

THE SHOOTING SCRIPT[®]



ATONEMENT

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BASED ON THE NOVEL BY
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A Newmarket Shooting Script[®] Series Book
NEWMARKET PRESS • NEW YORK

On SOUND: the final duet of Act 1 of La Boheme.

INT. ROBBIE'S STUDY/BEDROOM. DAY.

The music is on ROBBIE'S gramophone. He leans back, wrenching the paper out of the typewriter, again, crumpling it and throwing it in the waste-paper basket.

A series of JUMP CUTS: ROBBIE moves over to the gramophone, stands a moment listening to the climax of the duet, picks up the arm and moves the needle back to replay the high note. He paces his small room. He feeds another sheet of paper into the typewriter, stubs out his cigarette, pulls the sheet out of the typewriter and starts again. Decisively, he begins to type.

As he types, the words appear on the paper: "In my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long. Robbie."

ROBBIE sits back with a small gasp and laughs; he's surprised himself. Then he pulls the page out of the typewriter, sets it down on Gray's Anatomy, pushes the typewriter aside and reaches for some notepaper and a fountain pen. After a pause for reflection, he unscrews the pen and starts writing.

He writes: "Dear Cecilia..."

ROBBIE (V.O.)
... you'd be forgiven for thinking me
mad-the way I acted this afternoon.

INT. CECILIA'S BEDROOM. DAY.

CECILIA is now wearing a green halter-neck evening gown and the jet necklace has been replaced with a rope of pearls. A couple of other dresses lie on the floor beside the rejected black dress.

ROBBIE (V.O.)
The truth is, I feel rather light-
headed and foolish in your presence,
Cee, and I don't think I can blame the
heat. Will you forgive me? Robbie.

CECILIA fixes on a diamond hair-clip, contemplates her reflection for a moment, this time with satisfaction and leaves the room.

INT. STAIRS/FRONT ROOM. LODGE. DAY.

ROBBIE comes downstairs in a vest, carrying a shoe brush and a pair of black brogues. His mother, GRACE TURNER, whom we've already encountered in the Tallis kitchen, is sitting in the front room with her eyes closed, her feet up and her slippers dangling from her toes. ROBBIE spreads out a double page of the Daily Sketch, before sitting to polish his shoes.

GRACE
Off out, then?

ROBBIE
Yes; Leon asked me to join them for dinner.

GRACE
So that's why I've been polishing the silver all afternoon.

ROBBIE
I'll think of you when I see my face in the spoon.

He stands up. GRACE watches him for a moment.

GRACE
You're not a bit like your father. Not in any way.

ROBBIE
That's because I'm all yours.

ROBBIE kisses his mother's forehead.

ROBBIE
I'll be late.

GRACE
Your shirts are hanging upstairs.

ROBBIE starts to leave.

GRACE
Son?

ROBBIE
Yes?

GRACE
Nothing.

INT. ROBBIE'S STUDY/BEDROOM. DUSK.

ROBBIE, rushing now, does up the front of his shirt and at the same time finds an envelope, folds his letter, looks for his cigarette case, puts the letter in the envelope and seals it. He puts his jacket on, tests his lighter three times and leaves the room.

EXT. LODGE & PARK. DUSK.

ROBBIE leaves the bungalow, impeccable in his evening dress, the envelope in his hand and a spring in his step; he looks for all the world like a young man with a glorious future.

EXT. DRIVEWAY. DUSK.

ROBBIE walks down the drive towards the Tallis house, his letter still in his hand. He comes to a monumental bridge that crosses a small stream. Below he sees a figure at the water's edge, slashing at nettles with a hazel switch.

ROBBIE
Briony? Is that you?

BRIONY turns, obviously startled and straightens her hair.

ROBBIE
Are you all right?

BRIONY nods, her face flushing.

ROBBIE
Do you think you could do me a favour?

BRIONY scrambles up the slope to join ROBBIE.

ROBBIE
Could you run ahead and give this to Cee? I'd feel a bit of a fool handing it over myself.

BRIONY
All right.

She takes the envelope from him, turns and runs off without another word. He starts to roll himself a cigarette.

ROBBIE watches her go, leaving the drive to take a short cut across the grass, running all the way.

Suddenly ROBBIE gasps, as if punched in the solar plexus, and lets drop the makings of the cigarette.

ROBBIE
Briony.

EXT. GARDENS. DUSK.

But BRIONY is out of earshot, running across the gardens, clutching the envelope.

INT. ROBBIE'S STUDY/BEDROOM. DAY.

CUT BACK IN TIME.

Again ROBBIE tests his lighter three times and leaves the room. But this time the CAMERA PANS back to ROBBIE'S desk and moves in on the hand-written letter, still lying on his copy of Gray's Anatomy.

EXT. DRIVEWAY. DUSK.

ROBBIE, panicked now, cups his hands around his mouth and yells at the top of his voice:

ROBBIE
Briony!

INT. HALLWAY. DUSK.

BRIONY runs into the hall and stands for a moment, alone. Then, impulsively, she rips open the letter, stuffs the envelope into her pocket and reads.

The SOUND of a typewriter, builds to:

INT. ROBBIE'S STUDY/BEDROOM. DAY.

The hammers of ROBBIE'S typewriter in extreme close-up, crashing down with the word: C - U - N - T

INT. HALLWAY. DUSK.

WIDE on BRIONY, a tiny figure isolated in the vast hall, transfixed by what she's just read.

INT. DRAWING ROOM. DUSK.

CECILIA and LEON, both holding gin-and-tonics, sit in a window seat overlooking the gardens.

CECILIA
I suppose he's what you might call
eligible.

LEON
Rather!

CECILIA
He certainly seems to think he's the
cat's pyjamas. Which is odd,
considering he has pubic hair growing
out of his ears.

LEON snorts with laughter.

CECILIA
I imagine he'd give you a lot of very
noisy boneheaded sons.

LEON
He's quite a good egg, actually.

CECILIA
You say that about everyone.

LEON'S face lights up as BRIONY bursts into the room; he goes into his Arthur Askey impersonation.

LEON
Rummy, if it ain't my little sis!

BRIONY thrusts the letter into CECILIA'S hand without a word and flings herself into LEON'S embrace.

BRIONY
I wrote a play, Leon. I wanted to do a
play for you, The Trials of Arabella.

CLOSE on CECILIA as she unfolds the letter and reads. She blushes hotly, looks up to make sure her shock has not been observed and bows her head to read it again.

LEON
There's still time, doesn't have to be
this evening.

BRIONY
No, it's impossible!

CECILIA
Briony?

BRIONY completely ignores CECILIA, pretending to hang on LEON's every word.

LEON
Tell you what, I'm good at voices and you're even better. We'll read it out after dinner.

CECILIA
Briony, did you read this letter?

BRIONY
Yes, let's, that's a wonderful idea!

CECILIA
Briony...

CECILIA's about to speak, but she's interrupted by the sudden appearance of PAUL MARSHALL, who's carrying a silver tray, on which stand five cocktail glasses containing a sludgy brown liquid. He has a faint scratch running down his right cheek.

MARSHALL
Here we are, my chocktail; I insist you try it.

BRIONY tries to take advantage of this to slip out of the room; but CECILIA grabs hold of her arm and hisses at her.

CECILIA
Wasn't there an envelope?

BRIONY wriggles free and hurries out of the room.

INT. BRIONY'S BEDROOM. DUSK.

BRIONY, not yet changed, paces restlessly up and down, trying to make sense of the events of the evening. There's a light tap on the door and she looks up, very surprised to see LOLA.

LOLA
Do you mind if I come in?

Before BRIONY can answer, LOLA comes in and perches on the edge of the bed; her expression is tragic. She's dressed for dinner and wearing make-up and lipstick.

LOLA
Thanks, Briony, you're a brick.

She leaves the room.

INT. STAIRCASE AND HALLWAY. NIGHT.

BRIONY, now changed for dinner, crosses the landing and starts down the last section of staircase leading to the hall. As she reaches the bottom step, she notices a diamond hair-clip lying in front of the door to the library. She crosses to the hair-clip and picks it up. A moment later she hears a low moan, recognizably CECILIA'S voice, coming from behind the door.

INT. LIBRARY. NIGHT.

BRIONY opens the door quietly and stands, framed in the doorway, peering apprehensively in.

The library is cavernous and dark, lined with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. The only light comes from a desk lamp that points directly into BRIONY'S eyes. Silence. BRIONY takes a tentative couple of steps into the room. As she does so, there's a sound from the far corner.

CECILIA (O.S.)
(*whispering*)
Someone's come in.

BRIONY edges closer and suddenly, revealed in the corner, frozen against the bookshelves, are ROBBIE and CECILIA. ROBBIE, who has one of CECILIA'S wrists pinned against the wall, appears to be attacking CECILIA, while CECILIA has a hand round his head, gripping a handful of hair.

BRIONY, bewildered, stops by the desk.

BRIONY
Cecilia?

SOUND of a doorbell.

EXT. TALLIS HOUSE. DUSK.

CUT BACK IN TIME.

CLOSE on ROBBIE'S hand, tugging at the bell-pull.

When the door opens, it's CECILIA, the folded letter in her hand.

ROBBIE
It was a mistake.

CECILIA
Briony read it.

ROBBIE
Oh God. I'm so sorry. It was the wrong version.

CECILIA
Yes.

ROBBIE
No one was ever meant to...

CECILIA
No.

INT. HALLWAY. NIGHT.

CECILIA turns away and moves briskly towards the library. ROBBIE, after a second's hesitation, follows her, almost stepping on the hair-clip which has dropped from her hair.

INT. LIBRARY. NIGHT.

It's dark in the library.

ROBBIE waits in the doorway, until CECILIA has switched on the desk-lamp; then he closes the door behind him and advances tentatively into the room. CECILIA crosses almost the full width of the room, before turning to face him.

CECILIA
What was in the version I was meant to read?

ROBBIE
I don't know, it was more formal, it was less...

CECILIA
Anatomical?

ROBBIE
Yes.

CECILIA doesn't know whether to laugh or cry. ROBBIE begins to inch towards her as she begins to back gradually into a dark corner, until she's up against the bookshelves.

CECILIA

It's been there for weeks and then this morning by the fountain... I've never done anything like that before and I was so angry with you, and with myself. I thought if you went away to medical school, I'd be happy. I don't know how I could have been so ignorant about myself. So stupid.

Tears well in her eyes. He's moving closer and closer.

CECILIA

You do know what I'm talking about, don't you? You knew before I did.

ROBBIE

Why are you crying?

CECILIA

Don't you know?

ROBBIE

Yes, I know exactly.

He reaches out and draws her to him, until their faces are inches apart. He kisses her briefly and pulls back; then they look at each other and kiss again, this time a long, passionate and breathless kiss, that draws from CECILIA a falling, sighing sound. He pushes her back into the corner and she starts tearing at his shirt, pulling at his waistband. He buries his face in her breasts and she drags his head up by the hair and bites his lip. She links her hands around his neck. He reaches down under her dress and into her underwear. She kicks off her shoes and he raises one of her feet on to the lowest shelf. He undoes his buttons, lifts her dress and enters her. She turns her head sharply, biting her lip. They stop moving and slowly turn to look into each other's eyes. Then, after a long, still pause they whisper to one another, barely audible.

CECILIA

Robbie.

ROBBIE

Cecilia.

CECILIA

I love you.

ROBBIE

I love you.

She gasps as he starts moving again, crushing her against the creaking shelves. He takes her wrist and holds it back against the wall.

The door opens. CECILIA and ROBBIE freeze.

CECILIA
(*whispering*)
Someone's come in.

BRIONY
Cecilia?

CECILIA doesn't answer. ROBBIE steps back from CECILIA and begins adjusting his clothes, keeping his back to BRIONY. CECILIA tidies herself up, steps out from behind ROBBIE and pushes past BRIONY without a word. BRIONY watches her leave the room, at a loss, then turns back, startled, as she senses ROBBIE turning towards her. She takes a step back, frightened; but he merely fumbles with his bow-tie and, staring coldly past her, leaves the room.

INT. DINING ROOM. NIGHT.

BRIONY enters the dining room to find ROBBIE holding CECILIA'S chair for her to sit. Also around the table are LEON, MARSHALL, LOLA and, at the top of the table, EMILY. DANNY HARDMAN is rather sloppily pouring wine for LEON, whilst leering across the table at LOLA.

LEON
In Charlotte Street last week, people were sitting out having dinner on the pavement.

EMILY
It was always the view of my parents that hot weather encouraged loose morals. In high summer my sister and I were never allowed out of the house.

LEON
What do you say, Cee? Does the hot weather make you behave badly?

CECILIA flushes red, taken by surprise.

LEON
Good heavens, you're blushing.

CECILIA
It's just hot in here, that's all.