

Crash

Based on the novel by **J.G. Ballard**

Screenplay by **David Cronenberg**

Produced by **David Cronenberg**

Directed by **David Cronenberg**

Cast List:

James Spader James Ballard

Holly Hunter Dr. Helen Remington

Elias Koteas Vaughan

Deborah Unger Catherine Ballard

Rosanna Arquette Gabrielle

Peter MacNeil Seagrave

EXT. AIRFIELD – DAY

We are moving through a small airfield full of parked light planes. There are no people around. We move through the cluster of planes towards a hangar on the edge of the field.

INT. HANGAR – DAY

We are still moving through light planes, but now we are inside the hangar. Some of the planes have their engine covers open, parts strewn around. Others are partially covered with tarps or have sections missing. There is even a sleek executive jet parked in one corner.

As we float past the planes we notice a woman leaning against the wing of a Piper Cub, her chest against the wings trailing edge, her arms spread out to each side, as though flying herself. As we get closer we see that her jacket is pulled open to expose one of her breasts, which rests on the metal of the wing.

CLOSEUP – *Breast on metal.*

CLOSEUP – *Hard nipple and rivets.*

CLOSEUP – WOMAN – CATHERINE

Early thirties, dark, short hair, stylish executive clothes. Her eyes are wide open but unfocussed. A hand grips her shoulder from behind. We follow the hand down behind Catherine and discover a man crouched behind her, kissing her back.

Catherine is standing on a low mechanic's platform and her skirt has been raised and hooked over the wing's flap. She wears

garters and stockings but no panties.

The man, handsome, cruel-looking, rises up behind her, enters her, kisses her neck. Catherine half closes her eyes. She rotates her pelvis gently against his thrusting.

EXT. FILM STUDIO – DAY

We are floating towards the modest gates of a small film studio – the sign above the gates says "CineTerra" in Art Deco script

INT. FILM STUDIO – DAY

We now float through a film set on which a commercial for a min-van is being shot. Lights are being reset, the van polished for a beauty tracking shot.

We pick up an Assistant Director as he strides through the action, looking for someone.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

I'm looking for James. Has anybody seen James Ballard? You know who I mean? The producer of this epic?

A Dolly Grip with very close-cropped hair looks up from a section of dolly track which he is adjusting with small wooden wedges.

GRIP

I think I saw him in the camera department.

INT. FILM STUDIO – CAMERA ROOM – DAY

We float towards the door marked "Camera Dept." Inside the room we find a young woman, a Camera Assistant, wearing a T-shirt and heavy woolen socks and work boots and nothing else. She is draped across a table strewn with camera parts, stomach down, head resting on a black, crackle-finish camera magazine, her legs spread.

Camera parts and cases, tripods, changing bags everywhere.

A man is behind her, kissing the backs of her thighs.

We hear the sound of the Assistant Director approaching with deliberately heavy footsteps. The Assistant Director pauses just outside the door.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (O.S.)

James? James, are you in there? Could we please get your stamp of approval on our little tracking shot?

The man, James, looks up from the woman's thighs.

JAMES

Of course. Be there in a minute.

The Camera Girl twists around onto her back and throws her legs over James's shoulders.

CAMERA GIRL

It'll take more than a minute.

EXT. BALLARD APT. BALCONY – NIGHT

Catherine stands at the railing of the balcony of the Ballard apartment, which overlooks a busy expressway near the airport. Her arms are spread wide as they were in the airplane hangar, only now, it is James, her husband, standing, who is behind her. They are both half-naked, and he is inside her.

Their sex-making is disconnected, passionless, as though it would disappear if they noticed it. An urgent, uninterrupted flow of cars streams below them.

JAMES

Where were you?

CATHERINE

In the private aircraft hangar. Anybody could have walked in.

JAMES

Did you come?

CATHERINE

No. What about your camera girl? Did she come?

JAMES

We were interrupted. I had to go back to the set...

Catherine turns towards James and pulls open her blouse, exposing her left breast. She pulls James's face down and presses her nipple against his cheek.

CATHERINE

Poor darling.

(pause)

What can I do about Karen? How can I arrange to have her seduce me? She desperately needs a conquest.

JAMES

I've been thinking about that, about you and Karen.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE – LINGERIE – DAY

James lingers amongst racks of nightdresses outside a change cubicle. Monitored by a bored, seen-it-all middle-aged saleslady, James glances now and then through the curtains to watch Karen help Catherine try on underwear.

Karen, Catherine's secretary, a moody, unsmiling girl, is methodically involved in the soft technology of Catherine's breasts and the brassieres designed to show them off.

Karen touches Catherine with peculiar caresses, tapping her lightly with the tips of her fingers, first upon the shoulders along the pink grooves left by her underwear, then across her back, where the metal clasps of her brassiere have left a medallion of impressed skin, and finally to the elastic-patterned grooves beneath Catherine's breasts themselves.

Catherine stands through this in a trance-like state, gabbling to herself in a low voice, as the tip of Karen's right forefinger surreptitiously touches her nipple.

INT. UNDERGROUND PARKING LOT – DAY

James sits in the car beside his wife. She watches as his fingers move across the control panel, switching on the ignition, the direction indicator, selecting the drive lever, fastening his seat belt.

As the car moves off, James puts his free hand between Catherine's thighs.

INT. FILM STUDIO – JAMES'S OFFICE – NIGHT

James studies storyboards for an automotive battery commercial which are spread out over a broad architects' table. He makes notes on each panel of the boards with a sharp pencil.

As we move around him, we reveal his secretary Renata sitting and watching him intently from the vantage point of her corner chair, her hand poised to write down anything he might say in a small, leather-bound notebook.

From her point of view, we watch James from behind as he works. Every movement he makes – bending over to correct a panel, manipulating the pencil, touching the sharp point of the pencil to his lip, straightening up again – provokes a different tiny response from Renata, so attuned to him is she.

But he says nothing to her, and she remains poised and vigilant.

EXT. FILM STUDIO PARKING LOT – NIGHT

James settles into his car – a boring American four-door sedan – running through his control-panel routine like a pilot before driving off. This time his routine ends with the switching on of the windshield wipers because it has begun to rain heavily.

EXT. RAIN-SWEPT ROAD – NIGHT

Driving home from the studio, James hits a deep puddle at 60 miles an hour and suddenly finds himself heading into the oncoming lane. The car hits the central reservation with a thump and the offside tire explodes and spins off its rim.

INT. JAMES'S CAR – NIGHT

In the car, James fights desperately for control.

EXT. RAIN-SWEPT ROAD – NIGHT

The car hurtles across the reservation and, bouncing and slamming down on its suspension, heads up the high-speed exit ramp. Three sedans are barreling down the ramp right towards James.

INT. JAMES'S CAR – NIGHT

James pumps the brakes and saws away inexpertly at the wheel. He manages to avoid the first two cars, but the third he strikes head-on.

At the moment of impact, the man in the passenger seat of the other car is propelled like a Ha stress from the barrel of a circus cannon through his own windshield and then partially through the windshield of James's car.

The propelled man's blood spatters James's face and chest, his body coming to rest half inside James's car, its head dangling down into the dark recess of the passenger footwell.

James's chest hits the steering wheel, his knees crush into the instrument panel, his forehead hits the upper windshield frame. As these things happen, James is vaguely conscious of the same things happening to the woman driving the other car, as though she is a bizarre mirror image.

Slammed back into their seats after the initial impact, James and the woman look at each other through the shattered windshields, neither able to move. The woman, handsome and intelligent-looking, supported by her seat belt, stares at James in a curiously formal way, as if unsure what has brought them together.

Out of the corner of his eye, James can see the hand of the dead passenger, now his passenger, caught on the dashboard and lying palm upwards only a few inches away from him. James squints as he tries to focus on a huge blood-blister, pumped up by the man's dying circulation, which has a distinct triton shape.

James shifts his focus to the hood ornament of his car, twisted up into the cold mercury-vapor glare of the roadway lights but still intact. It is the same triton imprinted on the palm of the dead passenger, the car manufacturer's logo.

EXT. RAINSWEPT ROAD – NIGHT

Traffic is beginning to back up behind the accident and a growing circle of spectators, some of them pedestrians, some drivers who have left their own cars, begins to form.

The more adventurous members of the crowd paw hesitantly at the seized doors of the two cars, afraid to really yank them open in case the violence of that act might trigger some further unnamed catastrophe

INT. JAMES' S CAR – NIGHT

Numbly watching James as she fumbles to undo her seatbelt, the woman in the other crashed car inadvertently jerks open her blouse and exposes her breast to James, its inner curve marked by a dark, strap-like bruise made by her seatbelt.

In the strange, desperate privacy of this moment, the breast's erect nipple seems somehow, impossibly, a deliberate provocation.

INT. HOSPITAL – DAY

We are close on a face having makeup applied to it. It is a very pale, blotchy face, and the makeup is smoothing it, making it appear healthy and even slightly tanned. There are also some crude black stitches in this face, and we realize that it is James's face, and that it is Catherine who is applying the makeup with a very serious demeanor.

James's legs are up in a sling, drainage tubes coming from both knees. Wounds on his chest: broken skin around the lower edge of the sternum, where the horn boss had been driven upwards by the collapsing engine compartment; a semicircular bruise, a marbled rainbow running from one nipple to the other; stitches in the laceration across the scalp, a second hairline an inch below the original. Unshaven face and fretting hands.

Catherine is dressed more for a smart lunch with an airline executive than to visit her husband in hospital.

CATHERINE

There, that's better.

JAMES

Thank you.

James examines himself in her hand-mirror, staring at his pale, mannequin-like face, trying to read its lines.

Catherine looks around her as she puts her makeup away. There are twenty-three other beds in the briskly efficient new ward, all of them empty.

CATHERINE

Not a lot of action here.

JAMES

They consider this to be the airport hospital. This ward is reserved for air-crash victims. The beds are kept waiting.

CATHERINE

If I groundloop during my flying lesson on Saturday you might wake up and find me next to you.

JAMES

I'll listen for you buzzing over.

Catherine crosses her legs and tries to light a cigarette with a heavy, mechanically complex lighter with which she is obviously unfamiliar.

JAMES

(referring to the lighter)

Is that a gift from Wendel? It has an aeronautical feel to it.

CATHERINE

Yes. From Wendel. To celebrate, the license approval for our air-charter firm. I forgot to

tell you.

Catherine finally succeeds in lighting the cigarette. She takes a deep drag. James props himself up on his elbow, breathing with transparent pain.

JAMES

That's going well, then.

CATHERINE

Well, yes.

(pause)

You're getting out of bed tomorrow. They want you to walk.

James gestures for the cigarette. Catherine puts the warm tip, stained with pink lipstick, into his mouth.

CATHERINE

The other man, the dead man, his wife is a doctor – Dr. Helen Remington. She's here, somewhere. As a patient, of course. Maybe you'll find her in the hallways tomorrow on your walk.

JAMES

And her husband? What was he?

CATHERINE

He was a chemical engineer with a food company.

A dark-haired student female Nurse comes into the ward. She wags a finger at James.

STUDENT NURSE

No smoking, please.

As Catherine retrieves the cigarette from James and stubs it out in a glass, the nurse examines Catherine's glamorous figure, her expensive suit, her jewelry.

STUDENT NURSE

(to Catherine)

Are you this gentleman's wife? Mrs. Ballard?

CATHERINE

Yes.

STUDENT NURSE

You can stay for this, then.

The nurse pulls the bedclothes back and digs the urine bottle from between his legs. She checks the level and, satisfied, drops it back, flips over the sheets again.

Both Catherine and James watch her closely, her sly thighs under her gingham, the movement of her breasts as she bends to check the chart at the foot of the bed, the pulse in her throat. The nurse catches them watching her, smiles enigmatically back at them, and leaves.

Catherine pulls out a manila folder from her bag and slips a set of storyboards for a commercial out of it.

CATHERINE

Aida telephoned to say how sorry she was, but could you look at the storyboards again, she's made a number of changes.

James waves the folder away. Catherine examines his body, aloofly curious.

JAMES

Where's the car?

CATHERINE

Outside in the visitors, car park.

JAMES

What!? They brought the car here?

CATHERINE

My car, not yours. Yours is a complete wreck. The police dragged it to the pound behind the station.

JAMES

Have you seen it?

CATHERINE

The sergeant asked me to identify it. He didn't believe you'd gotten out alive.

JAMES

It's about time.

CATHERINE

It is?

JAMES

After being bombarded endlessly by road-safety propaganda, it's almost a relief to have found myself in-an actual accident.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAYS – NIGHT

James is taking his walk through the hallways, trundling his IV stand along with him like an awkward pet.

A white-coated doctor – Vaughan – steps into the ward from a room at the end of the hall. He is bare-cheated under his white coat. His strong hands carry a briefcase filled with photographs which he pauses to shuffle through as though checking a map.

As James approaches this new visitor, Vaughan's pock-marked jaws chomp on a piece of gum, creating the Impression that he might be hawking obscene pictures around the wards, pornographic X-ray plates and blacklisted urinalyses. He sports copious scar tissue around his forehead and mouth, rumpled and puckered as though residues from some terrifying act of violence.

Vaughan looks James up and down, taking in every detail of his injuries with evident interest.

VAUGHN

James Ballard?

JAMES

Yes?

VAUGHAN

Crash victim?

JAMES

Yes.

Vaughan shuffles his photos again. James manages to make out the shapes of a few crushed and distorted vehicles caught in lurid, flash-lit news-style. Vaughan flips through them distractedly, then with an unexpected, almost flirtatious flourish, slides them back into his briefcase and tucks it under his arm.

VAUGHAN

We'll deal with these later.

He flashes James an enigmatic smile, and then walks off down the hallway.

As James turns to continue on, a young woman comes out of the same room that Vaughan did and moves towards him using a dark wooden walking stick. She presses her face into her raised shoulder, possibly to hide the bruise marking her right cheekbone.

The woman is Dr. Helen Remington, whose husband died in her car crash with James.

James stops as she approaches. He speaks without thinking.

JAMES

Dr. Remington...?

The woman looks up at James as she continues her approach. She does not falter, but changes her grip on the cane as if preparing to thrash him across the face with it. She moves her head in a peculiar gesture of the neck, deliberately forcing her injury on him.

She pauses when she reaches the doorway, waiting for him to step out of her way. James looks down on the scar tissue on her face, a seam left by an invisible zip three inches long, running from the corner of her right eye to the apex of her mouth.

James is acutely aware of her strong body beneath her mauve bathrobe, her rib-cage partly shielded by a sheath of white plaster that runs from one shoulder to the opposite armpit like a classical Hollywood ball-gown.

James steps aside. Deciding to ignore him, Helen Remington walks stiffly along the communication corridor. parading her anger and her wound.

INT. HOSPITAL – DAY

Catherine washes James's body as he lies in his hospital bed, gently exploring his bruises and his wounds.

CATHERINE

Both front wheels and the engine were driven back into the driver's section, bowing the floor. Blood still marked the hood, streamers of black lace running towards the windshield wiper gutters.

Catherine re-soaps her hand from the bar in the wet saucer on the bed tray, a cigarette in her left hand. James strokes her stockinged thigh as she continues her monologue.

CATHERINE

Minute flecks were spattered across the seat and steering wheel. The instrument panel was buckled inwards, cracking the clock and the speedometer dials. The cabin was

deformed, and there was dust and glass and plastic flakes everywhere inside. The carpeting was damp and stank of blood and other body and machine fluids.

JAMES

You should have gone to the funeral.

CATHERINE

I wish I had. They bury the dead so quickly – they should leave them lying around for months.

JAMES

What about his wife? The woman doctor? Have you visited her yet?

CATHERINE

No, I couldn't. I feel too close to her.

EXT. ROAD HOME FROM HOSPITAL – DAY

Catherine and James travel home in the back seat of a taxi. Leaning against the rear window of the taxi, James finds himself flinching with excitement towards the approaching traffic streams, which now seem threatening and super-real.

Catherine watches him, aware that he is over-exhilarated, herself very excited by his new sensitivity to the traffic.

INT. BALLARD APT. – DAY

James sits in a reclining chair on the balcony of his apartment, looking down through the anodized balcony rails at the neighborhood ten stories below.

Cars fill the suburban streets below, choking the parking lots of the supermarkets, ramped on to the pavements. Two minor accidents have caused a massive tail-back along the flyover which crosses the entrance tunnel to the airport. In one of them, a white laundry van has bumped into the back of a sedan filled with wedding guests.

James gazes raptly down at this immense motion sculpture, this incomprehensible pinball machine.

Catherine comes onto the balcony, kneels down beside him, begins to toy lovingly with the scars on his knees.

CATHERINE

Renata tells me you're going to rent a car.

JAMES

I can't sit on this balcony forever. I'm beginning to feel like a potted plant.

CATHERINE

How can you drive? James... your legs. You can Barely walk.

JAMES

Is the traffic heavier now? There seem to be three times as many cars as there were before the accident.

CATHERINE

I've never really noticed. Is Renata going with you?

JAMES

I thought she might come along. Handling a car again might be more tiring than I imagine.

CATHERINE

I'm amazed that she'll let you drive her.

JAMES

You're not envious?

CATHERINE

Maybe I am a little.

(rising)

James, I've got to leave for the office. Are you going to be all right?

INT. BALLARD APT. GARAGE – DAY

James stands at the entrance to his apartment building's underground garage. Only about a dozen cars stand there, most of them have been driven to work. James walks amongst them, absorbing the details of the personal things left in the cars – a silk scarf lies on a rear window sill, a pair of sunglasses hooked over a carpeted transmission hump.

James stops in front of the empty bay marked "Ballard". He stares at the familiar pattern of oil-stains marking the cement.

INT. RENTED CAR – DAY

A steering wheel, an instrument panel, a windshield. Renata's hips gripped by the fabric of the passenger seat, her legs stowed out of sight beneath her red plastic raincoat. James drives Renata in a rented car, his first drive since the accident.

EXT. FIRST CRASH SITE – DAY

The rented car slows and stops on the concrete verge a few yards from the spot where James' crash took place.

INT. RENTED CAR – DAY

RENATA

Are we allowed to park here?

JAMES

No.

RENATA

I'm sure the police would make an exception in your case.

James unbuttons Renata's raincoat and places his hand on her thigh. She lets him kiss her throat, holding his shoulder reassuringly like an affectionate governess.

JAMES

There's still a patch of blood there on the road. Did you see it?

RENATA

I saw the blood. It looks like motor oil.

JAMES

You were the last one I saw just before the accident. Do you remember? We made love.

RENATA

Are you still involving me in your crash?

An airline coach passes, the passengers bound for Milan staring down at the pair. Renata buttons her coat.

EXT. FIRST CRASH SITE – DAY

James steps from the car, his right knee giving way after the effort of driving. At his feet lies a litter of dead leaves, cigarette cartons and small drifts of safety glass crystals.

A hundred yards behind them a dusty old American car, a Lincoln, is also parked on the verge. The leather-jacketed driver watches James through his mud-spattered windshield, broad shoulders hunched against the door pillar. As James crosses the road he picks up a camera fitted with a zoom lens and peers at James through the eye-piece.

Spotting the man, Renata opens the car door for James.

RENATA

Who is that man? Is he a private detective?

James gets back in the car.

INT. RENTED CAR – DAY

RENATA

Can you drive?

JAMES

I can drive.

James shifts the car into gear and cruises slowly towards the man with the camera. As they approach him, he gets out of his own car, ignoring them, and kneels down to study the hieroglyphics of the skid marks on the road surface.

As James and Renata drive past the kneeling man, the sunlight highlights the ridges of scars on his forehead and around his mouth.

The man looks up at James and he recognizes Vaughan, the young doctor he last saw in the hallway at the airport hospital.

EXT. AIRFIELD – HANGAR – DAY

James proudly shows off his new car to Catherine and Karen at their offices at the airport. The car is identical to the one he crashed.

James sits sideways in the driver's seat, door open, weirdly jaunty.

CATHERINE

I can't believe you've done this.

KAREN

This is the exact same car as your old one, isn't it?

CATHERINE

Yes, it is.

(to James)

Are you planning to have another car crash?

JAMES

I'm not thinking about the crash at all.

James is telling the truth. What he is thinking about is the way that Karen's hip casually brushes against Catherine's hip, without either woman seeming to be consciously aware of it.

EXT. POLICE POUND – DAY

James enters the gate of the police pound compound on foot, and shows his pass to the guard at the gate. His pass now stamped, he hesitates for a beat before he enters.

INT. POLICE POUND – DAY

Some twenty or so crashed vehicles are parked in the sunlight against the rear wall of an abandoned cinema. At the far end of the asphalt yard is a truck whose entire driving cabin has been crushed, as if the dimensions of space had abruptly contracted around the body of the driver.

Unnerved by these deformations, James moves from one car to the next until he comes to his own car. The remains of towing tackle are attached to the front bumper, and the body panels are splashed with oil and dirt. He peers through the windows into the cabin, runs his hand over the mud-stained glass.

Without thinking, he kneels in front of the car and stares at the crushed fenders and radiator grille.

Two policemen cross the yard with a black Alsatian dog. They watch James hovering around his car as if they vaguely resented his touching it. When they are gone, he unlatches the driver's door and with an effort pulls it open.

James eases himself onto the dusty vinyl seat, tipped back by the bowing of the floor. He nervously lifts his legs into the car and places his feet on the rubber cleats of the pedals, which have been forced out of the engine compartment so that his knees are pressed against his chest.

The two policemen are exercising their dog across the yard. James opens the glove compartment, forcing the shelf downwards. Inside, covered with dirt and flaked plastic, are a set of route maps, a mildly pornographic novel, a Polaroid of Renata sitting in the car near a water reservoir with her breasts exposed.

James pulls open the ashtray, which promptly jumps onto his lap, releasing a dozen lipstick-smearred butts.

Someone passes in front of the car. A policeman's voice calls from the gatehouse. Through the windshield, James sees a woman in a white raincoat walking along the line of wrecked cars. The woman – Helen Remington – approaches the car next to his, a crushed convertible involved in a massive rear-end collision.

James sits quietly behind the steering wheel. Helen turns from the convertible. She glances at the hood of James's car, clearly not recognizing the vehicle which killed her husband. As she raises her head she sees James through the Classless windshield frame, sitting behind the deformed steering wheel among the dried bloodstains of her husband.

Helen's strong eyes barely change their focus, but one hand rises involuntarily to her cheek. She takes in the damage to the car, then takes in James. Without giving away anything, she turns and moves away towards the damaged truck, then turns and comes back as James gets out of his car.

She gestures towards the damaged vehicles, then speaks to James as though just continuing a conversation already in progress.

HELEN

After this sort of thing, how do people manage to look at a car, let alone drive one?

(pause)

I'm trying to find Charles's car.

JAMES

It's not here. Maybe the police are still holding it. Their forensic people...

HELEN

They said it was here. They told me this morning.

She peers critically at James's car, as if puzzled by its distorted geometry.

HELEN

This is your car?

She reaches out a gloved hand and touches the radiator grille, feeling a chrome pillar torn from the accordion, as if searching for some trace of her husband's presence among the blood-spattered paintwork.

JAMES

You'll tear your gloves.

James gently takes her hand and moves it away from the grille.

JAMES

I don't think we should have come here. I'm surprised the police don't make it more difficult.

HELEN

Were you badly hurt? I think we saw each other at the hospital.

(pause)

I don't want the car. In fact, I was appalled to find that I have to pay a small fee to have it scrapped.

JAMES

Can I give you a lift?

(almost apologetically)

I somehow find myself driving again.

INT. JAMES'S CAR – DAY

James is driving Helen Remington away from the police pound.

JAMES

You haven't told me where we're going.

HELEN

Haven't I? To the airport, if you could.

At these words, James is stricken by an odd feeling of loss.

JAMES

The airport? Why? Are you leaving?

HELEN

Not yet – though not soon enough for some people, I've already found. A death in the doctor's family makes the patients doubly uneasy.

JAMES

I take it you're not wearing white to reassure them.

HELEN

I'll wear a bloody kimono if I want to.

JAMES

So – why the airport?

HELEN

I work in the immigration department there.

James is very aware that as they speak, Helen is intently watching his hands and feet operating the controls of the car, perceiving these motions in a way that she never would have before her crash with him.

He, in turn, has trouble taking his eyes off her facial scars, which she now makes no attempt to hide.

She pulls a cigarette packet from the pocket of her raincoat. She searches the instrument panel for the lighter, her right hand hovering above his knees like a nervous bird.

Having found the lighter, her strong hands tear away the cellophane from the cigarette pack.

HELEN

Do you want a cigarette? I started to smoke at the hospital. It's rather stupid of me.

JAMES

(suddenly very agitated)

Look at all this traffic. I'm not sure I can deal with it.

HELEN

It's much worse now. You noticed that, did you? The day I left the hospital I had the extraordinary feeling that all these cars were gathering for some special reason I didn't understand. There seemed to be ten times as much traffic.

JAMES

Are we imagining it?

Helen waves her cigarette in a gesture that takes in the whole interior of the car.

HELEN

You've bought yourself exactly the same car again. It's the same shape and color.

EXT. FIRST CRASH SITE – DAY

They are now passing the spot where their crash took place. Intimidated by the aggressive traffic around him, James allows the front wheel of the car to strike the curb of the central reservation, throwing a tornado of dust and cigarette packs onto the windshield.

INT. JAMES' S CAR – DAY

The car swerves from the fast lane and veers towards an airline coach coming out of the exit ramp. Helen quickly shifts to the left of her seat and, pressing her shoulder against James's, closes her hand over James's hand on the wheel.

With Helen's help, James just manages to pull the car behind the coach.

They watch the cars swerving past on both sides of them, horns sounding.

HELEN

Turn up here into the car park. It won't be busy this time of day.

INT. AIRPORT CAR-PARK – DAY

The car winds its way slowly up the rampways leading to higher and higher parking levels. James finds the rhythm soothing and begins to calm down.

HELEN

I've found that I enjoy burying myself in heavy traffic. I like to look at it. Yesterday I hired a taxi driver to drive me around for an hour. "Anywhere", I said.

HELEN (CONT'D)

We sat in B massive traffic jam under an off-ramp. I don't think we moved more than fifty yards.

(pause)

I'm thinking of taking up a new job with the Road Research Laboratory. They need a medical officer. The salary is larger something I've got to think about now. There's a certain moral virtue in being materialistic, I'm beginning to feel. Well, it's a new approach for me, in any case.

JAMES

The Road Research Laboratory? Where they simulate car crashes?

HELEN

Yes.

JAMES

Isn't that rather too close...?

HELEN

That's the point. Besides, I know I can give something now that I wasn't remotely aware of before. It's not a matter of duty so much as of commitment.

They have now reached the top level of the multi-storey car-park and James pulls into a parking spot overlooking a major runway. An immense jumbo jet is maneuvering into its take-off position.

James turns off the car and puts his arms around Helen. She offers no resistance, as though the whole scenario were well understood and agreed upon. James kisses her mouth, her eyelids, unzips her dress.

With the jet engines screaming for accompaniment, Helen lifts her right breast from her brassiere, pressing James's fingers against the hot-nipple. Helen now straddles him and, awkwardly meshing with the technology around them, they make love in the driver's seat of the car.

INT. BALLARD APT. – NIGHT

James and Catherine make love in the same position as in the preceding scene.

James keeps flashing back to himself and Helen in his car, the images mixing confusingly with his present lovemaking to Catherine.

INT. FILM STUDIO – JAMES'S OFFICE – DAY

James is back in the office, but it is obvious that he is only nibbling at the work that has piled up in his absence. Renata comes in.

RENATA

I almost forgot to give you this. Probably because I know you're going to like it.

Renata hands James a brown manila envelope with no markings on it.

JAMES

What is it?

RENATA

A complimentary ticket for a special stunt-driving exhibition. Definitely not part of the big auto show. There's a map in the packet and a note requesting you be discrete about the location.

JAMES

Really? What kind of exhibition is it?

RENATA

I suspect it involves reenactments of famous car crashes. You know, Jayne Mansfield, James Dean, Albert Camus...

JAMES

You're kidding.

RENATA

Serious. But you'll have to take your new friend, the female crash-test dummy. She dropped it off for you.

JAMES

You're not jealous, are you? You have to understand... Helen and I had this strange, intense... experience together.

Renata kisses him hard, then bites his lip. James pulls away in surprise.

RENATA

We've had a few of those ourselves, haven't we?

Renata turns on her heel and floats out the door, leaving James to contemplate the contents of the envelope.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – NIGHT

We are looking at the words Little Bastard. written in black script on silver metal, enamel on unpainted aluminum. We pull back to reveal the entire metal object, which is a less Porsche 550 Spyder race car. It is small and curvaceous, and is being fussed over by several men in overalls. The number .130" is painted on its hood and doors.

The Porsche sits on a country road, two-lane blacktop, heavily wooded, lit by a series of movie lights. On the hills lining the road have been erected a few rough wooden stands.

A blonde man – Vaughan – stands near the rear of the Porsche, a microphone-in his hand. His voice floats eerily out of the woods from speakers mounted on a series of pine trees.

VAUGHAN

(speakers)

"Don't worry, that guy's gotta see us!" These were the confident last words of the brilliant young Hollywood star James Dean as he piloted his Porsche 550 Spyder race car towards a date with death on a lonely stretch of California two-lane blacktop, Route 466. Don't worry, that guy's gotta see us". The year, 1955; the day, September 30th; the time: Now.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – GRANDSTAND – NIGHT

Helen and James sit in a half-empty stand, looking down at the road from amid the trees. Helen has her arm around James's waist, her face touching his shoulder.

JAMES

It's strange – I thought all this would be far more popular.

Helen is consulting a yellow programme sheet.

HELEN

The real thing is available free of charge. Besides, it's not quite legal. They can't advertise.

VAUGHAN

(speakers)

The first star of our show is Little Bastard-, James Dean's racing Porsche. He named it after himself, and had his racing number, 130, painted on it.

JAMES

Who is that? The announcer. Do I know him?

HELEN

That's Vaughan. He talked to you at the hospital.

JAMES

Oh yes. I thought he was a medical photographer, doing some sort of accident research. He wanted every conceivable detail about our crash.

HELEN

When I first met Vaughan, he was a specialist in international computerized traffic systems. I don't know what he is now.

VAUGHAN

(speakers)

The second star is stuntman and former race driver – Colin Seagrave, who will drive our replica of James Dean's car.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – NIGHT

Seagrave, a coarse and burly man, wriggles his way behind the wheel of the delicate little racecar without acknowledging the cheers of the crowd. He wears James Dean clothes – a red windbreaker, a white \$-shirt, jeans, loafers, prescription glasses with clip-on sunshades.

As he talks, Vaughan tours the phalanx of tripod-mounted cameras to check their placement, and chats off-mike with the pair of cameramen with hand-held cameras. He seems to be more the director of the event, possibly the ringmaster, than an actor in it.

VAUGHAN

(speakers)

I myself shall play the role of James Dean's racing mechanic, Rolf W0therich, sent over from the Porsche factory in Zuffenhausen, Germany. This mechanic was himself fated to die in a car crash in Germany twenty-six years later. And the third and in some ways most important party, the college student Donald Turnupseed, played by movie stuntman Brett Trask.

Trask, slim and wiry, wearing loafers and a blazer, waves his hand and gets into a replica of Turnupseed's two-tone, black-and-white 1950 Ford Sedan. He starts up the Ford, which smokes badly, and drives it up the hill about 100 yards.

VAUGHAN

(speakers)

Turnupseed was on his way back to his home in Fresno for the weekend. James Dean was on his way to an automobile race in Salines, a dusty town in northern California. The two would only meet for one moment, but it was a moment that would create a Hollywood legend.

At this point Vaughan, who is dressed in light-blue cotton 1950s mechanics' overalls, sees James and Helen in the thin crowd and waves to them, as though they were long-standing aficionados of crash spectacles. He doesn't wait to see if they react, but immediately steps into the passenger side of the Porsche, microphone still in hand.

VAUGHAN

(speakers)

You'll notice that we are not wearing helmets or safety padding of any kind, and our cars are not equipped with roll cages or seat belts. We depend solely on the skill of our drivers for our safety so that we can bring you the ultimate in authenticity. All right, here we go. The fatal crash of James Dean!

Vaughan hands the microphone to a stills cameraman who obviously also functions as an assistant and then settles all the way into the silver car.

Seagrave starts the Porsche, which settles quickly into a husky idle. A few blips of the throttle, and then the Porsche is backed down the road to the edge of the lighted strip of road.

When the Porsche stops, the excited crowd goes quiet. An assistant with a walkie-talkie kneels beside the silver car on the driver's side, coordinating the start with his opposite number standing next to the Ford over the hill.

There is a calculated pause before anything happens, and then the Porsche spins its wheels and accelerates up the hill.

From their vantage point in the stand, James and Helen can clearly see that the Ford has also started and that the two cars are headed towards each other, each in its respective lane.

The Porsche accelerates hard, the Ford lumbers along at a moderate pace, swaying clumsily on its soft springs.

As the cars approach each other, James notices a fresh clearing at the side of the road at just about the point where they seem likely to pass each other. Sure enough, when the cars are about thirty yards apart, the Ford wanders over the center line. As the Porsche approaches it, it seems to move back into its own lane, but then suddenly swerves again as though making a left turn.

The Porsche in its turn swerves to avoid the big American car but they collide, the immense chrome grill punching into the side of the fragile race car, crumpling it like a wad of tin foil and shunting it unceremoniously off the road into the clearing that has been prepared for it.

As the Porsche hobbles to a stop, Vaughan seems to stand up on his seat and then throw himself out of the car, rolling over what's left of the front hood onto the ground. Seagrave remains slumped in the driver's seat. Vaughan lies still where he lands, a few feet ahead of the crumpled nose of the racecar.

The door of the Ford opens and Trask stumbles out. He begins to walk around in a dazed and agitated manner, and the crowd, which had been buzzing, goes silent again. Trask walks down the road away from the crash site and disappears into the shadows at the edge of the road.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – GRANDSTAND – NIGHT

There is no movement from either Seagrave or Vaughan. James is not sure how to react, but Helen seems genuinely worried.

JAMES

Is this part of the act or are they really hurt?

HELEN

I don't know. You can never be sure with Vaughan. This is his show.

A stills cameraman runs out of nowhere and kneels beside the apparently stricken Vaughan in the weeds at the side of the road. It is not clear whether he is taking his picture or ministering to him. It soon becomes clear that he has handed him a radio microphone because Vaughan's low, melodramatic growl now ripples out of the woods from the tree speakers.

VAUGHAN

(speakers)

Rolf Wütherich was thrown from the Porsche and spent a year in the hospital recovering from his injuries. Donald Turnupseed was found wandering around in a daze, basically unhurt. James Dean died of a broken neck and became immortal.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – NIGHT

Vaughan now leaps to his feet, hands raised in triumph. Seagrave stirs behind the wheel, then raises his hands. Trask emerges from the woods, waving to the now-supercharged crowd.

Seagrave tries to get out of the collapsed car but is jammed behind the wheel. Without missing a beat, Vaughan dances over to the Porsche and begins to haul Seagrave out of his seat.

SEAGRAVE

Hold me. I'm dizzy. I can't stand up.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – GRANDSTAND – NIGHT

Helen stands up as the crowd buzzes.

HELEN

I know that man, Seagrave, the stunt driver. I think he's genuinely hurt.

Helen makes her way down the rickety grandstand steps towards the road, and James follows her.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD – NIGHT

Just as James and Helen step onto the road, six police cars, lights flashing and sirens wailing, converge on the lit stretch of road, three from each end. They screech to a halt and dozens of cops pour out of the cars.

The crowd panics and streams down from the grandstands onto the road. A loudspeaker mounted on one of the police cars begins to blare.

POLICE

(loudspeaker)

This is an illegal and unauthorized automotive demonstration which is in contravention of the Highway Traffic Act. You are all liable to fines and possible arrest and confinement... Disperse at once! Disperse at once!

Because James and Helen are just in advance of the first wave of spectators, they manage to link up with Vaughan as he helps haul a still-groggy Seagrave off the road and into the woods. Helen takes Seagrave's free arm.

HELEN

(to Vaughan)

What's the matter with Seagrave?

VAUGHAN

Hit his head, I think. His balance is off.

The police spread out through the crowd, collaring people at random before they escape into the woods.

EXT. WOODS – NIGHT

James and Helen help Vaughan hustle Seagrave through the woods. The din of the roadway fades away behind them.

JAMES

Why are the police taking this all so seriously?

VAUGHAN

It's not the police. It's the Department of Transport. Internal politics. It's a joke. They have no idea who we really are

In the gathering darkness of the woods, it is apparent that James doesn't really know who they are either.

INT. VAUGHAN'S LINCOLN – NIGHT

Vaughan drives the Lincoln through a scarred, bleak landscape. In the front seat with him are Helen and James. Seagrave is lying down in the back seat with his eyes closed.

VAUGHAN

That was glib, wasn't it? James Dean died of a broken neck and became immortal.. But I couldn't resist.

Vaughan puts his hand between Helen's thighs. She sepal not to notice, but her eyes close dreamily every once in a while. James watches microscopically.

Sometimes, when the flow of traffic allows, Vaughan stares intently at James while his hand works away in between Helen's thighs, and James looks away, flushed, like a schoolgirl.

EXT. SEAGRAVE'S GARAGE – NIGHT

The Lincoln turns into the forecourt of Seagrave's garage and showroom. His business, which has clearly seen better days, is hot-rodding and customized cars. Behind the unwashed glass of the show-room is a fiberglass replica of a 1930s Brooklands racer, faded bunting stuffed into the seat.

They get out of the car, helping the now quite woozy Seagrave through the door at the side of the showroom which leads to the stairway up to the apartment above the garage.

INT. SEAGRAVE APT. – NIGHT

The Seagrave apartment is dirty and depressing, featuring cheap, cigarette-scarred leatherette furniture.

James watches Helen and Vaughan steer Seagrave into the living-room, where two people sit on a couch watching television with the sound turned off: Gabrielle, a sharp-faced young woman who is rolling a hash joint; and Seagrave's wife, Vera, a handsome, restless woman of about thirty.

Vera stands as they come in and rushes over to-the shaky Seagrave.

VERA

Oh, God. What happened? Here, lie down.

Vera and Helen lay the confused Seagrave down on the three-seat sofa, while Vaughan sits next to Gabrielle and helps her prepare another hash joint. James, awkwardly left standing, notices long scars on Vera's thighs and legs.

HELEN

They did the James Dean crash. It seemed to go perfectly. But he started to feel nauseous on the way back. I'm sure it's concussion.

VERA

Ah, well... We're familiar enough with that, then, aren't we?

James watches Gabrielle and Vaughan. As she rolls a small piece of resin in a twist of silver foil, Vaughan brings a brass lighter out of his hip pocket. Gabrielle cooks the resin, and shakes the powder into the open cigarette waiting in the roller machine on her lap.

On Gabrielle's legs are traces of what seem to be gas bacillus scars, faint circular depressions on the kneecaps. She notices James staring at her scars, but makes no effort to close her legs.

On the sofa beside her is a chromium metal cane, and as she shifts her weight, James sees that the instep of each leg is held in the steel clamp of a surgical support. It now becomes obvious from the over-rigid posture of her waist that she is also wearing a back-brace of some kind.

Gabrielle rolls another cigarette out of the machine, but does not offer it to James. Instead, Vaughan gets up and takes it over to Seagrave, who has managed to sit up.

VAUGHAN

I'd really like to work out the details of the Jayne Mansfield crash with you. We could do the decapitation – her head "bedded in the windshield – and the little dead dog thing as well you know, the Chihuahuas in the back seat. I've got it figured out.

Seagrave takes the lit joint and draws heavily on it. He holds the smoke in his lungs for a while, studies the grease on his hands before he answers.

SEAGRAVE

You know I'll be ready, Vaughan. But I'll want to wear really big tits – out to here – so the crowd can see them get cut up and crushed on the dashboard.

James horns to go, leaving Helen to her conversation with Vera, but Vaughan follows him through the door, holding his arm in a powerful grip.

VAUGHAN

Don't leave yet, Ballard. I want you to help me.

INT. VAUGHAN'S WORKSHOP – NIGHT

James follows Vaughan down a cramped corridor to photographic workshop formed out of a warren of small rooms. Vaughan eases James into the first room and then carefully closes the door behind them.

JAMES

Do you live here? With Seagrave?

VAUGHAN

(laughs)

I live in my car. This is my workshop.

Pinned to the walls and lying on the benches among the enamel pails are hundreds of photographs. The floor around the enlarger is littered with half-plate prints, developed and cast aside once they have yielded their images. Vaughan makes a sweeping gesture that takes in all the photographs.

VAUGHAN

And this is the new project, Ballard.

As Vaughan hunts around the central table, turning the pages of a leatherbound album, James looks down at the discarded prints below his feet. Most of them are crude frontal pictures of motor-cars and heavy vehicles involved in highway collisions, surrounded by spectators and police, and closeups of impacted radiator grilles and windshields.

Vaughan opens the album at random and hands it to James. He leans back against the door and watches as James adjusts the desk lamp.

The first thirty pages record the crash, hospitalization, and post-recuperative romance of the young woman Gabrielle a social worker, the photos suggest – who is currently getting very stoned in the next room.

By coincidence, her small sports car had collided with an airline bus at the entry to the airport not far from the site of James's own accident. Vaughan had obviously been there, shooting film, moments after the crash. The incredibly detailed photos end with her affair with her physical therapy instructor.

The remainder of the album d-scribes the course of James's own accident and recovery, and includes his sexual encounters with Renata, Helen Remington, and his own wife, Catherine. Vaughan stands at James's shoulder, like an instructor ready to help a promising pupil.

James closes the book.

JAMES

What kind of help can I possibly be to you? You seem to be everywhere at once as it is.

At that moment, there is a knock at the door, and then Gabrielle enters and takes a few stiff steps into the room on her shackled legs. She holds out a couple of joints to Vaughan.

GABRIELLE

Thought you might be missing these.

(to James)

So here you are at the nerve center. Vaughan makes everything look like a crime, doesn't he?

Vaughan takes the joints and lights them both. He hands one to James, who takes it gratefully.

JAMES

What exactly is your project, Vaughan? ~ book of crashes? A medical study? A sensational documentary? Global traffic?

VAUGHAN

It's something we're all intimately involved in: The reshaping of the human body by modern technology.

INT. FILM STUDIO – JAMES'S OFFICE – DAY

James watches Renata and Catherine talking animatedly at the other end of his office. He can't hear what they are saying, but Renata is showing Catherine layouts of ads involving images of private plane. flying in formation. They touch each other from time to time without seeming to notice it, but James notices it.

EXT. VARIOUS IMAGE CITY ROADS – DAY

James and Catherine set off for home in their own separate cars. At times, they are within sight of each other and James watches her microscopically, as though he didn't know her, as though, perhaps, she isn't human.

At one point he sees her with her hands resting on the steering wheel, her right index finger picking at an old adhesive label on the windshield.

And then, abruptly, James is aware of the dented fender of Vaughan's Lincoln only a few feet behind Catherine's sports car.

Vaughan now surges past James, crowding along the roadway as if waiting for Catherine to make a mistake. Startled, Catherine takes refuge in front of an airline bus in the nearside lane. Vaughan drives alongside the bus, using his horn and lights to force the driver back, and again cuts in behind Catherine.

James moves ahead along the center lane, shouting to Vaughan as he passes him, but Vaughan is signaling to Catherine, pumping his headlights at her rear fender.

Without thinking, Catherine pulls into the courtyard of a filling station, forcing Vaughan into a heavy U-turn. Tires screaming, he swings around the ornamental flower-bed with its glazed pottery plants, but James blocks his way with his own car.

Heart racing, Catherine sits still in her car among the fuel pumps, her eyes flashing at Vaughan.

James steps from his car and walks across to Vaughan, who watches him approach as if he had never seen him before, scarred mouth working on a piece of gum as he gazes at the airliners lifting from the airport.

JAMES

Vaughan, what the hell are you doing? Are you trying to create your own Famous Crash?

Vaughan hooks his gear lever into reverse.

VAUGHAN

It excited her, Ballard. Your wife, Catherine. She enjoyed it. Ask her.

Vaughan reverses in a wide circle, almost running down a passing pump attendant, and sets off across the early afternoon traffic.

INT. BALLARD APT. – NIGHT

James and Catherine lie naked in bed, she with her back to him, her buttocks pressed into his groin. He is inside her.

CATHERINE

He must have tucked a lot of women in that huge car of his. It's like a bed on wheels. It must smell of semen...

JAMES

It does.

CATHERINE

Do you find him attractive?

JAMES

He's very pale. Covered with scars.

CATHERINE

Would you like to tuck him, though? In that car?

JAMES

No. But when he's in that car...

CATHERINE

Have you seen his penis?

JAMES

I think it's badly scarred too. From a motorcycle accident.

CATHERINE

Is he circumcised? Can you imagine what his anus is like? Describe it to me. Would you like to sodomize him? Would you like to put your penis right into his anus, thrust it up his anus? Tell me, describe it to me. Tell me what you would do. How would you kiss him in that car? Describe how you'd reach over and unzip his greasy jeans, then take out his penis. Would you kiss it or suck it right away? Which hand would you hold it in? Have you ever sucked a penis? Do you know what semen tastes like? Have you ever tasted semen? Some semen is saltier than others. Vaughan's semen must be very salty...

They both have huge orgasms within moments of each other.

INT. HELEN'S CAR – DAY

We are close on the distracted, solicitous face of Helen Remington.

HELEN

Have you come?

Helen Remington and James are having sex in the back seat of Helen's car, Helen sitting on James's lap with her back to him. She dismounts him and touches his shoulder with an uncertain hand, as though he were a patient she had worked hard to revive.

EXT. AIRPORT CAR-PARK – DAY

Helen's car is parked on the upper level of the airport car-park, which is currently quite busy. Streams of traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular, flow past the car.

INT. HELEN'S CAR – DAY

James lies against the rear seat of the car while Helen dresses with abrupt movements, straightening her skirt around her hips like a department-store window-dresser jerking a garment on to a mannequin.

JAMES

Please finish your story.

HELEN

The junior pathologist at Ashford Hospital. Then the husband of a colleague of mine, then a trainee radiologist, then the service manager at my garage.

JAMES

And you had sex with all of these men in cars? Only in cars?

HELEN

Yes. I didn't plan it that way.

JAMES

And did you fantasize that Vaughan was photographing all these sex acts? As though they were traffic accidents?

HELEN

Yes.

(laughs)

They felt like traffic accidents.

INSET. ROAD RESEARCH LAB – DAY

We are witnessing a spectacular road accident recreated under laboratory conditions in the immense confines of the Road Research Lab.

A motorcycle is in the process of having a head-on collision with a sedan bearing a family of four – an extremely violent and disturbing crash despite the use of cradles, dummies, rails, cables and extensive metering and recording technology.

Amongst the many witnesses to the crash, including numerous engineers, technicians, and Transport Ministry officials, are James, Helen and Vaughan.

Vaughan is energetically masturbating through his jeans, shielded by a sheaf of publicity folders which he holds in his other hand.

There is a terrific metallic explosion as the motorcycle strikes the front of the sedan. The two vehicles veer sideways towards the line of startled spectators.

The motorcyclist and his bike sail over the hood of the car and strike the windshield, then careen across the roof in a black mass of fragments.

The car plunges ten feet back on its hawsers and comes to rest astride its rails. The hood, windshield and roof have been crushed by the impact. Inside the cabin, the lopsided family lurch across each other, the decapitated torso of the front-seat woman passenger embedded in the fractured windshield.

The engineers wave to the crowd reassuringly and move towards the motorcycle, which lies on its side fifty yards behind the car. But it is Vaughan who first arrives at the bike, a black-jacketed figure striding on long, uneven legs.

For a moment it seems that he might try to lift it up himself, but he then backs away to where technicians are picking up pieces of the motorcyclist's body, and then turns away completely and rejoins Helen and James.

Vaughan holds up the bundle of technical hand-outs in his grip.

VAUGHAN

Get all the paper you can, Ballard. Some of the stuff they're giving away is terrific: "Mechanisms of Occupant Ejection", "Tolerances of the Human Face in Crash Impacts"...

Helen takes James's arm, smiling at him, nodding encouragingly as if urging a child across some mental hurdle.

HELEN

We can have a look at it again on the monitors. They're showing it in slow motion.

An audience of thirty or so gathers at the trestle tables to watch a slow-motion replay on a huge television monitor. As the hypnotic, grotesque ballet unfolds, the crowd's own ghostly images stand silently in the background, hands and faces unmoving while the collision is re-enacted. The dreamlike reversal of roles makes them seem less real than the mannequins in the car.

James looks down at the silk-suited wife of a Ministry official standing beside him. Her eyes watch the film with a rapt gaze, as if she were seeing herself and her daughters dismembered in the crash.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

James rides in Vaughan's car. Vaughan drives aggressively, rolling the heavy car along the access roads, holding the battered bumpers a few feet behind any smaller vehicle until it moves out of the way.

VAUGHAN

I've always wanted to drive a crashed car.

JAMES

You could get your wish at any moment.

VAUGHAN

No, I mean a crash with a history. Camus' Facel Vega, or Nathaniel Nest's station wagon, Grace Kelly's Rover 3500. Fix it just enough to get it rolling. Don't clean it, don't touch anything else.

JAMES

Is that why you drive this car? I take it that you see Kennedy's assassination as a special kind of car-crash?

VAUGHAN

The case could be made.

They approach a major intersection. For almost the first time on this drive Vaughan applies the brakes.

The heavy car sways and goes into a long right-hand slide which carries it across the path of a taxi. Flooring the accelerator, Vaughan swerves in front of it, tires screaming over the blaring horn of the taxi.

As they settle down, Vaughan reaches behind him and lifts a briefcase off the back seat.

VAUGHAN

Take a look at this and tell me what you think.

James opens the briefcase and slides out a thick packet of glossy photographs, all of them marked up with colored ink pens.

They are photos culled from a variety of sources – newspapers, magazines, video stills, film frames – blown up to uniform 8x10 size. Each one depicts a famous crash victim in the prime of life, and each one has the wounds to come marked up in a very explicit way – lines circling their necks and pubic areas, breasts and cheekbones shaded in, section lines across their mouths and abdomens. Handwritten notes complement the circles and arrows.

A second packet of photos shows the cars in which these famous people died, and each of these photos is marked to show which parts of the cars destroyed or fused with which famous body part – for example, a closeup of the dashboard and windshield from the Camus car – Michel Gallimard's Facel Vega – is marked "nasal bridge", "soft palate", "left zygomatic arch".

JAMES

It's very... satisfying. I'm not sure I understand why.

VAUGHAN

It's the future, Ballard, and you're already part of it. For the first time, a benevolent psychopathology beckons towards us. For example, the car crash is a fertilizing rather than a destructive event – a liberation of sexual energy that mediates the sexuality of those who have died with an intensity impossible in any other form. To fully understand that, and to live that... that is my project.

JAMES

What about the reshaping of the human body by modern technology? I thought that was your project.

VAUGHAN

A crude sci-fi concept that floats on the surface and doesn't threaten anybody. I use it to test the resilience of my potential partners in psychopathology.

The traffic has jammed up to a walking pace. Using his horn, Vaughan forces the drivers in the slower lanes to back up and let him across onto the hard shoulder. Once free, he accelerates past the lines of traffic, occasionally scraping the right flank of the Lincoln against the cement divider.

In the distance looms the airport car-park.

INT. AIRPORT CAR-PARK – DAY

The Lincoln spirals its way up towards the upper levels of the airport car-park. James just spots a sharp-faced young woman in a very short skirt, an airport whore, provocatively bent over a railing ostensibly to watch airplanes land and take off, when Vaughan slams on the brakes and jumps out of the car.

VAUGHAN

You drive.

The startled James numbly obeys, sliding over into the driver's seat as Vaughan approaches the whore and begins to negotiate with her. James gingerly maneuvers the boat-like car to one side to allow traffic to pass as James returns with the gum-chewing whore in tow.

As the girl, with short black hair and a boy's narrow-tripped body, opens the passenger door, Vaughan hands her a joint and lights it for her. Then, lifting her chin, he puts his fingers in her mouth and plucks out the knot of gum, flicking it away in the darkness.

VAUGHAN

Let's get rid of that. I don't want you blowing it up my urethra.

EXT. AIRPORT ROADS – NIGHT

James drives the Lincoln along the bizarrely-lighted roads that ring the airport. Vaughan and the whore are in the back seat.

INT. LINCOLN – NIGHT

James adjusts the rear-view mirror so that he can see into the rear seat. Vaughan is having strange, disconnected sex with the whore. James realizes that he can almost control the sexual act behind him by the way in which he drives the car.

It is, in that sense, a sexual threesome – or more properly, a foursome, because the sex between Vaughan and the whore takes place in the hooded grottoes of the luminescent dials, surging needles, and blinking lights of the black, brooding Lincoln.

INT. FILM STUDIO – JAMES'S OFFICE – DAY

James and Renata sort through some story boards together at the architect's table. Renata takes a few cast-offs and walks past the window towards the filing cabinet. She takes a quick peek out the window on her way.

RENATA

Your friend's still out there.

James leaves the table and looks out the window. Vaughan is sitting in his car in the center of the parking lot. Most of the staff are leaving for home, taking their cars one by one from the slots around Vaughan's dusty limousine.

RENATA

What does he want from you?

JAMES

Hard to say.

RENATA

I'm going to leave now. Do you want a lift?

JAMES

No, thanks. I'll go with Vaughan.

EXT. FILM STUDIO PARKING LOT – DUSK

James walks out into the nearly deserted parking lot to find two cars parked in front of Vaughan's Lincoln: a police patrol car and Catherine's white sports car.

One policeman is inspecting the Lincoln, peering through the dusty windows with Vaughan fidgeting beside him. The other stands beside Catherine's car, questioning her.

James slows guiltily as both policemen begin to talk to Vaughan. Catherine spots James and walks crisply over to him.

CATHERINE

They're questioning Vaughan about an accident near the airport. Some pedestrian... they think he was run over intentionally.

JAMES

Vaughan isn't interested in pedestrians.

As if taking their cue from this, the policemen walk back to their car. Vaughan watches them go, head raised like a periscope.

CATHERINE

You'd better drive him. He's a bit shaky. I'll follow in my car. Where is yours?

JAMES

At home. I couldn't face all this traffic.

CATHERINE

I'd better come with you, then. Are you sure you can drive?

As Catherine and James walk towards Vaughan, he reaches into the rear seat of his car and pulls out a white sweat-shirt. As he takes off his denim jacket, the falling light picks -out the scars on his naked abdomen and chest, a constellation of white chips that circle his body from the left armpit down to his crotch.

EXT. JAMMED MOTORWAY – NIGHT

The Lincoln has entered an immense traffic jam, and brake-lights flare in the evening air. Vaughan sits with one arm out the passenger window. He slaps the door impatiently, pounding the panel with his fist.

A police car speeds down the descent lane of a flyover, headlights and roof-lamps flashing. Ahead, two policemen steer the traffic from the nearside curb. Warning tripods set up on the pavement flash a rhythmic "Slow... Slow... Accident... Accident..."

Eventually, they begin to edge past the accident site, which is lit by a circle of police spotlights. Three vehicles – a taxi, a limousine, and a small sports Sedan – have collided where an on-ramp joins the main roadway. A crowd has gathered on the sidewalks and on the pedestrian bridge that spans the road.

Beside the taxi, its three passengers lie in a group, blankets swathing their chests and legs. First-aid men work on the driver, an elderly man who sits upright against the fender of his car, face and clothes speckled with drops of blood.

The limousine's passengers still sit in the deep cabin of their car, their identities sealed behind the starred internal window.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

Catherine has half hidden herself behind the front seat. Her steady eyes follow the skid lines and loops of bloodstained oil that cross the familiar macadam like a battle diagram.

Vaughan, by contrast, leans out of the window, both arms ready as if about to seize one of the bodies. In some recess in the back seat he has

found a camera, which now swings from his neck.

Siren whining, a third ambulance drives down the oncoming lane. Police motorcyclist cuts in front of James and slows to a halt, signaling him to wait and allow the ambulance to pass. James stops the car.

Ten yards from them is the crushed limousine, the body of the young chauffeur still lying on the ground beside it. Three engineers work with surreal hand-tools and hydraulic cutting and prying equipment at the rear doors of the limousine. They sever the jammed door mechanism and pull back the door to expose the passengers trapped inside the compartment.

The two passengers, a pink-faced man in his fifties wearing a black overcoat, and a younger woman with a pale, anemic skin, still sit upright, staring blankly, in the rear seat.

A policeman pulls away the travelling rug that covers their legs and waists. The woman's legs are bare, the older man's feet splayed, apparently broken at the ankles. The woman's skirt has ridden up around her waist, and her left hand holds the window strap.

As the older man turns to the young woman, one hand searching for her, he slips sideways off the seat, his ankles kicking at the clutter of leather valises and broken glass.

The traffic stream moves on. James eases the car forwards. Vaughan raises the camera to his eye, lowering it from sight when an ambulance attendant tries to knock it from his hands.

The pedestrian bridge passes overhead. Half out of the car, Vaughan peers at the scores of legs pressed against the metal railings, then opens the door and dives out.

EXT. MOTORWAY VERGE – NIGHT

As James pulls the Lincoln on to the verge, Vaughan runs back to the pedestrian bridge, darting in and out of the cars. James and Catherine get out of the car.

As James closes the door he notices that the blood of one of the accident victims has somehow been splashed onto the door handle, and that some of it is now on his hand.

He finds a section of newspaper at the side of the road and wipes the blood off his hand. When he looks up, he realizes that Catherine has followed Vaughan back to the accident site.

EXT. JAMMED MOTORWAY – NIGHT

James walks back alone, eventually spotting them amongst the throng of spectators, Catherine watching Vaughan's scarred face intently, provocatively, as he photographs every aspect of the accident.

There is a calmly festive and pervasive sexuality in the air amongst the onlookers, and even a congregational feeling as one group of engineers works on the crushed sports sedan, prying at the metal roof which has been flattened onto the heads of the occupants.

And now Vaughan poses an only slightly reluctant Catherine against the backdrop of the stricken taxi as though she were one of the shaken survivors of the accident.

When the roof of the sports sedan is levered up, the hair of the driver, its only passenger, comes off with it as though scalped, stuck to the roof-liner with drying blood. But it's soon apparent that it's not hair, but rather a cheap, tangled, platinum blonde wig.

Vaughan makes his way over to the sedan, intrigued by the dangling scalp, which is almost phosphorescent in the road-rescue work lights. Catherine trails obediently behind him, like a harshly disciplined puppy.

When the body of the driver is exposed to the lights, the effect is doubly grotesque, for not only is the driver dead and partially crushed, but he is also ~ cross-dresser: Seagrave, in Jayne Mansfield drag. His long, greasy hair is tied up in a knot on his head, he is unshaven, his huge, fake bosom is bloody and askew, his bloated, muscular body strains against the pink 60s skirt and jacket, the blue suede boots with high heels.

There is also a dead Chihuahua bitch inside the car with Seagrave, which Vaughan manages to move with his foot until a cop, outraged, shoos him away. The dog is stiff with rigor mortis, obviously dead long before the crash.

An excited Vaughan has spotted James and now approaches him, breathless.

VAUGHAN

It's Seagrave. He was worried that we would never do Jayne Mansfield's crash, now that the police were cracking down. So he did it himself. Vaughan turns back to look at the wreck again, almost reverent.

VAUGHAN

This is Seagrave's own solitary work of art.

(shakes his head)

The dog – God, the dog is brilliant, perfect. I wonder where he got it?

Now Vaughan turns to James, his face flushed, incandescent with joy.

VAUGHAN

Come with me, James. I have to document it.

Vaughan lopes off towards the Seagrave wreck.

But James hangs back, watching, as the passengers from the taxi are carried on stretchers to an ambulance. The dead chauffeur of the limousine lies with a blanket over his face, while a doctor and two ambulance men climb into the rear compartment.

Beyond them, Vaughan begins to snap away at every possible aspect of Seagrave's wreck, beginning with the dead Chihuahua.

EXT. MOTORWAY VERGE – NIGHT

Some time later, as the crowd disperses and the traffic begins to flow normally, James kneels beside the Lincoln and shows Vaughan the blood on his door. Catherine sits in the back seat.

JAMES

He must have driven through a pool of blood. If the police stop you again, they may impound the car while they have the blood analyzed. Vaughan kneels beside him and inspects the smears of blood.

VAUGHAN

You're right, Ballard. There's an all-night car-wash in the airport service area.

Vaughan rises and holds the door open for James, who sits behind the wheel, expecting Vaughan to walk around the car and sit beside him. Instead, Vaughan pulls open the rear door and climbs in beside Catherine.

As they set off, Vaughan's camera lands on the front seat.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

As they drive, James watches Catherine in the rear-view mirror. She sits in the center of the back seat, elbows forward on her knees, looking over his shoulder at the speeding lights of the expressway. At the first traffic light, she smiles at James reassuringly.

Vaughan sits like a bored gangster beside her, his left knee leaning against her thigh. One hand rubs his groin absentmindedly. He stares at the nape of her neck, running his eyes along the profiles of her cheek and shoulder.

EXT. CAR-WASH – NIGHT

Near the airport, the Lincoln joins a line of cars waiting their turn to pass through the automatic car-wash. In the darkness the three nylon rollers drum against the sides and roof of a taxi parked in the washing station, water and soap solution jetting from the metal gantries.

Fifty yards away, the two night attendants sit in their glass cubicles beside the deserted fuel pumps, reading their comic books and playing a radio.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

The car ahead advances a few yards, its brake-lights illuminating the interior of the Lincoln, covering the trio with a pink sheen. Through the rear-view mirror James sees that Catherine is leaning against the back seat, her shoulder pressed tightly into Vaughan's. Her eyes are fixed on Vaughan's chest, at the scars around his injured nipples shining like points of light.

James edges the Lincoln forward a few feet. When he turns around, he sees that Vaughan is holding in his cupped right hand this wife's bare breast.

James fumbles for change as Vaughan caresses Catherine's nipple in the back seat. Catherine looks down at this breast with rapt eyes, as if seeing it for the first time, fascinated by its unique geometry.

EXT. CAR-WASH – NIGHT

Their car is alone in the washing bay. A voice rings out. Cigarette in hand, one of the attendants stands in the wet darkness, beckoning to James, who inserts his coins in the pay slot and closes the window. Water jets on to the car, clouding the windows and shutting the trio into the interior.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

Within their blue grotto, Vaughan lies diagonally across the back seat. Catherine kneels across him, skirt rolled around her waist. The light refracted through the soap solution jetting across the windows covers their bodies with a luminescent glow, like two semi-metallic human beings of the future making love in a chromium bower.

The gantry engine begins to drum. The rollers pound across the hood of the Lincoln and roar forward to the windshield, driving the soap solution into a whirlwind of froth. Catherine settles over Vaughan, and as the rollers drum against the roof and doors, Vaughan drives his pelvis upwards, almost lifting his buttocks off the seat.

In the mounting roar of the rollers, she and Vaughan rock together, Vaughan holding her breasts together with his palms as if trying to force them into a single globe. When his hands move away to her buttocks, James can see that her breasts have been bruised by Vaughan's fingers, the marks forming a pattern like crash injuries.

At just this moment, Catherine looks into James's eyes in a instant of complete lucidity. Her expression shows both irony and affection, an acceptance of a sexual logic they both recognize and have prepared themselves for.

James sits quietly in the front seat as the white soap sluices across the roof and doors like liquid lace. Catherine cries out, a gasp of pain cut off by Vaughan's strong hand across her mouth. He sits back with her legs across his hips, slapping her with his free hand. His sweaty face is clamped in an expression of anger and distress. The blows raise blunted weals on Catherine's arm and hips.

EXT. DESERTED MOTORWAY – NIGHT

James drives the Lincoln home along a deserted motorway.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

The street-lamps illuminate Vaughan's sleeping face in the rear of the car, scarred mouth lying open like a child's against the sweat-soaked seat.

Catherine sits forward, freeing herself from Vaughan. She touches James's shoulder in a gesture of domestic affection. In the mirror, James can see the weals on her cheek and neck, the bruised mouth that deforms her nervous smile.

EXT. BALLARD APT. BUILDING – NIGHT

The Lincoln pulls up at the Ballard's apartment building. James and Catherine get out and stand in the darkness beside the now-immaculate black car. Vaughan is still asleep in the back. James takes Catherine's arm to steady her, holding her bag in his hand.

As they walk towards the entrance, Vaughan gets up and climbs unsteadily behind the steering wheel. Without looking back at James and Catherine, he starts the engine and quietly drives off.

INT. ELEVATOR – BALLARD APT. – NIGHT

In the elevator, James holds Catherine closely, lovingly.

INT. BEDROOM – BALLARD APT. – NIGHT

That night, James kneels over Catherine as she lies diagonally across the bed, her small feet resting on his pillow, one hand over her right breast.

She watches him with a calm and affectionate gaze as he explores her body and bruises, feeling them gently with his fingers, lips and cheeks, tracing and interpreting the raw symbols that Vaughan's hands and mouth have left across her skin.

INT. AUTO SHOW – AIRPORT CONVENTION CENTER – DAY

James and the crippled Gabrielle visit the annual auto show, which occupies the immense halls of the airport convention center. He watches appreciatively as she swings herself on her shackled legs amongst the hundreds of cars displayed on their stands.

Gabrielle approaches the imposing Mercedes stand and, pivoting about on her heels, seems to take immense pleasure from these immaculate vehicles, placing her scarred hands on their paintwork, rolling her injured hips against them like an unpleasant cat.

She soon draws the attention of a young salesman who tries hard not to notice her scars and braces.

SALESMAN

Is there something here that interests you?

GABRIELLE

The white sports model. Could you help me into it, please? I'd like to see if I can fit into a car designed for a normal body.

Both James and Gabrielle enjoy the salesman's discomfort as he helps her into the Mercedes sports car.

She does her best to make it difficult, deliberately snagging her leg brace clips on the soft leather of the driver's side armrest, forcing him to unhook her and to touch her deformed thighs and knees while manipulating her legs into the footwell.

EXT. AIRPORT CONVENTION CENTER PARKING LOT – LATE DAY

James makes love to Gabrielle in the front seat of her small invalid car, deliberately involving the complex hand controls in the mechanics of their sex.

As he slips his hand around her right breast, he collides with the strange geometry of the car's interior.

Unexpected controls jut from beneath the steering wheel. A cluster of chromium treadles is fastened to a steel pivot clamped to the steering column. An extension on the floormounted gear lever rises laterally, giving way to a vertical wing of chromium metal moulded into the reverse of a driver's palm.

Amidst this small forest of machinery, James explores Gabrielle's new and strange body, feeling his way among the braces and straps of her underwear, the unfamiliar planes of her hips and legs, the unique cul-de-sac, odd declensions of skin and musculature.

Gabrielle lies back. She lifts her left foot so that the leg brace rests against his knee. In the inner surface of her thigh the straps form marked depressions, troughs of reddened skin hollowed out in the forms of buckles and clasps. James unshackles the left leg brace and runs his fingers along the hot, corrugated skin of the deep buckle groove.

The exposed portions of her body are joined together by the loosened braces and straps. Through the fading afternoon light the airliners move across their heads along the east west runways of the airport. Gabrielle's hand moves across his chest, opening his shirt, her fingers finding the small scars below his collarbone, the imprint of the instrument binnacle Of his own crashed car. She runs the tip of her tongue into each of the wound-scars on his chest and abdomen.

James exposes her breasts, feeling for the wound areas which surround them. As he tries to enter her, she puts her hand over his mouth.

GABRIELLE

Don't. Not there.

She spreads her left leg and exposes a deep, trench-like wound-scar in her inner thigh. She directs his hand to this neo-sex organ.

GABRIELLE

Do it there. And then after that, do it here.

Gabrielle rotates over him so that he can see the wounds of her right hip. James turns her back, pulls her thigh in between his own thighs and enters her scar. With his mouth fastened on the scar beneath her left breast, his tongue exploring its sickle-shaped trough, he comes almost

immediately.

INT. FILM STUDIO – NIGHT

We float through the studio past a one-storey high automobile battery. Its six cells are transparent and each one contains something submerged in the bubbly water that represents battery acid: a two-man submarine, a scuba diver, a small shark...

James stands pacing as the dolly shot is reset, lighting is adjusted. An assistant director brings him a cellular phone.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Somebody named Vaughan. Do you want it?

James nods. The Assistant Director presses the "TALK" button and hands the phone to James.

JAMES

Hello? Ballard.

INT. TATTOO PARLOUR – NIGHT

We are close on Vaughan's scarred mouth.

VAUGHAN

I need to see you, Ballard. I need to talk to you about the project.

JAMES

(phone)

Where are you?

EXT. MALL – TATTOO PARLOUR – NIGHT

James drives up to the tattoo parlor, which is located in a small mall. It is next to a small, private medical clinic, and has the same antiseptic, untextured look of the ear, nose and throat suite next door.

INT. TATTOO PARLOUR – NIGHT

James enters to discover Vaughan getting a wound tattoo on his abdomen, one that looks as though it could have been made by the fluted lower edge of a plastic steering wheel. The woman giving Vaughan the tattoo is sexless and professional. She could be a nurse or a hospital dietician.

James sits next to them, barely acknowledged by the woman. Vaughan has messy papers spread out in front of him which include stylized sketches of famous crash wounds, photos of Andy Warhol's scars, automotive styling detail drawings from a 50s era Detroit design studio.

VAUGHAN

(to Tattooist)

You're making it too clean.

TATTOOIST

Medical tattoos are supposed to be clean.

VAUGHAN

This isn't a medical tattoo. This is a prophetic tattoo. Prophecy is dirty and ragged. Make it dirty and ragged.

TATTOOIST

(a hint of sarcasm)

Prophetic? Is this personal prophecy or global prophecy?

VAUGHAN

There's no difference. James – I want you to let her give you this one.

Vaughan spreads out a stained piece of paper as though it were a sacred piece of parchment. On it is a fiercely sketched wound that looks as though it were made by the Lincoln's hood ornament.

JAMES

Where do you think that one should go?

Vaughan spreads his legs in a mechanical, unsexual way and grabs the right inner thigh of his greasy jeans.

VAUGHAN

It should go here.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

We are close on the fresh tattoo on James's inner thigh. It looks more like a cartoon version of a wound than a real wound. We can see it because James's trousers are down around his knees.

Vaughan's face comes into frame. He gently kisses the tattoo. James lifts Vaughan's face to his own and kisses his mouth, touches his tongue to each of the scars around Vaughan's mouth.

EXT. UNDERPASS NEAR AUTO WRECKER' S YARD – NIGHT

We see that the Lincoln sits in the shadow of an underpass at the edge of an abandoned auto-wrecker's yard, looking quite comfortable next to the stacks of crushed auto hulks and piles of wheels and bumpers visible through the chainlink fence.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

James and Vaughan show their wounds to each other, exposing the scars on their chests and hands to the beckoning injury sites on the interior of the car, to the pointed sills of the chromium ashtrays, to the curtain of wheel covers hanging on a web of twisted wire just outside the car window. They touch, embrace, kiss.

EXT. UNDERPASS NEAR AUTO WRECKER'S YARD – NIGHT

James steps unsteadily from the Lincoln into the roadway, followed for an instant by Vaughan's uncertain arm reaching for him.

He moves away from the car, along the palisade to the weedgrown entrance of the wrecker's yard. Above him, the cars on the motorway move like motorized wrecks.

EXT. AUTO-WRECKER#S YARD – NIGHT

Just outside the fence of the auto-wrecker's yard a wreck, its engine and wheels removed, sits on its axles. James opens the door on its rusting hinges. A confetti of fragmented glass covers the front passenger seat.

James gets in and sits there for a moment, crouched over the mud-streaked instrument panel, his knees tightened against his chest wall. A moment or two of this strangely comforting foetal security, and then James unfolds and begins to get back out of the car.

An engine starts with a roar. As James steps back into the roadway he is briefly aware of a heavy black vehicle accelerating towards him from the shadow of the overpass where he and Vaughan embraced together. Its white-walled tires tear through the broken beer bottles and cigarette packs in the gutter, mount the narrow curb and hurtle on towards him.

Knowing that Vaughan will not stop, will kill him, James presses himself against the concrete wall. The Lincoln swerves after him, its right-hand fender striking the rear wheel housing of the car James has just left. It swings away, ripping the open passenger door from its hinges.

A column of exploding dust and torn newspaper rises into the air as it slides sideways across the access road. The Lincoln re-mounts the curb on the far side of the road, crushing a ten-yard section of the wooden palisade.

James can see Vaughan flicking a look back, his hard eyes calculating whether or not he can make a second pass at him. The rear wheels regain their traction on the road surface and the car swings away on to the motorway above.

James leans against the roof of the abandoned car. The passenger door has been crushed into the front fender, the deformed metal welded together by the impact.

James retches suddenly and emptily.

Shreds of torn paper eddy through the air around him, pasting themselves at various points against the crushed door panel and radiator hood.

EXT. BALCONY – BALLARD APT. – DAY

James sits on the balcony of his apartment, watching the sky. A single-engined airplane floats above the motorway, a glass dragonfly carried by the sun. It seems to hang motionless, the propeller rotating slowly like a toy aircraft' s. The light pours from its wings in a ceaseless fountain.

Below it, the traffic moves sluggishly along the crowded concrete lanes, the roofs of the vehicles forming a continuous carapace of polished cellulose.

Suddenly, Catherine is behind him. She puts her hands on his shoulders and he turns to her as though in a dream, gestures towards the airplane.

JAMES

I thought that was you, up there.

CATHERINE

My last lesson's next week.

(pause)

James... my car...

James can see now that Catherine is frightened. He takes her hand.

JAMES

What? Tell me.

EXT. BALLARD APT. DRIVEWAY – DAY

Catherine's car sits in the driveway. The paintwork along the left-hand side has been marked in some minor collision. Catherine and James stand

examining the mark soberly, archaeologists faced with a problematical hieroglyph.

CATHERINE

I wasn't driving. I'd left the car in the parking lot at the airport. Could it have been deliberate?

JAMES

One of your suitors?

CATHERINE

One of my suitors.

He kneels down to examine the assault on her car.

He feels the abrasions on the left-hand door and body panels, explores with his hand the deep trench that runs the full length of the car from the crushed tail-light to the front headlamp. The imprint of the other car's heavy front bumper is clearly marked on the rear wheel guard.

James rises and takes Catherine's arm. He opens the passenger door for her.

JAMES

It's Vaughan. He's courting you.

Let's go find him.

EXT. DESERTED MOTORWAY – LATE DAY

Catherine's car hurtles along a deserted six-lane highway.

INT. CATHERINE'S CAR – LATE DAY

James is driving. He looks across the seat at Catherine. She sits very still, pale, one hand on the window-sill.

JAMES

The traffic... where is everyone? They've all gone away.

CATHERINE

I'd like to go back. James...

JAMES

Not yet. It's only beginning.

EXT. FAMILIAR STRETCHES OF ROAD – LATE DAY INTO NIGHT

They drive past stretches of road we have seen before: the underpass near the wrecker's yard, several accident sites and filling stations, etc.

EXT. AIRPORT FILLING STATION – NIGHT

One of the filling stations is near the airport. As they cruise by it, they spot Vera Seagrave talking to a girl at the pumps.

James turns into the forecourt. Vera is dressed in a heavily insulated leather jacket, as if she were about to leave on an Antarctic expedition.

James calls to her from the car.

JAMES

Vera! Vera Seagrave!

At first she fails to recognize him. Her firm eyes cut across him to Catherine's elegant figure, as if suspicious of her cross-legged posture.

James gets out of the car and approaches Vera. He points to the suitcases in the rear seat of Vera's car.

JAMES

Are you leaving, Vera? Listen, I'm trying to find Vaughan.

Vera finishes with the girl attendant and, still staring at Catherine, steps into her car.

VERA

The police are after him. An American serviceman was killed on the Northolt overpass.

James puts his hand on the windshield, but she switches on the windshield wipers, almost cutting the knuckle of his wrist.

VERA

I was with him in the car at the time.

Before James can stop her, she accelerates towards the exit and turns into the fast evening traffic.

James gets back into Catherine's car.

JAMES

I think he'll be waiting for us at the airport

CATHERINE

James.

James turns the car into the traffic.

EXT. AIRPORT ROADWAYS – NIGHT

Vaughan is waiting for them at the airport flyover. He makes no attempt to hide himself, pushing his heavy car into the passing traffic stream.

Apparently uninterested in them, Vaughan lies against his door sill, almost asleep at the wheel as he surges forward when the lights change. His left-hand drums across the rim of the steering wheel as he swerves the Lincoln to and fro across the road surface.

His face is fixed in a rigid mask as he cuts in and out of the traffic lanes, surging ahead in the fast lane until he is abreast of them and then sliding back behind them, allowing other cars to cut between them and then taking up a watchful position in the slow lane.

James can see that Vaughan's car has become even more battered than it was before, scarred with many impact points, a rear window broken, cracked headlamps, a body panel detached from the off-side rear wheel housing, the front bumper hanging from the chassis pinion, its rusting lower curvature touching the ground as Vaughan corners.

When they slow down for a line of tankers, Vaughan makes his move. He pulls up beside them and then cuts viciously three lanes of traffic to hit them broadside. The nose of the Lincoln just nicks the tail of the light sports which spins down the road.

The Lincoln keeps on going, its vast momentum taking it into toward rails of the exit ramp, and then over them.

Catherine and James slam spinning into the tail of a tanker which has all but stopped. The traffic behind them has already been slowing and thus easily avoids hitting the stopped car when it comes bouncing to a halt across two traffic lanes.

Catherine lies back, sprawled in her seat, eyes wide, body rigid, bleeding from a small cut on her cheekbone. James jumps out of the car, then immediately slows with a limp. He continues on, working his way through the motionless cars.

When he looks over the edge, James sees that Vaughan's Lincoln has plunged into the top of an airline coach which was running on the roadway below. With the Lincoln now inside it, the coach then slewed sideways and crashed into several other vehicles.

Wreckage, flames and blood are everywhere.

James eyes are wide – not with horror – but with excitement.

EXT. POLICE POUND – NIGHT

Catherine and James stand at the gatehouse of the police pound collecting the gate key from the moustached, sharp-eyed young officer there.

They then walk down the lines of seized and abandoned vehicles. The pound is in darkness, lit only by the streetlights reflected in the dented chromium.

They soon find Vaughan's crashed Lincoln, massive and charismatic even here, even in death. James manages to wrench open the passenger-side rear door enough to allow them both get inside.

INT. VAUGHAN'S CAR – NIGHT

Sitting in the rear seat of the Lincoln, Catherine and James make brief, ritual love, her buttocks held tightly in his hand as she sits across his waist.

EXT. POLICE POUND – NIGHT

Afterwards, they walk among the cars. The beams of small headlamps cut across their knees. An open car has stopped beside the gatehouse. Two women sit behind the windshield, peering into the darkness.

A pause, and then the car moves forward, its driver turning the wheel until the headlamps illuminate the remains of the dismembered vehicle in which Vaughan died.

The woman in the passenger seat steps out and pauses briefly by the gates. It is Helen Remington. When she helps the driver of the car out, James and Catherine see that it is the crippled Gabrielle, her leg shackles clacking as she and Helen begin to walk towards Vaughan's car.

They stroll haltingly, arms around each other, like strange lovers in a cemetery visiting a favorite mausoleum. At one point, Helen kisses Gabrielle's hand, and it is obvious that they have become lovers.

James and Catherine circle away from the couple and make their way back to the gatehouse.

In the depths of the pound, Helen helps Gabrielle into the Lincoln. In the darkness of the back seat, they embrace.

EXT. POLICE POUND – GATEHOUSE – NIGHT

James stands talking to the officer at the gatehouse window, holding Catherine's arm around his waist, pressing her fingers against the muscles of his stomach.

JAMES

I'd like to register a claim for the black 1963 Lincoln, the one that came in a couple of days ago. Is there a form I can fill out?

POUND OFFICER

There certainly is, but you'll have to come back between 7:30 and 4:30 to get one. What's your attachment to that thing?

JAMES

A close friend owned it.

POUND OFFICER

Well, it's got to be a total write-off. I don't see what you could possibly do with it.

EXT. CROWDED RAIN-STREAKED ROADWAY – SUNSET

We are close on the huge, battle-scarred grille of Vaughan's Lincoln, now brought back to swaying, bellowing life. The restoration of the Lincoln is as Vaughan would have wanted it: Just enough to get it running and nothing more, with ugly brown primer slapped onto the replaced panels, and whatever was cracked, scraped and crumpled still cracked, scraped and crumpled – a mobile accident rolling on badly misaligned wheels.

INT. VAUGHAN'S LINCOLN – SUNSET

We pull back to see James alone in the car. The road is crowded and manic; James is intense, hard, exhilarated, alert – a hunter. The car is full of junk, pop cans, styrofoam containers, all suggesting that he has been basically living in the car for some time.

James is searching for something amongst the lanes of traffic, threading the immense car in and out of the shifting holes that appear and disappear, driving with a fluid recklessness that is recognizably Vaughan's style.

Suddenly, James becomes tense, focussed: he has spotted what he has been looking for.

EXT. CROWDED RAIN-STREAKED ROADWAY – SUNSET

Through the Lincoln's insect- and oil-smearred windscreen we can see the unmistakable shape of Catherine's white sports car, itself winding its way aggressively through the braids of vehicles.

The Lincoln lurches out onto the narrow emergency lane and takes off after Catherine's car, scraping the low concrete wall as it wallows from side to side, clipping the corner of a truck that has made the lane too narrow.

INT. CATHERINE'S SPORTS CAR – SUNSET

In her mirrors, Catherine spots the Lincoln charging towards her along the emergency lane. Her demeanor is just as predatory as James's, and she does not hesitate to react.

Catherine cranks the steering wheel to the right and dives across two lanes of startled vehicles to fishtail down a little-used utility access road.

Behind her, and closing rapidly, the lumbering Lincoln follows suit.

EXT. UTILITY ROAD – SUNSET

Around the decreasing-radius curve of the utility road, the more nimble sports car stretches out the distance between it and the Lincoln, but once the road uncurls, the booming V-8 allows the American car to gobble up the ground until it is nose-to-tail with Catherine's car.

James begins to bump the tail of the sports car, breathing off the accelerator for a beat to let the white car – which looks especially fragile and delicate by comparison – get away a bit, then charging back until it makes contact.

Now the road ahead curves again, and just as Catherine enters the curve, James gives her a seriously violent jolt. The rear of her car slews off onto the grass verge, almost comes back, then loses traction completely.

Catherine's car spins backwards off the road, then rolls unceremoniously, almost gently, down a small grade, shedding bits and pieces until it finally flops to a halt on its side in front of a cement culvert.

INT. VAUGHAN'S LINCOLN – SUNSET

Momentum has carried James past the point where Catherine has left the road. James stands on the brakes until the Lincoln shudders to a halt. He jams the shift lever into reverse and backs up, tires squealing and smoking in protest, to where he saw her go over the edge.

EXT. UTILITY ROAD – SUNSET

James jumps out of the car and stands for a beat at the edge of the road on the wet grass, savoring the tableau below him.

Catherine lies sprawled, half out of the car, her tight black dress hiked up over her hips, one arm across her face as though shielding her eyes from the sight of her ruined, lightly-smoking sports car.

James eagerly makes his way down the wet grass of the hill towards Catherine. As he approaches her, she begins to move, stretching her arms behind her head as though awakening from a deep sleep. He can now see that her dress is wet, soaked by the dirty water trickling out of the culvert and now – dammed up by her torso.

James kneels close to Catherine.

JAMES

Catherine. Are you all right? Are you hurt?

Catherine's eyes flutter open. Her mascara is smeared, as though she has been crying, and there is wetness at the corners of her eyes. Her upper lip is bruised and beginning to purple, and there is blood on her forehead and at the corner of her mouth.

CATHERINE

James, I... I don't know... I think I'm all right...

James slips her panties down her legs, leaving them around her left ankle when they snag on the one high-heel shoe she still has on. He gently rotates her onto her right hip, undoes his fly, then lies down on the concrete with her, ignoring the light, muddy stream which now begins to soak the thigh of his trousers. Kissing the back of her neck, he enters her from behind.

JAMES

Maybe the next one, darling... Maybe the next one...

He pull up and away from the couple on the ground until we lose them behind the overturned Sports car, then rise and pivot until we are once again watching the frantic lanes of traffic hurtling obliviously only a few meters away.

THE END