

LAURA LEE

A Screen Short

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FADE IN:

EXT. ANTIQUES SHOP - NEW ENGLAND - DAY

Establish a quaint-looking little antiques store in the business district of an equally quaint little New England town. A man, 50s, ROGER KIRKLAND, enters the store.

INT. SHOP

The store is a typical collection of antique bric-a-brac, with two women working it -- LAURA LEE TYLER, a pretty blonde woman in her 30s/40s. Long hair, bright eyes, Southern charm and femininity. And an older, heavysset, dark-haired woman, MRS. COMPTON, who minds the front counter.

LAURA LEE approaches a WOMAN CUSTOMER who is holding an antique blue bottle.

LAURA LEE

Hand blown. Don't make 'em like they used to.

WOMAN CUSTOMER

Beautiful.

LAURA LEE

(aside)

I can get it for you wholesale.

They share a laugh. Laura Lee notices Roger.

LAURA LEE

Excuse me. Just call if you need any help.

(to Roger)

How may I be of help?

ROGER

I haven't decided yet.

(looks around)

How do you keep track of all of this?

LAURA LEE

I don't. She's in charge.

ROGER

I hate the idea of all of this turning to dust. I mean, over time.

LAURA LEE

Over time.

ROGER

Like the rest of us, I suppose.

LAURA LEE

But not today, no, not today.

ROGER

My name is Roger Kirkland.

LAURA LEE

(aside)

I'm Laura Lee Tyler. We're not supposed to give that out.

ROGER

Of course.

(whispered)

You have pretty eyes.

LAURA LEE

My goodness, a flatterer. How can my pretty eyes help you?

ROGER

I'm not sure.

LAURA LEE

Oh, I think you are. . . Shopping for yourself or someone special?

ROGER

No one special. Just saw the place. I had never been in here before. I live just up the road. You work here regularly?

LAURA LEE

In the summer, a few days a week. In the off season I'm a teacher.

ROGER

Well, as for me, I guess you could call me a retired wayfaring stranger.

LAURA LEE

Well, welcome stranger.

ROGER

I don't want to get personal, but -- married?

She shakes her head.

LAURA LEE

You?

He shakes his head.

ROGER

Won't bore you with the details.

LAURA LEE

Oh, but that's the juicy stuff.

(off a dirty look from
proprietress)

I better pretend to get back to work.

She grabs a piece of bric-a-brac.

LAURA LEE

(loudly)

Now this would make a nice gift, Mr.
Kirkland. . .

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FRONT YARD - ROGER'S SUMMER HOUSE -- DAY

It is isolated, but overlooks a lake. In the front yard there is a rusty old swing set that is swaying back and forth in the wind. The chain on one of the swings has broken loose, with the seat hanging awkwardly to one side.

Roger's car enters driveway. He gets out, moves to swings.

ROGER (V.O.)

I suppose it was the distant thoughts,
the battles, the gunfire in the hills
of long ago. A streaming of cars,
the arc of woods against failing
light, and your rings of golden hair,
winds swirling, out on the dock, in
the afternoon, the caissons, the
rumblings, the dwindling pools slim
in their green brackish drift, your
hand bathed in tenderness, slender,
curled in mine, against the hours,
fraught with calm darkness. I
lingered, surrounded by souls, you
hid on the porch, beauty turned soft,
in drawn lamplight.

A car pulls into the drive behind Roger's. It's Laura Lee. She gets out, approaches Roger.

LAURA LEE

You wouldn't remember me. I'm the woman you met in the antiques store earlier this afternoon.

ROGER

Of course I remember you.

LAURA LEE

You wanted to remember.

ROGER

Yes.

LAURA LEE

I'm glad.

ROGER

Come on in.

LAURA LEE

(awkward)

My husband passed. I think I had mentioned that before.

ROGER

Yes.

LAURA LEE

I'm glad you wanted to remember. . .
Oh, you left this item behind.

She offers him a small wrapped package; he looks at her askance.

LAURA LEE

Okay, maybe you didn't leave it behind. There I go again, sneaking up, being me. I mean, just in case you didn't remember me. I think of myself only as Laura Lee. Like Lorelei.

ROGER

Luring men to their doom?

LAURA LEE

Yes!

She makes a spooky face, gestures, laughs. He chuckles.

LAURA LEE

I would never in a million years be so forward with someone I don't know. I just felt, well, maybe it was time to be in a mood of abandon.

ROGER

Come on in. We'll abandon. I'll get us something to drink.

She hesitates.

LAURA LEE

I have to warn you, if I sit down, I'll stay forever. I'll stay forever here if I sit down. No more antiques store, no more boring hours walking among the junky relics answering questions for old ladies. If I sit down, I'll stay forever.

ROGER

Then stay forever -- or as long as you like. I think I mentioned this in the shop -- my wife is gone too.

He takes her hand, draws her to him; they embrace -- a long embrace. She's clearly at peace in his arms.

ROGER (V.O.)

She stayed the entire summer. She was soft and delicate, funny and beautiful. But she was also frightened. At some profound level, somewhere in her depths, she was frightened.

LAURA LEE

I'm going for a walk. I need to get some air.

ROGER

I'll come with you.

LAURA LEE

No. No, I need some time alone.

ROGER

What is it, what's wrong?

LAURA LEE

I just need some time.

She smiles a faint smile.

ROGER

She disappeared, but from the window I could see her down among the rocks. She found a place there among the rocks at the edge of the lake, and she sat quietly and just watched. I wondered if I would follow her to those rocks, as men so often do. Follow her and be lost forever. She was soft and quiet and beautiful down there, alone among the rocks. Perhaps this was her true home. Perhaps I was the one who had strayed off course.

He moves to her.

ROGER

I didn't want you to be alone.

She smiles faintly.

LAURA LEE

I belong here, by the lake, among the silent rocks. I belong here, so I can call out. Do you hear me when I call?

ROGER

Yes.

LAURA LEE

In the night when I am gentle in your arms, still, I feel the need somewhere deep within me to call out.

Pause.

ROGER

I need to know what's wrong.

LAURA LEE

I'm glad you hear me.

She turns to him; they embrace.

ROGER

I love you, Laura Lee. I want us to be married. But if there's something wrong, you should tell me.

LAURA LEE

There's nothing wrong.

ROGER

You've been withdrawn the last couple of weeks. And tomorrow you have to leave to go back to teaching. I'm afraid I'll lose you, I won't see you again.

LAURA LEE

You won't lose me.

ROGER

I'm afraid. You can understand that.

LAURA LEE

I don't want to face the autumn, it depresses me -- the death of leaves, the school children and their notebooks. Outside the windows, in the walkways, under the trees. The hours are turning sour and cold, and it depresses me. . .

Another embrace

ROGER

Over the winter, Laura Lee grew remote. We saw each other on weekends. I suspected there had been some sort of tragedy. Then she came back again to this house last summer and we shared our love together. All summer long we loved each other in this place, and sometimes we used the swings, and we felt young and revitalized.

(to Laura Lee)

Did you grow up here?

LAURA LEE

Right down below.

ROGER

In the town where we met -- the antiques store?

LAURA LEE

Yup. We used to come and look through the windows. The cut glass, the rockers, the dusty old things. Yes, I grew up down there.

ROGER

And just when a faint smile seemed to pass across her face, she would become withdrawn. I felt a pulling away. But she wouldn't talk about it. She looked out faintly on the lake, in all her soft and sweet beauty, and remained quiet in her chair.

LAURA LEE

I have a son. That's why I've been so quiet. He committed suicide. I'm sorry, but I've kept it in. Sometimes I withdraw, that's all. It doesn't mean I don't love you.

ROGER

I want us to be married.

LAURA LEE

Are you sure?

ROGER

You say it as though you have some sense of foreboding.

(several beats)

We could be married here -- I mean, right here on the lake.

Momentary pause.

LAURA LEE

Yes. . .

ROGER

(with concern)

Laura Lee?

LAURA LEE

(aside)

And so I took his hand, and we walked down along the lake. Among the rocks.

They do so. Then, to Roger:

LAURA LEE

You don't need the burden of my grief.

ROGER

Yes, yes I do. That's what I'm here for.

LAURA LEE

The burden of a thousand tears. You don't need that.

ROGER

The minute we get back, we'll be married.

LAURA LEE

The burden of my grief is too great. Don't come down here, don't come down among the rocks. Will you promise me, if you love me, that you will not come down among the rocks?

ROGER

I promise.

LAURA LEE

But he did come down among the rocks. He would sit beside me for long hours, as the waters quietly lapped against the dock. Quiet hours, with the tiniest of movements on the surface of the lake. The trees and woods peaceful and quiet. It was then I realized that he too was grieving, grieving for some loss.

(to Roger)

What are you grieving for?

ROGER

Am I grieving?

LAURA LEE

Yes. Yes, I can feel it within me. You're frightened, frightened of something. What is it you are frightened of?

ROGER

I was in the Army. In combat. I can hear the gunshots, always I can hear the gunshots. I needed to be here by the lake in the summers. While I was away my wife developed cancer. She died. I'm still frightened by it -- the gunfire, the thought of death. There's no peace when the thought of death is in your consciousness. . . More than that, I'm frightened of us, of losing you the way I lost my first wife. I don't want to lose you.

LAURA LEE

You won't lose me.

ROGER

And yet I know I will, and I can't bear it. I would sooner throw myself upon these rocks than lose you. I can hear gunshots far out over the hills, even in the quiet of the afternoon. I can hear feet pounding in the dust, and the roar and rumble of trucks. You have filled the emptiness of this place, this house, these long hours. I came here each summer to escape a sense of loss, and yet even with the abundance of trees, of the woods, and the sounds on the lake, even with all of this, I felt hollow. Then, when we met in the antiques store, I felt life stirring within me again. I don't want you to leave here alone. I want us to live together, and never be apart, not even for a single instant. I saw too much horror, over there, and then back here in a hospital ward. I am frightened of death.

A slight pause.

LAURA LEE

You know I have to leave today. I have to teach next week. Stay and enjoy yourself. I'll drive up next weekend.

ROGER

No. No, if you leave I will lose you forever.

LAURA LEE

Roger, you are being irrational.

ROGER

I feel irrational. I'm frightened, especially here by the water, near these rocks.

LAURA LEE

(joking)

I warned you that I would lure you here.

ROGER

Yes, you did. Sometimes in the dark hours late at night, I hear the water lapping against these rocks, these stones. Even though you are beside me in bed, your breath gentle, your hair softly spread on the pillow, I hear the water down here among the rocks. Even when I hold you naked with your breasts and mouth against me, feeling your sweet delicious softness, I know that somehow you are calling from among the rocks. I know in my heart I will be wounded again, and I can't bear the thought of that.

LAURA LEE

No woundings, I promise.

ROGER

Don't go, Laura Lee. Please. Quit your job. Call them. We'll stay on here, even in winter.

LAURA LEE

But I packed my things that day, a few blouses, some combs and summer things, and we kissed beside the swings. It was late August, and already there was a sense of the emptiness, the loneliness of September. We kissed beside the swings.

ROGER

Don't go.

LAURA LEE

I took my things down to the car, and packed them in the trunk. Then I waved to you, my dearest one. I waved.

ROGER (V.O.)

I heard the sound of the car starting, and I watched forlornly as you pulled out of the drive, and swung forward out into the road. I could hear the engine as you drove off down the hill and swept along the road beside the lake. . . I waited and waited.

(MORE)

ROGER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Then I heard another sound, and you came back to me. It was your car, and I could hear the sound of it as it swung back into the drive. Oh God, I was so relieved that you had come back.

They embrace.

LAURA LEE

I had to come back. I couldn't leave you.

ROGER

Thank God.

LAURA LEE

I couldn't leave this place, for this is where I belonged. We can be married here. But somewhere within me, I am still frightened, still grieving. We can be married here, but the frail bones of my psyche are like old antiques, disintegrating on the lost shelves of hope.

ROGER

No.

LAURA LEE

Yes. I cannot help it. The pain comes back, I am haunted and frail, an absolute shadow in your arms. On the porch, on the dock, in the kitchen during the quiet hours of the afternoon. I am a shadow. I want to be more, I reach out and hope to be more. But if you turn you will not see me. You will hear a voice, but you will not see me. . . I'm going down to the village now, just to pick up a few groceries.

ROGER

Please don't go.

LAURA LEE

You need have no worry, I will be all right.

ROGER

I'll come with you.

LAURA LEE

No. You won't, and you know you won't. But remember I loved you, remember the soft vowels of my name, Laura Lee, as spoken over the gentle lake waters, rippling softly on the rocks. Laura Lee.

A brief embrace. She goes out.

ROGER (V.O.)

I couldn't stop her, I knew it. The car engine started, and the wheels churned, and then I heard it speed away. Round and round the lake. And I knew I would never see her again. I was terrified, I knew what would happen. And now I have come back here again in the summer, with my suitcase, to this empty house, with its old swings.

(slight beat)

I don't know why, except it reminds me of you, and your quiet softness, and the peaceful hours we spent together. The grace and gentleness. The quiet of the woods. I have come back to you, my Laura Lee, and this place. I have come back, because I know your spirit is here waiting for me. But I couldn't look when the police asked me to. I couldn't look down at the rocks. Or the car, the twisted wheels and wreckage. I couldn't look because I knew you were there with the life torn out of you. Your softness and sweetness, your gentle beauty, spread out lifeless among the rocks. I couldn't look because I love you with all my heart, Laura Lee. And I grieve for you. And I can't bear the thought of life without you.

(a beat)

Now I too will join you among the rocks.

He raises a handgun, eyes it. Takes several paces to one side.

ROGER

I love you, Laura Lee, and I will be with you.

As he begins to raise the gun to his head -- FADE OUT.

THE END