

**PHIL'S WAKE**

a short film by  
Gabe Spangler

Gabe Spangler  
gabespangler@gmail.com  
414-807-5035

FADE IN:

**INT./EXT. (MULTIPLE LOCATIONS) - MORNING**

MONTAGE START

Early fall. The sun crests a sleepy horizon. A large body of water sits calmly. Seagulls flap their way through a hazy city.

The subdued monotony of morning traffic. A littered roadside. A lone pedestrian walks purposefully along a sidewalk.

Pale light hits a row of aged and unkempt gravestones, one of many in a large cemetery. A hearse rolls slowly past. Several cars follow. A backhoe sits a safe distance from a fresh, rectangular hole in the ground.

A feeble residential neighborhood. Sun-dappled tree canopies. A woman walks a small dog.

A somewhat dilapidated house sits quietly on a small lot. The autumn leaves, just beginning to fall, gather on its lawn.

PHIL, a man of 65 years, sits at a small desk in his bedroom, writing in a notebook. He's tired, sleep deprived, wearing pajamas and slippers. Lines of age define his face. His wife, AUDREY, is still asleep in a nearby bed.

MONTAGE END

Phil's pen moves across the page as he scribbles, his free hand to his forehead, bracing his head as he commits his thoughts to paper.

PHIL (V.O.)

Mr. Gordowski's visitation today.  
What's his first name? Shit. Allen.  
Yes, Allen. Can't forget. His wife's  
a talker. She'd tell everyone if I'd  
forgotten her husband's name. But  
what does it matter now?

Phil glares down at a crisp, white letter addressed to him. The return address is from the IRS, bearing its official logo. He quickly opens a drawer and places the letter under some other papers, then continues writing.

PHIL (V.O.)

Mrs. Gordowski asked me if she'd get to see her husband in the afterlife. Why does everyone assume because I'm a mortician that I have some secret spiritual knowledge of the afterlife? How the hell should I know what happens? I told her yes, you'll get to see him. But I said in the hereafter instead of the afterlife. Hereafter sounds better. It implies a place close by, in a time not far from the present. Hereafter. Here. After. Sounds like a better place. A place with no hassles. No pain. No worries. Things are complete. Finished. Odd that only the dead receive such satisfaction.

Phil pauses to stare out the window.

AUDREY (O.S.)

Were you up half the night again?

Phil twists around in his chair. Audrey is lying on her side, staring at him.

PHIL

No. Well...

AUDREY

What're you writing about this time?

PHIL

The usual. Thoughts. Stuff.

AUDREY

Why not share them with me instead of writing them down?

PHIL

They're just my little rants, quibbles. They'd bore you to death.

AUDREY

Isn't that what husbands and wives are supposed to do? – bore each other to death?

Phil averts his gaze as he ponders what Audrey just said, only looking back because he hears the bed sheets rustling, but Audrey is already halfway across the room.

AUDREY

I'll get the coffee started.

Phil twists further in his chair to watch her go, his attention distracted by a dark suit hanging neatly from the closet door – a grim reminder of his profession.

**INT. FUNERAL HOME – DAY**

The interior of a small, independent funeral home is dimly lit. Warm wall sconces and candles set a somber tone.

The visitation room is occupied by approximately seven or eight patrons, all elderly. MRS. GORDOWSKI, an elderly woman, sits in the front row, facing a display table with an urn atop it. A bouquet of flowers accompanies the remains, along with an easel holding an enlarged photograph of an elderly man, a bright smile across his face. The text underneath the photo reads: "Allen Richard Gordowski, March 14, 1943 – October 2, 2023."

Mrs. Gordowski gazes mournfully upon the picture of her deceased husband, then at the urn containing his ashes. She dabs under her eyes with a tissue.

CUT TO:

The visitors are slowly filing out, each slowly passing through the small, front lobby where Phil and his assistant, JONATHAN, see them off one at a time. Jonathan is a slender man of about 35 years, his features odd and his appearance slightly unkempt.

Another couple finishes putting on their coats before shuffling out. Phil raises his hand in a subtle goodbye gesture.

PHIL

Thank you.

The couple smiles and waves back before passing through the front door. The last of the visitors are saying goodbye to Mrs. Gordowski in the next room, giving Phil and Jonathan a few moments alone. Jonathan looks over at Phil and smirks, parting his lips and inhaling to say something.

PHIL

Whatever you're going to say...  
Please. Just don't.

After a moment of silence, Jonathan speaks anyway.

JONATHAN

You know what they say about the  
dead?

Phil closes his eyes and sighs.

PHIL

No, Jonathan ... what do they say?

Jonathan smiles again as he readies himself for the punchline.

PHIL

Just get it over with.

JONATHAN

Not everyone can be cremated. You  
have to URN it.

Phil turns to Jonathan with a stale expression.

PHIL

I told you, jokes like that are inappropriate. If even one person heard you...

JONATHAN

*(interrupting)*

I'm sorry. Really. I should be ASH-amed.

Phil looks away in disgust.

JONATHAN

You get it? ASH-amed?

PHIL

Yeah, I get it.

Phil peers into the other room, noticing that the last visitors are about to exit.

PHIL

You know, you might want to start looking for something else. I'm thinking of retiring.

Phil walks away, leaving Jonathan in stunned bewilderment.

JONATHAN (O.S.)

Wait. Retiring? When?

Phil ignores Jonathan and continues into the visitation room, smiling at the last visitors as he passes them. He finally comes to Mrs. Gordowski.

MRS. GORDOWSKI

The presentation was lovely, Phil. Thank you so much.

PHIL

You're very welcome. Will you be staying longer? Shall we arrange for

transportation of the remains to the cemetery for you? Or will you still be transporting them yourself?

MRS. GORDOWSKI  
I'll be taking them myself. But might I spend a little time in your chapel?

PHIL  
Of course. Take all the time you-

MRS. GORDOWSKI  
(*interrupting*)  
And can I ask a favor? It's a bit odd.

PHIL  
Anything.

CUT TO:

Mrs. Gordowski stands in front of the display table, smiling warmly as she holds the urn containing her husband's remains. Her husband's large photo display is directly beside her on the easel.

Phil stands about five feet opposite, holding Mrs. Gordowski's phone as he prepares to take a photo.

PHIL  
Ready? One, two...

Phil hits the appropriate button and the phone makes a shutter sound. Mrs. Gordowski is extremely pleased as she looks at the photo after getting her phone back. She begins to tear up again as she hugs her phone and the urn close to her chest.

MRS. GORDOWSKI  
Oh, my Allen! My dear Allen!

Phil is astonished at the outburst of emotion.

**INT. BEDROOM – NIGHT**

Phil and Audrey lie in bed. Soft blue light fills the room. Audrey lies on her side, asleep, facing away from Phil, who lies on his back, still awake.

Phil stares at the ceiling, then over to the window, looking out into the dark night, something obviously very troubling on his mind. He turns to his sleeping wife.

PHIL (V.O.)

Audrey. Wife. How will she remember me?

Phil finally shifts his covers back and sits at the edge of the bed, his bare feet flat on the floor. He looks over at his desk, a lone pen upon its otherwise barren work top.

**INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY – NIGHT**

Phil sneaks out of his bedroom, closing the door carefully behind him. He's still wearing pajamas, but he's put on a pair of sneakers. As he turns to walk away from the door he nearly bumps into his daughter, MELISSA, who's carrying a cup of hot tea back to her bedroom.

MELISSA

*(protecting the cup)*

Dad, what tha fuck?

Melissa, a woman of about 35 years, is wearing sweatpants and a brightly-colored hoodie. She's evidently not someone who cares about her appearance, and her manner of speech indicates someone who is intensely introverted, perhaps a bit on the spectrum.

Phil places his index finger over his lips.

PHIL

Shhhhhhh. Your mother's asleep.

Melissa looks down at the sneakers her father has put on.



MELISSA  
Going out again?

PHIL  
Just need to clear my head.

Phil and his daughter stare at each other uncomfortably for a few moments.

PHIL  
I love you, Melissa. You know that, right?

MELISSA  
Yeah, I know.

Melissa walks away before Phil can react.

PHIL (V.O.)  
Will she mourn me? Will she be sad at all?

Phil hears Melissa's bedroom door close and walks away, descending the stairs. A few seconds later Melissa opens her bedroom door and peeks back into the hallway.

MELISSA  
Dad...?

The hallway is empty. Melissa is confused, not sure what to think about what her father just said, but her phone chimes in her hoodie pocket, distracting her. She reaches in and makes a few presses upon the screen, bringing up the text function. There's a message from Jonathan that reads: "Still awake?"

**INT. PHIL'S CAR – NIGHT/MORNING**

Phil drives around aimlessly in the early AM hours. The sleepy and lonely streets blend one into another, Phil's anxiety ever-present as he gazes out at the dimly-lit buildings.

CUT TO:

A harsh, gray tone creeps over the city as dawn arrives.

Phil drives into a secluded and industrial part of town, where many buildings are abandoned or for-sale, where urban decay lends even more ugliness to the colorless dawn.

While slowly passing an abandoned building, Phil notices a HOMELESS MAN lying not far from the roadside, no coat or blanket to keep him warm. Thinking it odd, he pulls over to the curb and parks.

**EXT. ROADSIDE – MORNING**

Phil closes his trunk lid, an old blanket in-hand. He approaches the homeless man, but as he gets closer it's apparent that the man is not sleeping, but dead.

A mortician by profession, Phil is not shocked, but instead stoops down and tilts his head to get a better look at the man. Not so dissimilar in appearance to himself in age and body type, the man seems to have simply given up, having laid back and expired with an almost serene look of resignation.

PHIL (V.O.)

Who will remember him? Will I be the only one?

Phil drops the blanket, then reaches down and grabs the man's wrists, pulling him up to a sitting position, grunting from the effort.

PHIL

Up you go. C'mon.

Phil stoops even lower and places the man's arms over his shoulders, wrapping his own arms around the man's upper torso in preparation to lift him.

CUT TO:

The homeless man sits lifelessly in the driver's seat of Phil's car as Phil lifts the man's legs into the car and closes the driver's door.

Phil retrieves a one-gallon gas can from the trunk and douses the man's face and upper body. He then pours gas all over the passenger seats.

Phil checks his pockets, realizing he has no way to ignite the gasoline.

PHIL

Shit!

Phil stares at the homeless man, who is dripping with gasoline, as if a dead man could help.

CUT TO:

Phil fishes a book of matches from the glove box and slams it shut. He comes back around to the open driver's window.

PHIL

Sorry, my friend.

Phil strikes two matches at once, which ignite with a hiss and a flare. He throws the lit matches through the driver window and the gasoline ignites with a powerful whoosh.

Phil walks away as a growing inferno overtakes his car's interior, its flames licking out of the open driver's window. Black smoke rises into the sky.

**INT. PHIL'S HOUSE [MULTIPLE LOCATIONS] – DAY**

A soft morning glow bleeds through the curtains. Audrey lies in bed, still asleep, the space next to her empty.

Audrey rolls onto her back and wakes, soon realizing that Phil is not in bed with her. Her attention is immediately drawn to the desk, where Phil has left out one of his notebooks – something he never does.

Curious, Audrey rises and approaches the desk. She picks up the notebook and starts reading. With each word her interest turns to concern.

MONTAGE START

Audrey exits her bedroom in a panic. She encounters Melissa in the hallway. She clutches her daughter frantically with Phil's notebook in one hand, shaking it as she begins yelling something. Melissa very clearly mouths the words: "What tha fuck!?"

Audrey opens the garage door, but it's empty, Phil's car gone.

Audrey hurries into the living room, reuniting with Melissa. Melissa raises her hands and shakes her head, signaling that she has not found her father either.

Audrey, phone in hand, sits down on the couch and begins dialing a number. Melissa sinks into a chair opposite, pulling her knees up to her chest. She has no words as her mother continues on the phone, although it's apparent there's something on her mind, perhaps the odd encounter with her father in the bedroom hallway the night before.

MONTAGE END

**EXT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY**

An empty parking lot is soon invaded by a speeding station wagon. It comes to a sudden halt, and Audrey quickly emerges from the driver's door, slamming the door after her as she hurries toward the funeral home. Melissa emerges from the passenger side, trying to keep up.

MELISSA

Mom, what tha fuuuuck!? Wait!

Adjacent to the parking lot, across the street, a late-model rental car is parked along the curb. Phil is sitting in the driver's seat, hunched low behind the steering wheel. He studies Melissa closely as she shuffles to catch up to Audrey.

Phil starts the car.

HOMELESS MAN (O.S.)  
This ain't right, Phil.

Phil looks over in utter terror, setting his eyes upon the homeless man that he'd set on fire earlier that morning.

HOMELESS MAN  
And it ain't right what you did to me.

ALLEN (O.S.)  
He's right, Phil.

Phil, still in shock, looks in the rearview mirror to discover ALLEN GORDOWSKI sitting in the rear seat, wearing the same suit from his wake photo, although his expression is deadpan rather than happy.

ALLEN  
She's worried. She's in pain. Anyone can see that. Isn't that enough, old pal?

Phil snaps his attention back to the front passenger seat, but finds it empty. Turning to the back seat, he finds it empty as well. Both men have disappeared.

Phil, emotionally troubled, puts the car in gear and drives away.

**INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY**

Jonathan is vacuuming in the front hallway of the funeral home, his back to the door. The noise prevents him from hearing Audrey as she approaches from behind and taps him on the back of the shoulder. Jonathan screams out very effeminately, clutching at his chest in fear. After catching his breath and composing himself, he switches off the vacuum.

JONATHAN

Good god, you scared the hell out of me!

AUDREY

Have you seen Phil?

Jonathan is confused.

AUDREY

Phil? Have you seen him? Has he been in today?

JONATHAN

No, I haven't seen him. We don't have anything scheduled. I was just doing a little cleaning. I haven't seen Phil since yesterday afternoon.

Audrey storms off. Melissa enters finally, frantic as she locks eyes with Jonathan.

JONATHAN

*(quietly to Melissa)*

What's going on?

Melissa shakes her head and whispers the words "I don't know" as Jonathan takes her hand in his, letting it slip away as he follows Audrey into the main visitation room, careful to not let Audrey notice the gesture of affection towards Melissa.

Audrey has her hands on her hips as she looks about the room, unsure of what she's doing. Melissa follows Jonathan into the room and stops just behind him.

JONATHAN

Audrey? What's wrong?

AUDREY

Phil's missing.

Audrey turns around slowly, finally looking directly at her daughter.

AUDREY  
(to Melissa directly)  
He may be dead.

MELISSA  
What tha fuck?! Dad's dead?!

AUDREY  
Maybe. I don't know.

Audrey slowly sits down in one of the chairs of the rear row.

AUDREY  
Are you two seeing each other?

Melissa squeals as she buries her face in Jonathan's shoulder. Jonathan, flustered, has no answer.

**INT. PHIL'S HOUSE – DAY**

Phil sneaks into his own house through the back door.

CUT TO:

Phil enters his bedroom and retrieves a new notepad from the desk drawer and a pen from the desktop, accidentally leaving the drawer ajar.

CUT TO:

Phil enters the basement. He turns on an overhead light and sits down in an old recliner. He opens his notepad and begins to write.

**INT./EXT. MULTIPLE LOCATIONS – DAY**

MONTAGE START

The day ebbs onward. The lake undulates and shimmers in the afternoon sun.

Audrey still sits in the funeral home, thinking quietly as Melissa cries into Jonathan's chest. Jonathan is on his phone, presumably trying to reach Phil. He hangs up, shakes his head at Audrey and shrugs.

Phil writes in his journal, the emotion starting to show in his expression.

The sun starts to set, casting its soft, amber light on the city like a golden blanket. Traffic moves lethargically, the cars like metal coffins in the sinking dusk.

MONTAGE END

**INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT**

Audrey and Melissa sit on the couch as DETECTIVE NANCY KERN sits in a chair opposite. She's a woman in her mid 50s, smartly dressed, holding a small notepad in-hand.

DETECTIVE KERN

Here's where we stand. We found Phil's car on the side of the road in the old warehouse district. It was destroyed in a fire that we believe was not accidental. We think someone started it deliberately. There was a man in the driver's seat who'd perished in the fire.

Audrey sits forward, sick with fear. Melissa grabs a pillow and buries her face in it, moaning oddly, but quickly lowers the pillow to speak.

MELISSA

Jesus fuckin' god! He's dead, isn't he?

AUDREY

Melissa, please!

DETECTIVE KERN

Well, hold on.



Audrey and Melissa turn their attention back to the detective.

DETECTIVE KERN

(to Audrey specifically)

We're not sure yet, but we have reason to believe that the man who burned to death is not your husband.

Audrey is confused.

MELISSA

Jesus fuck, it's not dad?

Audrey glares at her daughter, who buries her head back in the pillow.

DETECTIVE KERN

The body is male, and it is your husband's car. But there are a few things that don't add up. We found no wallet. No cell phone, either. And the man was not wearing sneakers like you reported. He was wearing leather boots.

AUDREY

Leather boots? Phil doesn't even own a pair of leather boots. Are you saying my husband's still alive?

DETECTIVE KERN

I shouldn't say that just yet. We should wait for positive identification of the remains first.

Audrey nods, her hope deflated a bit.

DETECTIVE KERN

But there's more. Your husband's cell phone was in use after the car fire. Just for about an hour, then no further cell tower pings at all.

AUDREY

He used his phone?

DETECTIVE KERN

Or someone else did. It's a possibility that someone took it. Or he could have given it to someone. Has there been any financial activity from Phil's credit or debit cards today?

AUDREY

We have separate accounts. I wouldn't even know how to check. I don't know his account password.

DETECTIVE KERN

If you give me permission, I can check with your bank on that. But if his wallet and phone were stolen, it might not be an indication that your husband is still alive. I must reiterate, the fire victim very well could be Phil. You have to face that possibility. Forensic identification will tell us soon enough. We're working on that now. It shouldn't be long.

Audrey nods again.

CUT TO:

Phil stands at the basement stairwell, eavesdropping on the conversation, in obvious emotional turmoil as he hears his wife sobbing in the nearby living room.

**INT. BASEMENT — NIGHT**

Phil sneaks back into the storage room where he's been hiding. He sits back down, flips open a new page in his journal and begins to write.

PHIL (V.O.)

Dear Audrey...

Allen Gordowski stands behind Phil, looking over his shoulder as he writes. Further behind him stands the homeless man, partially obscured in shadow.

FLASHBACK TO THAT MORNING:

Phil douses himself in gasoline, not the homeless man. He throws the gas can to the ground and sits in the driver's seat of his car.

Phil readies a match, then strikes it. It flares to life. He holds it close to his face as he examines the brilliant flame.

**INT. LIVING ROOM & BEDROOM – MORNING**

Sunlight creeps into the house. A stale silence is interrupted by a few birds chirping outside.

Melissa is curled up on the couch, a blanket over her as she sleeps. Audrey, asleep in a sitting position next to her, finally rouses and peers around the dim interior of the house. She eventually rises.

CUT TO:

Audrey enters her bedroom, her eyes drifting from the window to the unmade bed. She finally notices that one of the desk drawers is ajar. Her eyes widen as she realizes the implication.

Audrey hears the front door downstairs and quickly exits the bedroom to go investigate.

**INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY**

Audrey enters the living room to find Detective Kern standing with Melissa.

AUDREY

What is it?

DETECTIVE KERN  
I have more information.

AUDREY  
Have you found Phil?

DETECTIVE KERN  
No. But we strongly believe he's  
still alive. Why don't we sit down.

Melissa and Audrey once again sit on the couch as Detective Kern seats herself in a chair opposite.

DETECTIVE KERN  
First of all, the burned body we  
found in your husband's car was not  
Phil. We know that now with one  
hundred percent certainty.

A cry of relief escapes Audrey as she leans forward and puts her head in her hands. Melissa grabs a pillow and clutches it tightly in her lap, almost whimpering.

DETECTIVE KERN  
There's more. Phil used his debit  
card yesterday morning to rent a car.  
Word is out to patrol units, but we  
haven't found him or the car yet.  
Unfortunately, the rental company he  
chose does not use GPS trackers on  
their vehicles.

AUDREY  
So who was the man? – the man who  
died in Phil's car?

DETECTIVE KERN  
His name is David Leatham, a  
well-known homeless man in that part  
of town. We aren't sure yet why he  
was in that fire ... whether he did  
it to himself or if someone else did

it to him. That's yet to be determined.

MELISSA

(to Audrey)

Mom, where's dad?

Audrey has no answer for her daughter, instead turning to Detective Kern. Detective Kern is flummoxed.

**INT. BASEMENT – DAY**

Phil sits reposed in the recliner, his notebook clutched over his chest in front of him. Warm morning light floods in through the small, transom-style windows.

Allen Gordowski and the homeless man stand behind the chair, looking down at Phil. Phil stares upward in thought, seemingly oblivious to their presence.

PHIL

Is this a dream? Am I dead?

ALLEN

It's time.

Phil's head snaps forward to find Allen standing directly in front of him. There is a bright light behind him where the stairs lead up, out of the basement.

The homeless man, behind Allen now, walks away, stopping briefly at the brightly lit stairwell before disappearing into the white glow.

Allen waves Phil toward the bright stairwell.

ALLEN

C'mon. It's time.

**INT. LIVING ROOM – DAY**

MONTAGE START

Phil walks toward the glowing basement stairs.

Phil emerges from the basement and walks toward the living room, notebook in-hand.

Phil enters the living room, surprising his wife, daughter and Detective Kern. Audrey stands immediately, then Detective Kern after her, both facing Phil in shock.

Melissa rises last, terrified for a few seconds before running away in her typical, awkward way.

Audrey finally hurries to Phil and hugs him intensely. Phil reciprocates, his notebook still in-hand as he wraps his arms around his wife.

Melissa stands at the living room doorway, peeking in from behind the doorway, a few tears mixed in with her giddiness.

MONTAGE END

Phil and Audrey end their embrace.

DETECTIVE KERN

Mr. Suksdorf? Mr. Phil Suksdorf?

PHIL

Yes, that's me.

DETECTIVE KERN

I'm glad you're home safe. Your family's been worried sick trying to find you.

AUDREY

Phil honey, where'd you go?

PHIL

Nowhere really.

AUDREY

But you were gone so long? Why didn't you tell me what you were doing?

Detective Kern turns to Phil, particularly interested in his response. Phil pauses for a few moments.

PHIL  
(to Audrey)  
Everything's in here. Read it, and then we'll talk.

Phil hands the notebook to his wife. She accepts it, looking down at it in disbelief.

AUDREY  
You never let me read these.

PHIL  
From now on I'm an open book.

Phil smiles at Audrey as she smiles up at him.

DETECTIVE KERN  
I appreciate what's going on, but there is the matter of your abandoned car ... and the man who burned to death inside it. Are you aware of that, Mr. Suksdorf? – that a man died in your car?

PHIL  
I am, yes.

DETECTIVE KERN  
Right. Okay. So I'm going to have to insist you come down to the station to make a formal statement. We have a lot of questions that need answering.

PHIL  
Okay.

MELISSA  
Fuckin' shit, are you arresting him?

DETECTIVE KERN

No, not under arrest right now. And not currently being charged with a crime. But that could change.

Phil opens his mouth to speak, but Detective Kern, sympathetic to his situation, holds her hand up to silence him.

DETECTIVE KERN

For your own benefit, I must remind you that you have the right to remain silent. And you should probably use that right until you've spoken with a lawyer. Do you have one that can meet you at the station?

PHIL

*(to Audrey)*

Call Neil Schiro and tell him what's happening. He hasn't handled criminal law in decades, but I think he'll do it for me. And here, please return the rental car. It's parked just around the corner.

Phil hands Audrey the keys to the rental car.

DETECTIVE KERN

Come with me. I'll drive.

Detective Kern ushers Phil toward the front door. Audrey looks down at the notebook, then the car keys. Melissa finally comes a bit closer, concerned that her father is being taken away.

Phil and Detective Kern stop at the open front door. Phil turns around to face his family. Behind them stands Allen Gordowski, smiling.

ALLEN

No, this isn't a dream. And you're not dead, Phil. You're alive!



Phil is enthralled with Allen's declaration. Audrey and Melissa turn to the empty spot where Phil is looking, confused that he's staring at nothing.

Melissa runs up and hugs her father. They embrace for a long time. Phil is overcome with emotion.

DETECTIVE KERN

C'mon. Time to go.

Detective Kern steps out the front door first, turning to make sure Phil is behind her.

PHIL

I love you both very much.

Phil finally steps out into the blinding sunlight. His wife and daughter remain inside, happy and relieved.

**INT. BASEMENT & LIVING ROOM – DAY/NIGHT**

MONTAGE START

Audrey slowly seats herself on the living room couch, sunlight streaming over her shoulder as she raises Phil's notebook into view. She opens it and begins to read.

Phil, in the basement the previous night, writes emotionally in the notebook.

CUT BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN AUDREY AS SHE READS AND PHIL AS HE WRITES:

PHIL (V.O.)

Dear Audrey. I don't know how things got to this point, and I've hated putting you through this.

I don't know why I'm always unhappy. Why I can't sleep. Why I pour words into a notebook instead of sharing them with you. That's wrong. And I know it now. And while I still don't have the courage to totally share my

feelings with you, I thought if you could read this, that might at least be a start.

Our funeral business is done. We're going to have to shut down and sell the property before the IRS takes everything. But I'm not upset. I've always hated that place. My father built it, and I was only doing it for him. Now it's over, and I'm glad.

I'm sorry for being so irritable and depressed all the time. You've been very understanding and thoughtful through it all. Please know that I've noticed, and I appreciate it. You and Melissa are the only bright, shining spots in my life. I love you both more than I can say.

Audrey turns the page as she continues reading.

I was going to end it. I can admit that now. But something stopped me. Two reasons, actually. You and Melissa. I couldn't leave either of you. So I lit that man on fire to see if anyone would care if I died.

The man was already dead, of course. Lifeless on the roadside when I found him. I would never hurt anyone. I hope you know that.

I'm sorry for my selfish behavior. I regret it now. I couldn't stop myself. But I'll never do anything like that again. I'll get help. I'll do whatever you need me to. Things will get better. I promise.

I want to start over, if you can  
forgive me, and if you'll still have  
me. I love you always.

Your Phil.

Audrey closes the notebook and looks up, tears running down  
her face.

FADE OUT: