

The Woman from Estero Bay

by

Michael Fawcett

1861 9th St., Unit B
Los Osos CA 93402
mfawcett@calpoly.edu
805 534-1229

FADE IN:

SMALL BAY - DAWN

An old troller, weeping rust, the Magdalena, crosses a small bay on its way to the open sea.

INT. TROLLER - WHEELHOUSE

PUT-PUT of the troller's ENGINE.

Fisherman JOHN MANCINI, a worn man approaching fifty, is at the helm.

EXT. TROLLER

His two sons, MARK, 14, and PAUL, 17, are busy with on-board tasks. Mark has a harelip and is slow.

INT. WHEELHOUSE

Paul enters the wheelhouse.

MANCINI
(talking over engine)
Faint engine knock I thought I
heard the other day? It's a knock,
all right.

Paul comes to his father's side and cocks his ear.

PAUL
Once out of the channel bring her
to half throttle. We'll see.

MANCINI
What next? A water spout?

EXT. COAST GUARD CUTTER

As the troller leaves the harbor, a Coast Guard cutter enters the harbor and slowly passes by the Magdalena's port side.

PURR of its ENGINE.

Mancini eyes the cutter with trepidation through the wheelhouse window.

He sees a Coast Guard officer staring down at him as the cutter passes.

BACK TO SCENE

The officer looks hard at the Magdalena.

He sees Mancini who assumes an expression of nonchalance.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. WHEELHOUSE

MANCINI

Officer White who wrote us up last month.

PAUL

Relax, dad. We got new fire extinguishers. You fixed the broken running light.

MANCINI

Still no immersion suits. Two-hundred and ninety apiece for God's sake.

MARK

The EPIRB was the most important thing. It works now.

MANCINI

Go down without immersion suits you're a goner.

PAUL

We're not going to go down, dad.

MANCINI

Tell that to the Acevedo brothers. The three of 'em didn't last two hours in this water.

The bow of the Magdalena begins to rise and fall as they enter the open sea.

Mancini eases the throttle ahead.

The ENGINE makes a FAINT KNOCK.

PAUL

Not your imagination.

MANCINI

Imagine that.

PAUL
Gotta treat her like an old lady.
Be okay for a while.

EXT. OPEN SEA - LATER

The horizon pitches up and down.

Mancini works on the line that raises and lowers the outriggers. Tools lie about him on the deck.

Mark watches him while Paul stands at the stern coiling ropes.

PAUL
You've spent an hour on that.

MANCINI
Don't want to lose a day's fish.
Another fifteen minutes.

MARK
Try and try till you succeed, huh,
dad?

Mancini threads a line into a pulley assembly.

MANCINI
Morrison says I can have the ninety-
four Ford sedan for \$900 we give
him a fish now and again.

PAUL
Doesn't mom need another operation?

MANCINI
Minor one to correct the shoulder.
Doc says it'll be the last. We done
okay a year without a car. Can wait
a few more months.

MARK
Why a deer have to run in front of
her?

MANCINI
God puts challenges in front of us
all.

PAUL
Why would God do that to mom?

MANCINI
Don't be blasphemous, Paul.

Paul starts to say something but continues coiling rope.

MANCINI (CONT'D)
Splice the ends together we're good
to go.

Paul sees something in the water.

PAUL
(alarmed)
Dad, come look!

Mark joins Paul at the stern.

MARK
Quick!

Mancini hurries to their side.

They see a nude woman's body in the cold sapphire water, her
blond hair undulating in the swell.

BACK TO SCENE

Mancini watches her, absorbing another misfortune into his
life.

PAUL
Got to be the Rodríguez girl.

MARK
Didn't have no vest on.

MANCINI
Now God has sent her to me.

PAUL
Got to get her on board, without
hurting her.

MARK
How we hurt her if she's dead?

MANCINI
He means respect. Respect for the
dead. That's all we can do for the
dead.

The three men are consumed by the gravity of the task before
them.

Paul fashions a noose with a line, attaching a large washer to it.

Mancini leans over the stern, letting the line into the water.

The woman is down ten feet.

The noose approaches her arm.

Mancini's face contorts with concentration.

The noose just misses the woman's arm.

Again it misses.

Then it slips over her arm.

MANCINI (CONT'D)
Got her. Bring her up gently.

The body slowly rises to the surface.

MARK
Don't hurt her, dad.

MANCINI
She breaks the surface get the pole
hook under her armpit.

The body surfaces. Paul gets the pole hook under an arm.

Mancini and Mark, leaning way over the stern, take hold of the woman's arms.

Paul helps Mark.

The three fishermen pull the woman up and over the stern.

They lay her on the deck.

They are suddenly aware of her nakedness.

MANCINI (CONT'D)
The blue tarp, quick.

Paul covers the woman with the tarp.

The three stand for several moments as if in shock at what they have done.

MANCINI (CONT'D)
Roll her up.

Tucking an edge of the tarp under the woman, they begin to roll her up.

MANCINI (CONT'D)
Gentle. Gentle. Respect for the
dead, boys.

The men stand looking at the tarp.

MARK
What now, dad?

MANCINI
Back to port.

MARK
Coast Guard find out we don't got
immersion suits, fine us big time.

MANCINI
Quiet, Mark.

PAUL
Big Hans will know what to do.

INT. WHEELHOUSE

Mancini's face is expressionless, as he pilots the boat
homeward.

EXT. TROLLER - LATE AFTERNOON

Fog rolls into the bay.

The MAGDALENA CHUGS along the channel. Mark and Paul sit
glumly on the hatch cover of the fish hold, staring at the
roll of blue tarp.

MARK
Ain't the Rodríguez girl.

PAUL
Not by a long shot.

MARK
Who, you think?

PAUL
Not from around here.

MARK
How you know?

PAUL
You saw what I saw.

MARK
We gonna be in trouble.

PAUL
For what?

MARK
Havin' a dead woman on our boat,
that's what.

EXT. T-PIER - LATER

Mancini backs the Magdalena into its mooring place.

Fog has now enveloped the Magdalena and the three men.

The boys on either end and Mancini in the middle, they carry the body off the boat, up a short flight of wooden stairs, and onto the pier.

They lay it down carefully on the weathered planks.

A FOG HORN MOANS.

They look at the bundled body.

They see a damp strand of blond hair that has worked its way out of one end of the tarp.

BACK TO SCENE

Mancini surveys the foggy pier.

A lone automobile, its lights on, drives by on a nearby street.

MANCINI
Mark, go tell Big Hans. Should be
in his office. Paul, open the shed
doors.

The boys glide swiftly away, dutiful acolytes.

Mancini squats and with a tremendous heave lifts the body onto his shoulder.

He trudges the remaining length of pier, across twenty yards of asphalt, and into the processing shed of the Hansen Fish Company.

INT. PROCESSING SHED - NIGHT

Paul flicks on fluorescent lights and pulls the door down.

A sizable room with corrugated metal walls and two large fish processing tables.

Mancini deposits the body onto the table furthest from the door, Paul supporting the end enclosing its head.

A flap of tarp has fallen to one side.

The two men see a breast and a bluish nipple.

BACK TO SCENE

They are embarrassed to have seen this together.

Mancini wipes his hand across his mouth.

Paul walks to a large wooden box holding a slump of crushed ice.

With a coal shovel he digs into the ice, returns to the table, and carefully shakes the ice over the tarp.

Mancini starts to object but instead grabs another shovel.

Quickly the woman is encased in a shroud of ice.

They leave the shed.

EXT. PROCESSING SHED - NIGHT

Mancini puts his arm around Paul.

A FOG HORN MOANS.

Mark joins them.

MARK

He feels bad tonight, but he's coming.

Mancini's face as he mulls over the discovery of the body.

A DOOR CLOSES SHARPLY (O.S.)

Mancini turns.

He sees a WOMAN walking toward a car in front of a building.

BACK TO SCENE

MANCINI

I think that's the doctor who just moved to Estero Bay. This morning Big Hans said it was gonna be nice having a doctor across the street.

Mancini frowns in thought.

MANCINI (CONT'D)

Paul, go tell the doctor what we found.

Paul jogs across the street. The Woman opens her car door.

PAUL

Ma'am!

The Woman turns. Paul runs up to her.

Paul speaks to her, pointing in the direction of Mancini and Mark.

The Woman shrugs, nods her head.

She walks quickly across the street toward Mancini and Mark.

She wears blue jeans, sneakers, a windbreaker. Her black bag swings at her side.

Paul joins his father and brother.

The doctor is young and very pretty.

DOCTOR (WOMAN)

Oh, my, a body? They told me this would be a quiet place to start my practice. Must be the Rodríguez girl.

She runs her eyes carefully over the three fishermen.

MANCINI

(softly)

It's not the Rodríguez girl.

She sees a stocky man in an old sweater, who needs a shave and whose hands look like grimy tools.

BACK TO SCENE

DOCTOR

(her tone cool)

Not the Rodríguez girl, you say.

MANCINI

No, ma'am.

Mancini and his sons follow the doctor into the processing shed.

INT. PROCESSING SHED

From a corner of the room, near an open door, there is the greenish glint of chrome from a wheelchair.

BIG HANS quickly wheels into the light. Even in his chair he is tall.

The rolled up sleeves of a flannel shirt reveal once-muscled forearms, now wasted, a blue blur of faded tattoo on each, a silver watch loose on a wrist.

There is an oxygen cannula in his nose, the thin plastic tube leading to a green tank on the back of the chair.

His gargle fills the room.

BIG HANS

God-damned body you say?

MANCINI

Hans, we caught the new doctor leaving her office.

The doctor looks at Big Hans without acknowledging him.

She pulls back the hood of her windbreaker, shaking loose a tousle of curly blonde hair.

Big Hans edges his chair to the table on which lies the body.

The blue eyes in his long, craggy face study the doctor.

BIG HANS

Why, you're just a kid!

The doctor places her bag on the table.

DOCTOR

Perhaps I am, to you.

Mark joins his father at the other end of the table. Paul takes a position on the side opposite the doctor.

Big Hans pats the doctor's elbow.

BIG HANS

Let's have a look, doc.

He winks in Mancini's direction.

The doctor stares for a long second at the ice covered tarp.

DOCTOR

Iced, like one of your fish.

She slides the ice off the tarp with both hands and pulls back a flap of tarp to reveal the face of the dead woman.

She gasps, looks away and bites her knuckles, leaning on the table for support.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(covering self)

So pretty. One never gets used to this.

The doctor runs trembling fingers over the dead woman's face.

Then she straightens up, closes her eyes, and takes a breath.

Stands perfectly still, as if in brief meditation.

She opens her eyes and looks at Paul, who, transfixed, stares at her.

Paul becomes uncomfortable, takes a step back.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(her voice steady)

Shall we begin?

The doctor tries to undo the tarp, to no avail.

Paul continues to stare at her.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(to Paul)

Please step back!

Paul retreats another step.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(to Mancini)

I let the boys stay because they're your sons. I need a hand with this.

Mancini obediently helps the doctor with the tarp, the corpse jerking woodenly with their efforts, until it lays bare under the light.

The dead woman has her right arm slightly bent at her side, the left arm crooked awkwardly across her belly, its hand claw-like.

Her eyes are closed, her face peacefully slack. There is a piece of torn kelp on her lower lip.

The doctor carefully removes it.

Big Hans rises slowly from his wheelchair and stands, bracing himself on the table with large, thin hands.

His breathing a labored, steady wheeze.

BIG HANS

God, what beautifully full lips she had.

The doctor blinks slowly and begins to speak in an almost pedagogic tone.

DOCTOR

Young Caucasian female, late twenties, early thirties, average height, probably one-hundred twenty pounds. Has all her fingers and all her toes. No overt signs of trauma. At least not on her topside. I would guess she's been dead not more than twenty-four hours.

The doctor breathes deeply.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Did she drown? Was she murdered? Sexually abused? I don't know. That she died as a result of foul play is plausible, since no one in this climate goes about naked, on a boat or climbing over wave-exposed rocks. Then again a person who is mentally ill may take off her clothes at an inappropriate time.

BIG HANS

(aloud but to self)

Tearing away at her illness, trying to get to its core.

The doctor acknowledges his remark with an indulgent smile.

DOCTOR

Notice she isn't wearing jewelry, and...

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
(leaning closer)
...yes, her ears are pierced.

Mark speaks for the second time since he got off the boat.

MARK
Could have escaped from Atascadero.

DOCTOR
(looking at Mark)
Yes, there's a mental hospital
there.

The doctor tries to fluff the dead woman's wet hair.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Easy to verify but probably not
necessary. Look at her hair. Even
as matted as it is, I can tell it's
an expensive cut. No Vidal Sassoon
at Atascadero.

She touches a finger of the claw-like hand.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Well-manicured nails.

MARK
Could be a rich woman who was
murdered.

Mancini hushes his son.

The doctor lifts an eyelid.

She leans in.

She sees an iris as clear as glass.

BACK TO SCENE

The doctor looks up and sighs.

BIG HANS
You saw something!

He fixes his eyes on the doctor.

DOCTOR
Just death.

The doctor passes her hand slowly over the woman's torso.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
No obvious abrasions or contusions
on top.

She rolls the body toward her, the ICE CRUNCHING beneath it,
and leans over.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Something took a bite there.

A moon-shaped wound on the buttock.

BIG HANS
(craning his neck)
Just a small, curious shark, doc.

The doctor turns the body away from her and bends down.

DOCTOR
Now here's something.

The other buttock is deeply bruised and covered with
scratches and several deeper lacerations.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Could have slipped on rocks and
fallen into the surf. But then you
would expect cuts and bruises on
her arms and legs when she tried to
get back out. Unless she hit her
head and was carried out to sea.

The doctor slowly examines the dead woman's head, parting the
hair with her hands as she goes.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Nothing here I can see.

She abruptly pushes down on the body's chest several times
with the heels of her hands.

The corpse's mouth drools slightly.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Frankly, I never dealt with a
drowning victim. Not sure that
liquid is from her lungs.

BIG HANS
Let me interrupt here. I seen my
share of drowned persons over the
years. Water come out of some
mouths and not others.
(MORE)

BIG HANS (CONT'D)

Now, this woman, how she died, why she's naked, where her jewelry went, it's all strange. But we see something about her that's even stranger. You know what it is, doc. Maybe you didn't mention it because of us men or the boys.

DOCTOR

(smirking)

I know what it is?

BIG HANS

Of course you do. This woman don't have... well, any pubic hair. The first thing a coroner'd see, first thing that'd grab his attention.

Mancini, who has been standing all this time as if in church, steps forward.

MANCINI

She don't have a belly button either.

The doctor's face reddens and she puts her hands on her hips, this sudden display of anger causing Mancini to step back and Big Hans to teeter and look back for his chair.

DOCTOR

I'll make observations about this body in a sequence of my own choosing.

The two men look at the body and are silent.

Mark looks up at his father.

Paul studies the body and then the doctor.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Of course I see she doesn't have pubic hair. 'Look, guys, no pubic hair!' Is that what I was supposed to start off with? With two teenage boys present?

BIG HANS

Sorry, doc, I just thought...

Big Hans eases himself back into his wheelchair, a pained expression on his face.

The doctor's anger has subsided, but now there is a portentous tone in her voice.

DOCTOR
I think this young woman may be
full of surprises.

The doctor feels with her fingers under the woman's arm.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
No axillary hair either. No trace
of razor stubble.

She takes a penlight out of her bag, puts it between her teeth, and with surprising strength forces the body's stiff legs apart.

Paul's eyes are big in his head and Mancini motions Mark back.

The doctor peers at the dead woman's pudendum, talking around the glowing penlight in her teeth.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Odd. The glans and the prepuce of
the clitoris are pronounced, the
labia minor patulous and larger
than I've ever seen.

BIG HANS
What does that mean?

DOCTOR
Must've been a pretty sexy lady.

Big Hans sits very still in his chair, and his pasty face becomes tinged with red.

The doctor forces the woman's mouth open and puts a wood tongue depressor between its teeth. She shines the penlight into the opening and, this apparently not producing the desired result, inserts her forefinger into the mouth.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
No visible dental work.

She probes about the woman's mouth.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Her eye teeth are small.

She looks up at Paul, who is witnessing the most unusual event of his life, and smiles unexpectedly.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Think she could be a vegetarian?

Paul's embarrassed incomprehension offers only a shrug.

The doctor continues to look at him.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Got your wisdom teeth yet?
(beat)
You do, you should have thirty-two
teeth. This lady has only twenty-
eight, and the molars seem small
for an adult.

The doctor pulls a magnifying glass from her bag and examines each of the woman's inner arms.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
No apparent needle marks.

Then, after a careful examination of the umbilical zone, she puts the glass back into her bag, shaking her head.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Not a hint of a navel.

The doctor thinks for a moment, bites her lip, and asks Mancini carefully.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Do you realize the odds of a
fishing boat coming upon a body
floating in the open sea?

MANCINI
Found her just inside Estero Bay.

DOCTOR
Wherever. Now what're the odds of
fishing out a body like this one?

Mancini steps forward, his big, soiled hands seeming to grab at words in the air.

MANCINI
What, who is she?

DOCTOR
Let me show you something.

The doctor rummages through her bag. She takes out a pair of surgical pliers.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
This won't be a pretty sight.

Mark instinctively slinks over to a lawn chair by the wall and sits down.

PAUL
(breathes deeply)
I'm okay, dad.

The doctor looks around at the three men.

DOCTOR
I felt something in the roof of her mouth.

BIG HANS
(aloud to self)
A bullet.

The doctor pulls a blonde curl off her cheek and, using her left hand as a guide, inserts the instrument into the corpse's mouth.

She nods when she feels it take hold. She pulls gently. Then with a slow twist something begins to come loose, and then out, with a SUCKING SOUND.

She holds the instrument up to the light, and in its jaws there is a lavender-colored, metallic cylinder the size of a small lipstick tube.

Big Hans leans almost out of his chair.

BIG HANS (CONT'D)
Holy Mother of God!

The doctor places the instrument on the table by the body.

She turns and walks over to the wall of the fish shed, and when she comes back to the table her eyes are moist.

DOCTOR
I think there's another cylinder in there.

Mancini comes to her side.

MANCINI
Can I, doctor?

DOCTOR
Go ahead.

Mancini picks up the instrument holding the cylinder, feels it with his hand and puts it up to his cheek.

MANCINI

It's warm!

BIG HANS

Some kind of god-damned battery?

Mancini hands the instrument back to the doctor.

She puts a finger to the cylinder and closes her eyes.

Then she releases it into a small zip-top bag that she puts into a pocket of her windbreaker.

She puts the instrument back into her bag along with the tongue depressor. She closes the bag with a movement that says she is through with the dead woman. She covers her with a fold of tarp.

DOCTOR

She's a forensic pathologist's dream.

MANCINI

Doctor, when an official investigation begins will I be involved?

DOCTOR

Smack in the middle. You found her. There'll be a thousand questions.

Big Hans lets out a phlegmy laugh.

BIG HANS

Sell your story, John. Think of the crowd this dead lady could bring me.

DOCTOR

Don't fool yourselves. Five minutes with her a coroner calls the Joint Pathology Center in Maryland. The postmortem will be legalized mayhem. They'll carve her up like a tuna. Remove her brain, weigh it. Disassemble her palette. Examine her organs like objects you'd find in a shark's stomach. Put her eyes in a beaker. That's just for starters.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

After she's been probed, sliced, and gutted they'll whip stitch her back together with coarse, black thread. She'll be wheeled out of the autopsy room looking like a grotesque baseball and then down into the deepest, darkest, coldest vault of government secrecy and years will pass before the public ever, if at all, hears anything about her.

(to Big Hans)

You'll be long gone by then and turning in your grave with the secret of her.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(to Mancini)

You'll think of her every time you go out to fish because she was the catch of your life, only you won't be able to tell this fish story because everyone will think you're crazy.

Paul suddenly bursts forth.

PAUL

And where will you figure into this investigation? You think people in this town won't believe my dad? Or Big Hans? What about you. Won't you tell what you've seen? We're a total of five witnesses. To hell with the government!

MANCINI

(raising a fist)

Paul!

The doctor calmly takes her bag into her hand.

DOCTOR

Paul's right. We are five witnesses. Problem is we haven't witnessed a murder or an accident. We've seen a bizarre corpse.

(beat)

Believe me, this woman will bring each of you nothing but unhappiness. And don't foster any illusion about government hush money. This lady will leave no trail.

BIG HANS

Maybe you're right, but this dead woman could be the highlight of your career.

DOCTOR

My future is practicing medicine in this small town. A quiet, private practice.

The doctor walks over to Big Hans and kneels by the oxygen tank on his chair. She squints at the gauge, makes a small adjustment.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Don't any of you make this woman part of your future.

She pats Big Hans's sallow forearm and stands up.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Right now, emphysema is your only future. More metered dose inhalers, theophylline capsules, and iodinated glycerol. You'll die on a respirator.

Big Hans struggles to suppress a coughing spasm, and his eyes well with tears.

BIG HANS

Got a beautiful future. Two sons and six grandchildren! Die on a respirator? I'll take a short cut first.

DOCTOR

I can't make you well. But I may be able to get you out of that chair and off the oxygen. You give me the chance, that is.

Big Hans slowly looks up at her. His words are edged with sarcasm.

BIG HANS

So you're an emphysema wizard?

DOCTOR

Maybe an occasional cigarette...

Big Hans's blue eyes seem to focus on a long ago scene.

BIG HANS

Like to burn one right now.

DOCTOR

I know a few tricks they don't
teach in medical school.

Mark joins his father once more, and the doctor walks over to
them, indicating the boy with her head.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(to Mancini)

I can help you as well. A cleft
palette's not difficult, just
expensive.

MANCINI

(looking at Mark)

How?

DOCTOR

I can arrange it. The
hyperthyroidism is a piece of cake.
Just medication.

MANCINI

(stumbling over word)

Hyperthyroidism?

Now there is a new bead on his rosary of woe.

DOCTOR

I think I see it in him.

MANCINI

How you mean?

DOCTOR

Something in the eyes. Too early
to be noticed by your average
sawbones.

Mancini gestures in the direction of the T-pier.

MANCINI

I got a thirty-foot troller there
needs work. My wife's been in and
out of the hospital. Where --

DOCTOR

Did I say anything about money?

Big Hans, a look of exasperation on his face, wheels his
chair toward the doctor.

BIG HANS
Tell me, doc, where in hell you
from?

DOCTOR
(calmly)
Back east.

Big Hans wags a long finger.

BIG HANS
No. No. What's your ancestry?

DOCTOR
Danish.

BIG HANS
What's the family name?

DOCTOR
Aren't we nosy tonight.
(pause)
Berggren.

BIG HANS
(squinting)
Berggren's a Swedish name.

The doctor smiles at him and shrugs her shoulders.

Big Hans slumps in his chair, grimaces.

BIG HANS (CONT'D)
John, what you make of this?

DOCTOR
What do you mean, what does he make
of this? He's a fisherman. Like you
once.

MANCINI
I think it's trouble, Hans.

DOCTOR
Smart man.

The doctor begins heading for the door of the processing
shed.

BIG HANS
So what we do about this coroner
business?

DOCTOR
 (over her shoulder)
 So who is going to get you out of
 that chair?

The doctor turns.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 Must I hoist a flag?

Mancini follows the doctor to the door.

MANCINI
 You suggesting we get rid of the
 body?

DOCTOR
 Body?
 (beat)
 Oh, did they find the Rodríguez
 girl?

The doctor walks quickly out of the processing shed, her
 black bag swinging in her hand.

INT. BEDROOM - DAWN

Morning light is just beginning to define the large bedroom
 window. TELEPHONE RINGS. A person in the bed stirs and then
 reaches for the phone.

DOCTOR
 (into phone, annoyed)
 Hello.

--

DOCTOR
 The coroner? Do you know what time
 it is?

--

DOCTOR
 I don't have family here.

--

DOCTOR
 That's a preposterous assertion.

--

DOCTOR
The T-pier. Eight o'clock. Across
the street from my office.

The doctor hangs up and, still heavy with sleep, sits up in her bed.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Fools.

EXT. T-PIER - MORNING

A dark blue sedan eases slowly onto the pier and stops.

The CORONER gets out. A tall, once handsome man in a suit and a windbreaker. A careful comb over fails to conceal an extending baldness.

He leans against the pier railing, takes out a cigarette, decides not to smoke it, and returns it to the pack.

The SHRILL CRY of SEAGULLS.

He looks down the pier.

He sees the doctor approach, with the step of a young girl.

BACK TO SCENE

As she comes closer, he runs his hand over the crown of his head and tightens his stomach.

The doctor wears jeans and a thick wool shirt, the sleeves rolled up to reveal smooth, well-turned forearms.

She approaches the coroner.

DOCTOR
Hope I didn't keep you waiting.

She grasps his hand firmly.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Camille Berggren.

CORONER
Jim Patterson.

The coroner looks at the doctor's face.

He sees the clear irises of her eyes.

BACK TO SCENE

CORONER (CONT'D)

Thought the pier good a place as any.

DOCTOR

A pier is always good.

CORONER

Sorry to put a dent in your Thanksgiving.

DOCTOR

I don't have family.

CORONER

Want to clear this up soon as possible.

The doctor stands smiling at him.

DOCTOR

I examined a body last night someone found in the bay? Then told unnamed persons to get rid of it? Really!

CORONER

Thought it was just a prank call at first...

DOCTOR

A prank call? To the county coroner at his home?

CORONER

But the caller began to cry... his story was farfetched I admit... yet so coherent in its detail I couldn't let it pass. Hope you understand.

DOCTOR

And they told me this would be the perfect place to start a quiet practice. A cruel initiation for a new doctor. And no name either?

CORONER

He said your examination took place in a building belonging to the Hansen Fish Company. That was the only name that came up.

The doctor sifts her hair through her fingers.

DOCTOR

It's right over there. Knock on the door and talk to the man in the wheelchair. He's the owner.

CORONER

I know Big Hans. But today every place in town is closed tighter than a Scotchman's purse.

DOCTOR

Then why are we standing on this pier on Thanksgiving day? Sounds like a prank coming from a dorm room at Cal Poly. Everyone in the county knows about the Rodríguez girl.

The coroner weighs the doctor's impatience.

CORONER

Has to be something like that.

(shakes head)

Still, there was something in the caller's voice, an anger over persons having been wronged, a sincerity... Can't put my finger on it.

DOCTOR

I think there's a very imaginative young actor out there.

A seagull cries, arching into the sky.

CORONER

He also said...

The doctor puts her hands on her hips, tilts her head, smiles, and opens her eyes wide.

DOCTOR

Let it die.

The coroner stands looking at the doctor. He nods reluctantly.

The doctor walks quickly away.

The coroner returns to his car.

He leans against the door, following the doctor with his eyes.

Pulls a cellphone from his jacket and punches a key.

CORONER
(into phone)
Hey, Phil.

--

CORONER
Half-convinced me the whole thing
was a prank.

--

CORONER
That's what I said. Half-convinced.

--

CORONER
That new doctor's something.

--

CORONER
Should see her eyes.

--

CORONER
No. They have no color. They're as
limpid as sea water.

--

CORONER
Damned if she isn't the prettiest
woman I've ever seen from Estero
Bay.

EXT. SMALL BAY - DAWN

The Magdalena passes between the breakwaters of the inner bay, her bow beginning to rise and fall on the swells of the expansive outer bay. Upon her deck lies a roll of blue tarp with four concrete building blocks tied tightly along its length.

FADE TO BLACK.

