he does on student films. On big budget films like that one, he is a Production Assistant. A very important job. But what he really wants to do is direct.

BETSY

Oh, I love Hollywood.

Betsy moves toward Martin.

MARTIN

If you're interested, I also had a bunch of books on making special effects somewhere...

BETSY

No!

(suddenly very seductive)

I want to act. I love the premieres, the gossip, the life! I want to get down and dirty with the stars and know everything about everybody important. I want to be famous-- to cause a scene, to make myself known!

Betsy, breathless due to her enthusiasm, is almost unbearably close to Martin.

BETSY (CONT'D)

How do you feel about... Hollywood?

MARTIN

(seduced)

Uhh...It's wonderful!

MARY (O.C.)

Martin?

Mary is knocking on the door. The spell is broken. Betsy returns to her little world, leafing through the stack of press kits.

MARY (CONT'D)

Martin? Your father wants to take Betsy into town now. You better get ready if you want to go too.

MARTIN

(voice squeaky)

Okay!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN(CONT'D)

(clearing his throat)  
Okay Mom!  
(to Betsy)  
My parents always insist that I dress up  
to go into town. So if you want to  
umm...

BETSY  
I'll wait downstairs.

Hold on Betsy's mischievous smile as we

CUT TO:

INT. THE FOYER -- EVENING

Betsy, coat on, is on the phone yet again as she waits for  
the rest of the family at the foot of the stairs.

MAN (O.C.)  
(on phone)  
We're going to wait and see if the others  
pick it up.

BETSY  
If you want in, you better not wait.

Mary and Ca walk into the foyer in the midst of a  
"discussion."

MARY  
I don't have a whole lot else to do with  
Carl working full-time now.

CA  
Well that's all well and good, Mary, but,  
shit, that still leaves the question as  
to how --  
(seeing Betsy)  
Oh, dammit-- oh, darn it! Excuse me  
Betsy.

Carl, hearing the commotion, enters the foyer.

CARL  
What's going on?

CA  
We were having "the" argument.

MARTIN (O.C.)  
What argument is that?

All eyes turn to

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

as he descends the staircase toward his family. He certainly cleans up well; dressed in a fine black shirt and nice slacks, he almost looks suave, but definitely cute. The significance of this transformation is not lost on Betsy, who hangs up the phone and stands to greet him.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Did you get in a fight with the Nortons again?

CA

Hell no. Oh, excuse me, Betsy.

MARY

Your father doesn't --

CA

(lying)

I mean yes, that's exactly what we were fighting about.

CARL

No it isn't.

Ca smacks Carl upside the head.

CA

Looks like you all are ready to head into town. Carl, stay home.

CARL

But Dad, I don't want to sit around all night watching the field!

CA

Well, that's just too damn bad. Pardon me, Betsy.

BETSY

(to Martin)

You look really nice.

MARTIN

Thanks, so do you. I mean, you did before, since that was what you were wearing before. So you look the same. Okay.

CA

Alright folks in the car!

EXT. THE HECHTS' HOUSE -- EVENING

Carl, looking pissed, is sitting on a stump with a rifle in his hand. Mary keeps running in and out of the house, no doubt having forgotten her purse, or to turn the oven off, or whatever women forget that takes them so darn long to leave the house.

MARTIN

(to Betsy)

So have you seen our stunning vineyard?

BETSY

(sarcastic)

Oh yeah! Anything's better than rows upon rows of wheat fields, where I grew up. God I just had to get out of there. I hate hickville.

MARTIN

Oh man, did you come to the wrong place!

BETSY

My parents know I want to move to California, so they say, go to California to visit old Carl, your step-cousin four times removed! I figure anything that gets me closer to Hollywood is good, but...

MARTIN

Yeah.. well, I know people in Hollywood! Or Abel does. That's pretty good, right? I mean, when you go there I can tell them to talk to you!

BETSY

Really?

MARTIN

Really! Here... as a token of my promise, please accept this humble grapevine!

Martin bows elaborately, plucks a branch from a handy grapevine, and places it behind her ear. He pushes another stray hair out of her face while he's at it. Betsy smiles sweetly.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Complete with alien pod.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLOSE ON

The white pod as it becomes

EXT. DOWNTOWN LODI -- NIGHT

The moon over Lodi. What would normally appear to be a small-time commercial area in a suburban town passes as the piece de resistance of the town called Lodi.

The Hechts' car pulls up and parks. Betsy alights and is the first to look up and down the street. Not a car in sight. The downtown is empty.

CA

Here we are. Downtown Lodi. We certainly have some fine stores. You'll like this one, Betsy.

MARTIN

The fish and tackle shop?

CA

Great for lake fishing.

BETSY

(sweetly)

Thanks for thinking of me.

MARY

Look here, there's even an employment office.

CA

Mary.

Ca shoots Mary a disapproving look as they all start trudging up to the dimly lit stores. Window shopping in hell.

MARY

Here's something you might look nice in, Martin.

Martin peers into the dark recesses of a closed store.

MARTIN

That's a dress, Mom.

MARY

Oh, is it? Then maybe it would look good on Betsy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

(to Betsy)

I'm really sorry about this.

BETSY

This is good for me. An actress needs to understand misery.

MARTIN

Dad! Could we go into Sacramento or something?

CA

Sacramento! Good lord! That's a good hour's drive from here! Here, why don't you go down to that ice cream store down there? That looks open. Here's some money.

(Shaking his head)

The kid wants to go to Sacramento!

EXT. ICE-CREAM PARLOR

Will wonders never cease? It's actually open. Martin hands Betsy a whopper of an ice cream cone. He gets his own and they wander over to the empty curb.

MARTIN

I am so sorry about all this.

BETSY

Don't be sorry! I love double fudge mocha.

MARTIN

Do you know anyone in town? A friend... a boy...friend-

(quickly)

or a girl?

BETSY

No. Not a soul.

MARTIN

Good, good. Well, bad... to have no one to talk to. But, who were you talking to earlier?

BETSY

Earlier? No one.

MARTIN

Weren't you on the phone?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETSY

Oh, that. Wrong number. I like...  
talking to wrong numbers. Nice night,  
isn't it?

MARTIN

Yeah. No more bright lights in the sky.

Martin examines the alien pod.

BETSY

Do you really want to be messing with  
that? I mean, who knows what's in it.

He finds a seam. Inside is a bouquet of red.

MARTIN

Hey, cool.

BETSY

Thanks. I mean, thanks for giving it to  
me and being here.

Betsy pushes the pod away from Martin's sharp eyes and  
commands his entire attention.

BETSY (CONT'D)

So what can I do for you?

MARTIN

Umm... what do you mean?

BETSY

You're gonna introduce me to your  
brother. I wanna do something for you.

MARTIN

Oh well... you don't have to...

BETSY

Look, you scratch my back, I'll whip out  
the scratching post and save you the  
trouble. What about that project of  
yours? What's that for?

MARTIN

If I finish a science project over the  
summer, I can, you know, kind of... skip  
a grade. You probably think that's  
nerdy.

BETSY

And I would think that because...?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

It is nerdy, for one thing.

BETSY

There is that.

MARTIN

Plus, my brother says --

BETSY

Your brother. Come on. You can't let anyone tell you you're nerdy or stupid, or that you won't make it, or that you can't act your way out of a paper bag -- oh, sorry. That's me. Ignore your brother.

MARTIN

What about my dad? You heard him. No project until after school starts and my chances have already gone down the drain.

BETSY

Look at it this way. Is this what you really want to do? Skip a grade?

MARTIN

Yeah, I do.

Betsy warms to her subject, and Martin, as she continues her rant.

BETSY

Then you have to want it so much you'd let nothing stand in your way, not your dad, not your family, not your idiot drama teacher-- Oh, sorry. That's me again. But you, you gotta wiggle out from under the trappings of mediocrity. Now tell me. What would you be willing to do to get what you want?

Enraptured, Martin watches Betsy, whose passion has once again brought her close to him. He gazes into her eyes and answers another question.

MARTIN

Anything.

MAN (O.C.)

That's not good enough. I need something with extra oomph.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Martin and Betsy look up to see a lone MAN in a suit, clicking off his cell phone and drinking his milkshake like straight vodka. He sits down beside the forgotten white pod.

MAN (CONT'D)

What have you got there? Looks like a pomegranate.

MARTIN

Pretty strange, don't you think?

MAN

Strange? As in interesting? Have you got the wrong town. Let me tell you, I've been stuck here for two whole days and there's nothing going on. Nothing! I tell you --

The man realizes he is shaking Martin, who, he'd be quick to say, is none too pleased.

MARTIN

If this weren't Lodi, I'd be scared.

MAN

I'm sorry. I work for the news. TV news.

Betsy noticeable perks up at the sound of "TV."

BETSY

Really?

MAN

Okay, worked for the news. I'm used to things going on.

BETSY

We got something with oomph. How about alien pods?

MAN

Alien pods? I love alien pods! What are alien pods?

MARTIN

That's what my brother calls these white pods. They're all over our vineyard, but they don't seem to be anything anyone's ever seen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETSY

We've even seen strange lights out there.  
Definitely alien.

MAN

Fluff!

MARTIN

Excuse me?

The Man GRABS the alien pod from Martin and reaches for his cell phone.

MAN

It's not much, but it could be fluff.  
Everyone needs fluff!

MARTIN

Give that back!

MAN

This may be my ticket out of here.

MARTIN

It's my vine!

The man stands up to a considerable height. He looks down on the suddenly small twosome impassively.

MAN

Prove it.

BETSY

(to Martin)

Don't fight over it. You know there are  
more vines where that came from.

MARTIN

You're right!

MAN

(on phone)

Get me Bob. It's Charlie.

Martin starts to run back toward his parents. Betsy pulls a pen out of her purse and grabs a napkin. She scribbles down something on it and pushes it over to the man.

BETSY

Here's the address of where you can find  
out more about the pods!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN

Thanks, kid. I owe you. Hey, don't I know you?

BETSY

Let's just say I've given up lollipops and I'm heading straight for ice cream.

MAN

(realization)

You're the girl who kept calling..

(on phone)

Charlie Jackson. You know, the guy you just fired. I got something for you.

MARTIN

Betsy, come on!

Betsy smiles almost wickedly to herself as she dashes off after Martin.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN-- NEAR THE HECHTS' CAR

Mary hovers while Ca inspects the fish and tackle offerings.

CA

No wife of mine is going to be working anywhere but the home. And the farm. And the --

MARY

Ice cream parlor?

CA

The ice cream parlor... No, wait.

MARY

I could bring home free ice cream for the family.

CA

Hmmm...

MARY

If I have to spend one more entire day baking a ham I am going to snap. The chickens... they make so much noise, the cluck, cluck, cluck the whole day...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

To prove her point, Mary clucks like a chicken a bit. We have the sinking suspicion that Mary snapped a long, long time ago.

MARTIN

(re: Mary)

I'm going to pretend --  
(out of breath)  
Dad! Let's go home!

CA

Will you look at this, Mary? First he wants to go to Sacramento, now he wants to go home! What has gotten into you, Tinny?

MARTIN

The alien pods --

CA

Forget about the stupid alien pods.

MARTIN

But --

MARY

We are having "the" argument, Tinny.  
Your father doesn't want me to work.

MARTIN

They're fluff!

Mary and Ca look at each other, not sure whether to be offended or not.

CA

What, boy? First, calm yourself down and then talk to me with some sense!

MARTIN

BUT-!

CA

Now what did I just say?

MARTIN

It's imp--

CA

(a disapproving vocal  
utterance)

Uh!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Martin frustratedly tries to calm down. Betsy arrives right behind him, positively glowing with excitement.

BETSY

Our alien pods are going to get us on the evening news.

MARTIN

Yeah, they're fluff!

MARY

Oh dear. Am I the only one who doesn't understand?

MARTIN

Come on, it's fluff! Fluff is... what is fluff?

BETSY

It's what they stick in newscasts so the entire program won't be about minorities being shafted by the system.

MARTIN

We better get back home before the television crews get there!

CUT TO:

EXT. HECHTS' HOUSE -- SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

Silence. Carl picks at his teeth while gazing out into the blackness that is the vineyard at night.

We begin to see way more of Carl's face than anyone ever really wanted as a light plays across it, growing brighter and brighter. Carl looks straight into

A BRIGHT LIGHT

Obliterating all other sight. A chorus of strange, unidentifiable NOISES assault his ears.

CARL

What the hell?

Out of the light and din emerges a lone figure, bearing a rod before it.

REPORTER #1

Excuse me sir, is this where the mutant grape vines are?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The first of several TV vans has already pulled up in front of the house, a convoy of vans behind it. A REPORTER holds a mic before Carl as he beckons to his CAMERAMAN, and a TECHIE starts to set up another bright light.

CARL

Uhh.. what?

REPORTER #1

I'm going to need something better than that. All week, we've been getting anonymous tips from someone named Betsy about mutant grape vines.

Suddenly, a boom pole comes out from above him and smacks Carl in the face. Carl, caught completely off-guard, flinches and takes a step back -- into a vine. He falls over backwards, as the gun falls from his hand.

CUT TO:

INT. THE HECHTS' CAR

The report of a GUNSHOT catches everyone's attention.

MARY

What was that?

The family is approaching their home, where they see a number of vans and virtually their whole field lit up.

BETSY

They're here!

MARTIN

Oh my God! Is that the Channel 7 van from Stockton? This is big!

Betsy excitedly turns on the reading light, pulls out a compact, and begins to examine her appearance in its mirror.

BETSY

They all came. I thought this was never going to happen.

CA

Okay. As soon as we get there, we go straight for the house. No talking. We'll figure out what we're going to do when we get inside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Oh boy...

CUT TO:

EXT. HECHTS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

CAMERA PANS across a van with a bullet hole in it, then over to a now-religious reporter holding up a binder with a distinct hole in the middle, and finally over to a man near Carl who gingerly moves the shotgun out of harm's way.

Carl looks thoroughly bewildered as several REPORTERS aggressively ask him questions while waving branches in his face. We see the man from the ice cream store, feeling self-important, ordering around a reporter.

MAN

I tell you, my contact said they were all over this vineyard. Now I want experts in here to get to the bottom of this --

The Man's voice is drowned out by the sudden craziness caused by the arrival of the Hechts' car. Although marauded by a gaggle of REPORTERS on their way to the house, all make it inside without too much trouble. Except for Betsy.

MAN (CONT'D)

There she is! What's your name, kid?

Lights and cameras surround Betsy.

BETSY

My name is Betsy Fauntleroy, and it was I who actually brought the first alien pod to the light of day. I carried it with me. Right here.

She indicates where Martin placed the branch with a seductive flip of her hair. The Reporters, entranced, close in.

CUT TO:

INT. HECHTS' FOYER

The Hechts press their faces to the window panes beside the door, their rear ends facing the camera.

MARY

Oh no! They got Betsy!

CA

Where's Carl?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Here he comes!

CA

Where?

Carl swings open the door, hitting Ca in the rear in the process. He quickly closes the door behind him.

CARL

What the hell is going on out there? One minute I'm watching the field, next thing I know it's a war.

MARTIN

It's because of the alien pods.

CARL

I figured as much. Those reporters spent 5 minutes running through the field till they found one of these.

Carl displays one of the pods. Ca gathers the family into a circle, preparing for the speech.

CA

This is a family, and we're a team.

MARY

What about Betsy?

CA

I don't know where she fits in. But this is the team. So, Mary, what should we do?

MARY

I suppose we find out what those pods really are, so those reporters will go away.

CA

(hadn't thought of it)  
Right, Mary.

MARTIN

I can do that.

CA

Carl, you and I will have to have a conference to figure this out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Excuse me, Dad, but I can do that.

CA

Do what?

MARTIN

I can figure out what they are.

CA

That's very considerate of you to offer, son, but this project would need someone...

MARTIN

With a scientific mind? Someone who just spent the last month in science camp? Someone, say, like me?

CA

Well, sure, but that's not really your thing, Tinny. You're just like me--

MARTIN

I am not just like you, Dad. I have ten trophies upstairs proclaiming how unlike you I am.

MARY

Martin!

MARTIN

I'm good at math and science, and I am going to skip a grade. Now who wants me to figure out what these pods are?

Mary raises her hand, and Carl follows. Eventually Ca raises his hand, too.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Too bad. I'm not going to do it.

CA

Now what do you think --

MARTIN

Unless. You promise me I'll have time to work on my project this summer.

CARL

Instead of working with me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

I can still work with you, I just need enough time for my project.

CA

You really want to work on some project to skip a grade?

MARTIN

Yes.

CA

Then I'll support you in doing it, whether you figure out these pods or not. You're just like your dad, after all. Stubborn. Now, go do... whatever you do so we can get rid of these guys lowering my property value.

Martin snatches Carl's pod and runs upstairs.

CARL

But I wanted one.

MARY

There's plenty more out there. It's our vineyard, after all.

CARL

Wait a minute. I bet you aren't the only one who wants one, and I bet my father's wine case we could make a pretty penny off of supplying those wants. Carl, to the study!

Ca stomps off purposefully towards the study, Carl in tow, leaving Mary alone at the door.

MARY

But what about poor cousin Betsy?

CUT TO:

INT. MARTIN'S ROOM

Martin runs in and shoves a stack of press kits on the floor to clear a space.

He takes a deep breath. He adjusts the trophy that Betsy placed on his desk. He smiles.

He looks at the pod, picks it up, feels it. He takes a wiff of it and grimaces.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Wax?

An idea pops to mind. He jumps out of the chair and plows through a stack of books here, then a stack of books there, searching for something in particular.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Hey, Mom?

MARY (O.C.)

They're trampling my roses!

MARTIN

Have you seen my books on special effects?

MARY (O.C.)

Try Betsy's bedroom. It's the guest room.

Martin takes the pod as he moves into--

INT. BETSY'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

A cacophony of colors assaults Martin as he enters the room. Posters of famous actors and actresses line every inch of the walls. A far cry from Martin's room, however, since the only clutter in the room consists of a pile of books and maps in the corner.

Martin picks up a map of

CALIFORNIA

with the route between Lodi and Los Angeles highlighted in red.

MARTIN

looks through several books on special effects. Finally, he finds an especially earmarked version of

THE MAKING OF LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

Martin flips through the book until he happens upon the page that depicts how the alien plants in "Little Shop" were made.

Martin drops the white pod beside the picture of the green plant of the movie. Different color, same look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Betsy.

CUT TO:

EXT. HECHTS' FRONT PORCH

Ca opens the door magnificently and processes out with Mary and Carl. Mary manages to lure Betsy to stand beside her.

CA

I'm ready to make a statement.

REPORTER #1

What is the nature of these plants on your property, Mr. Hecht?

CA

They are obviously due to some sort of biological change, perhaps brought on by the Ozone layer.

CARL

They might even be alien pods!

Carl surreptitiously smacks Carl, who yelps.

CA

These rare and obviously unique plants are certainly a sight to see. I invite everyone watching this program to come on down to my farm and see for themselves. There's plenty of wine in my stores. Visitors will also have the opportunity to take home one of the Hechts' alien pods for the ever so reasonable price of five dollars!

MARY

I will also be taking orders by phone.  
(to Ca)  
See, I told you I'd get a job, with or without you.

CA

I definitely like 'with.'

ANGLE ON

Martin as he comes out the front door and listens to his father. He grabs Betsy and pulls her aside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARTIN

Talk about getting out from under the trappings of mediocrity.

BETSY

What?

MARTIN

You're behind the alien pods.

BETSY

Not me.

MARTIN

All this only started when you arrived.

Martin displays the pod.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

And it's not alien. It's made of the same kind of special effects wax used on Little Shop of Horrors. The whole process is outlined in a book in your room.

BETSY

I had some time -- make that a lot of time -- to think this summer. I can't be somebody if I'm in nowheresville. So I wanted to generate some excitement, give myself a reason to stay in California. I can't go back home to the same humdrum existence, where my whole life is planned for me and none of it is what I want. You understand that, don't you?

(flirtatiously)

You wouldn't want me to get into any trouble would you? I mean, we're having so much fun, and no one's getting hurt. You wouldn't tell, would you?

MARTIN

(uncomfortable)

Well, uh...

BETSY

I like you Martin. You're smart. If I got found out I would probably have to go home, and they would never let me come back to visit you. You wouldn't want that now, would you? You won't tell?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Her lips are now incredibly close to Martin's. Martin mumbles something unintelligible, as Betsy plants a big one on his lips.

BETSY (CONT'D)  
(triumphant)  
I'll take that as a no.

CUT TO:

NEWS PROGRAM OF THE HECHT FAMILY

CA (ON TV)  
And this is my son Martin and our lovely cousin Betsy. Come on down and meet us all!

Martin and Betsy come in-frame, with Betsy smiling brightly and Martin looking completely blown away.

REPORTER #1  
And there you have it concerning the strange tale of the mutant grape vines. This is Channel 7 News in Lodi, California.

The camera pulls back to reveal --

INT. HECHT'S LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Betsy and Martin are watching the television. Betsy presses the button on the remote she's holding and jumps up excitedly.

BETSY  
Got it! Woohoo! All three TV stations and the local cable access!

Martin smiles dreamily at her. Poor sod is in love.

MARTIN  
You certainly pulled it off. Had me fooled, even.

BETSY  
And my friends said chemistry would never come in handy.

MARTIN  
Hey, I never did ask you how you managed those bright lights at night?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BETSY

Beats me. I didn't do that.

MARTIN

You... didn't?

BETSY

Nope.

MARTIN

You don't know how that happened? And you're not curious?

BETSY

Come on, Martin. Story's over...

Betsy smiles mischievously and turns around to look out the window. A whole sea of people mills around and in the vineyard. Ca and Mary are excitedly taking orders while Carl pours the wine for a few obviously drunken folks. Betsy flips her hair with a smile.

BETSY (CONT'D)

Let's mingle with our public!

THE END