

# **Small States**

by Geoffrey Long

Picture this.

You've come in at the end of the credits. The director's name has put in its cameo appearance and then faded away, followed by the actors' names (birth names or pseudonyms, depending on the frailty of the ego), then the names of the producers, the production companies, the catering companies... Little trains of white letters crawl across a series of paintings, full-color Edward Hopper slices of Americana: a businessman in a city office, two old men in rocking chairs wasting time outside a countryside gas station, a woman in a polka-dot bikini on the porch of a beach house. The final painting is one of the famous ones, Lighthouse at Two Lights, 1962.

Slowly, the camera pans out and the shot widens to reveal the painting is actually a print, taped to the wall in a run-down apartment. One of the strips of tape is peeling, taking the paint with it. Shoved against the wall beneath the print is a small table, and seated at it is an old man. He is hunched over an antique typewriter, pecking furiously at the keys and squinting at the paper as it grows out of the mouth of the machine.

The shot cuts to a close-up on his hands. His fingers are gnarled, and his leathery, mottled skin is pulled tight against the bone. The notion occurs to you briefly that the fingers seem carved from some dark-stained wood, like the hands of an antique marionette, but the thought fades as the camera pans to the right. On the table beside the typewriter is a stack of paper, neatly and carefully arranged. Beside it is another stack, or rather more of a pile, with corners of sheets poking out in all directions. The top sheet on the first stack – the one you can see — is covered with line after line of tight, compact lettering.

There is a sharp *ping*, followed by a soft grunt from the old man. The shot cuts back to him as his fingers pause in mid-phrase; he gives the wheel on the side of the typewriter a spin and tears the paper the rest of the way out of the machine. With a flourish he whisks it through the air and slaps it face-down on the messy pile. He doesn't bother straightening the pile, just reaches off to the left, out of the shot, and returns with a clean sheet of paper. He feeds the new sheet into the typewriter, cracks his knuckles once with a wince, and resumes his typing. The camera comes to rest on the jumbled pile, on the new page. Again, if you look closely you can make out the words, a ragged braille impacted into the thin paper from the force of the man's typing, but they are backward, inverted, and the camera cuts away before you can make anything out.

The camera returns to a long, establishing shot. The old man is seated at the table, typing. The Hopper print is hanging over his head. The room is filled with the staccato reports of keys attacking paper. The camera pans to the left. Your eyes stay with the old man for a moment, then leap to the far edge of the shot, watching as the apartment unfolds.

The apartment walls are all the same off-beige, worn shade of yellow. There is a single window, closed and with the drapes drawn, but reddish-orange light still seeps through the thin off-white fabric. Sunset, or sunrise. Beside the window is a bookcase, filled to overflowing with books of all shapes and sizes. The hardcovers have been stripped of their dust jackets.

The camera continues its pan around the room. There is a small kitchenette just past the bookcase. In the corner, there is a small stove with a covered pot on it, but the burner beneath the pot is dark and cold. Just past the stove is a door into an adjoining room. The door is only slightly open, but you catch a glimpse of an unmade bed, and clothes crumpled on the floor. The camera keeps panning; the door slips out of the frame. There is another bookcase, even more full than the first. Beside the bookcase is a pile of boxes, with handwritten labels scrawled on them in thick, black permanent marker. The boxes take up all the room between the bookcase and the corner, and the camera continues to turn, now tracing the next wall.

There is another door. This one is closed, and sports a collection of locks and deadbolts, all secured. There is an eyehole in the door as well, and a small note taped to the inside of the door just beneath it is filled with fire escape instructions and diagrams, written in English. The camera keeps moving. Beside the door is a long, moth-eaten brown couch, and over the couch hangs a collection of photographs in battered frames: a whole series of a woman, a couple of assorted children, a few of various men, a few landscapes scattered throughout. Your eyes scan over all of them as the camera rolls past each in turn.

The camera cuts to a close-up of one of the photographs. It is black and white, fuzzy, out of focus. She is young, perhaps twenty or twenty-one, with a flowing floral print dress and long, curly hair that tumbles down around her shoulders. Her heart-shaped face is broken into a wide smile that lights up her eyes, and her head is cocked to one side. The camera has caught her in mid-laugh. She is slight, even thin – she is holding a small pile of books before her, held tight against her chest. Behind her you can see a few trees at the edge of a wide, rolling green area; the tops of buildings peek up over the tops of the trees. A city, then. A city park. You wonder what her story is.

The camera cuts back to the old man at the table. He has stopped typing and is sitting still, motionless, staring at the page in the typewriter. He is breathing heavily, the air rasping in and out of his lungs. You get a good look at him. The skin on his face is just as weathered and tightly drawn as the skin on his fingers. His hair is thinning, so much so that it seems like strands of silver thread. He does not wear glasses, but squints so sharply at the paper that his eyes are almost closed. He has a wide, bushy mustache that is the same silver as his hair but considerably thicker; the hairs of the mustache wave and ripple as his breath rasps huskily between his open lips. He closes his mouth and clears his throat. His eyes scan across the page. Finally, he reaches out, spins the wheel on the side of the typewriter and pulls the page free. He stares at the paper in his hand, not reading the words, just staring at the entire page as if he were not entirely sure where it came from. He snorts once, decisively, then slaps the page onto the pile. His stare lingers on the pile for a long second. He snorts again. He reaches out, picks up the pile in his hands, and straightens it. He smooths out the edges, taps the whole pile a few times on the table beside the typewriter, and leans back in his chair. He snorts a third time, then flips through the pages with his thumb. He nods once, satisfied, and closes the manuscript.

The camera cuts to a shot over his shoulder. Printed on the front page are two words: SMALL STATES. He opens the manuscript and begins to read. Like a ghost, you are there with him.

## ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

*(Setting: Inside of a respectable, homey college apartment. Close-up shot on a glass of water. A young woman, LAURA TEMPLE, is washing dishes in her sink. We have a close-up view of her hands, running through the water, which she leaves running from the tap. She is dressed in a white T-shirt and blue jeans, and her long hair is pulled back away from her pretty face. She appears to be in her early 20s. From the looks of things outside, it's early afternoon, on probably a Saturday.)*

LAURA (voiceover)

I know it's wasteful to leave the water running, in a conventional sense. I mean, it's only truly wasteful if it's meaningless, right? But I like the sound the running water makes, splashing into the water that's already in the sink like it's rejoining old relatives or something. So, therefore, it's not meaningless to me, and not truly a waste.

*(A beat.)*

LAURA (voiceover)

Right?

*(She finishes the dishes, takes a glass from the drying rack and fills it with water from the tap. We have a close-up as she drinks.)*

LAURA (voiceover)

When I was a little girl, my mother and I would go on walks in the park. One day, a very old woman stopped us on the path and asked me once where I came from. She asked it in that kind of sing-song way that all old people use on the very little, but I looked her in the eyes and very seriously replied that I came from the ocean. My mother struck me sharply on the back of the head, and told me not to lie.

*(She sets the glass down, wipes her hands on her jeans and walks from the sink across the apartment to where she has an easel set up with a palette of watercolors. She has painted a beachfront, a vaguely impressionist scene with a lighthouse out on a long finger of rock. The lighthouse is not yet finished. She picks up the brush, dips it in the paint, and begins to work on the lighthouse.)*

LAURA (voiceover)

Years later, I went out to the beach after school, sat on the sand and looked out at the water. It was a gray, overcast day, and the Atlantic was the same misty gray as the sky, so much so that I couldn't tell where one stopped and the other began. The ocean began just under my feet, ran all the way out into the horizon and then swung back up again, up and over my head, as far as I could see in any direction. That was when I knew that my mother had been wrong to hit me. I had been telling the truth.

*(She abruptly stops painting, looks at the canvas, then up at the framed Hopper print on her wall. She frowns, then sets down the brush. She turns, walks across the apartment, picks up a lightweight jacket off the back of a chair and leaves. The camera returns to the open window beside the easel. It overlooks a park, and in the sky we can see a kite flying.)*

LAURA (voiceover)

I guess I've been trying to get back there ever since.

## ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

*(Setting: Exterior, the park. Cut to a side shot of DAVID POWELL, running with the same kite outstretched behind him. David is a young man, about 23 or 24, and dressed in jeans, ball cap, and white T-shirt. He is struggling to keep the kite in the air. At the side of the field stands a young boy, clapping his hands. David wheels around and begins to reel in the kite, tugging it and wrestling with it, and grins triumphantly when it stays aloft. David beckons to the boy, who comes racing over to him.)*

DAVID

And that's the way you do it.

*(David hands the boy the kite and kneels down beside him. Both of them stare at the kite.)*

BOY

Thanks!

DAVID

Have fun, big guy. Now, I've got to get to the library. Your grandmother's right over there if you need her.

*(The boy ignores him, and keeps staring up at the kite. David ruffles the boy's hair, stands and walks across the field a little ways to where the GRANDMOTHER is sitting on a bench.)*

DAVID

The kid's a natural.

GRANDMOTHER

He'll make a great pilot someday.

DAVID

No doubt about it. Well, I'd better get a move on.

GRANDMOTHER

Of course, dear, of course. I'm sure you're very busy. Thank you for showing Toby how to fly his kite.

DAVID

My pleasure. Anytime.

*(David smiles at her again and waves good-bye, then continues to the sidewalk and off towards the library. The camera follows him from such an angle that we see his head against the sky, and then the camera pans up to the sky and lingers there.)*

DAVID (voiceover)

I've always been fascinated with the sky, the way it stretches out forever. Some days, like this one, are so clear and beautiful that it's difficult to believe that the sky is real. The clouds are so sharp and perfect, it's like someone stretched a canvas across the universe and replaced the sky with a perfect mural, like a Hopper painting.

*(The camera pans back down to see David's back as he keeps walking.)*

### ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

*(Setting: Interior, a medium-sized public library. The camera is staring down an aisle, and Laura is sitting Indian-style on the floor at the end of the aisle, almost against the wall. She is flipping through a rather sizable book of Hopper prints. We watch her flip through several pages, then she finally settles on the same print of the lighthouse that was hanging on her wall. As she looks at it, the camera cuts back up again to show David wandering down the aisle towards her. He stops beside her and looks at the books on the shelf in front of her, not finding what he is looking for. Laura looks up, sees him, and begins to scoot out of the way. David raises a hand.)*

DAVID

Don't bother, it's all right. Don't let me disturb you. I couldn't find what I was looking for anyway... Oh.

*(He has spotted the book lying open in Laura's lap. Laura looks down at the book and then back up at David. She begins to close it hurriedly.)*

LAURA

Oh, I'm sorry. Here. I don't need it. I've read it a dozen times already.

DAVID

No, please, keep it. So have I.

*(They smile briefly at each other. David gestures to the spot beside her.)*

DAVID

Do you mind?

LAURA

Hm? Oh! No, please do...

*(David lowers himself down and sits beside her. Laura opens the book back up to the painting of the lighthouse.)*

DAVID

*The Lighthouse at Two Lights.* One of his classics.

LAURA

It's one of my favorites.

DAVID

Mine, too. I have a print of it hanging in my studio.

LAURA

Really? So do I.

*(She blushes.)*

LAURA

Well, it's not much of a studio, really. More like an easel set up next to the window in my living room.

DAVID

You paint, then?

LAURA

A little.

DAVID

I'm impressed. I've never been able to make the brushes do what I wanted them to.



LAURA

Then what do you do in your studio?

DAVID

Photography, mostly.

LAURA (intrigued)

Professionally?

DAVID

Oh, no. It's only a hobby. Besides, I'm afraid not many people would be very impressed by the kind of photography I do. It may be a bit too... artistic for people's tastes around here.

LAURA

Oh?

*(Laura is slightly taken aback. David notices this and quickly shakes his head, embarrassed.)*

DAVID

No, no, nothing like that! Really. My work is more conceptual, more modern. It's like... Like magical realism on film.

*(Suddenly a librarian appears at the end of the aisle and shushes them. They nod and smile apologetically to her, and then David turns to Laura. He offers her his hand. She takes it.)*

DAVID

I'm David, by the way. David Powell.

LAURA

Laura Temple. It's a pleasure meeting you, David.

DAVID

The pleasure's all mine.

LAURA (blushing)

They're going to chase us out of here in a minute. Would you... Would you like to continue this over coffee?

DAVID

Well, I...

LAURA

I'm sorry. Listen to me. Now who's being too forward?

*(David smiles at her.)*

DAVID

Not at all. I know a great place down on the square.

*(They stand and leave the aisle as the camera turns and focuses in on the books.)*

There is a shift in focus, and the camera pans back out to the books in the bookcase in the old man's apartment. For the first time you notice that his collection includes numerous books on Hopper, lighthouses and photography. The camera is focused in on his books, but then turns slowly to take in the old man, still seated at the typewriter. He is holding the screenplay in his hands. We can see the window just past him – the sun has completely set and now the light coming in from the outside is taking on a cooler, more electric hue. From outside we can hear the sounds of traffic.

The old man nods, satisfied with himself. With a sigh he sets the screenplay down on the table, stands up from the table and stares down momentarily at the typewriter.

"And boy meets girl," he mumbles. He groans quietly, scratches his stomach, and then the camera follows him as he makes his way over to the kitchenette. He reaches up into one of the cabinets and pulls out a glass. He carefully pushes a few of the dishes in the sink out of the way, then holds the glass under the tap as he pours himself a glass of water. When it's about half full, he lifts it up in front of his eyes and

stares at it. He sighs, then sets the glass down on the counter and shakes his head. He reaches up and massages his forehead.

“No,” he says to himself. “They forget the drinks.”

He picks up the glass and carries it with him as he makes his way back to the table, and the camera follows him as he goes. He lowers himself carefully into his chair and picks up the screenplay again, frowning. He flips several pages forward in the script and then resumes reading.

## ACT ONE, SCENE SIX

*(Cut to David and Laura, walking down a city street.)*

DAVID

So where are you from?

LAURA

New England. Connecticut, actually -- one of what my father used to call the small states.

*(David chuckles.)*

LAURA

What?

DAVID

Small states. It was one of my father's favorite expressions. But he didn't use it like that.

*(Laura looks at him curiously.)*

DAVID

Dad used to say that we always carry around these small states, these tiny frames of life that make up our memories. As a moment slips into the past, it becomes part of our country, our empire.

*(She nods.)*

LAURA

That's nice. Like every moment of your life you're conquering new territory.

DAVID

Something like that.

*(A beat.)*

LAURA

So where are you from?

DAVID

Oh, all over the place. My mother died when I was little, and my father was a travel photographer, so he used to take me with him everywhere he went. He'd pull me out of school for months at a time to haul me around from Argentina to Zimbabwe and back. My grandma always used to worry about my education, but I learned plenty just travelling around.

LAURA

And you learned photography from him.

DAVID

Pretty much. I loved the way the whole world opened up when I looked through that lens. It was like something magical happened when I was doing what I was meant to do, you know? That's the best evidence for

the existence of God that I've ever found -- the way the world can just stop sometimes and let you know that you're on the right path.

*(Another beat. Suddenly, David stops.)*

DAVID

Would you like to see it?

LAURA

What?

DAVID

My work. Would you like to see some of it? My place isn't very far from here.

LAURA

Um... Sure. I'd love to.

*(David smiles at her and they walk off-camera.)*

## ACT ONE, SCENE SEVEN

*(Setting: Interior, a staircase descending into a basement. The light is very dim, coming from the top of the stairs. David is leading.)*

DAVID

Hang on. I'll get the lights.

*(David reaches the bottom of the stairs and then flicks a switch. The basement is flooded with light. The camera cuts to Laura as she reaches the bottom of the stairs and sees his place. She gasps and beams in amazement. We see her face before we see the room.)*

LAURA

Wow.

*(We cut to Laura's point of view as the camera pans around the room. It's full of photography equipment and props. There is a bed off in one corner, and a set of cinder blocks and boards that make up a makeshift set of bookshelves, which are overflowing with art books and photography books. There is a camera set up with a big blue cloth backdrop against one wall. Between camera and backdrop is a Romanesque column set on the floor, on which is a collection of still life: a globe, a pocketwatch and a few other assorted trinkets. Strung up behind it, and against the blue cloth, is a set of white Christmas lights. Laura crosses to the still life and stares wonderingly at it. Smiling, David comes up behind her.)*

LAURA

It's beautiful.

DAVID

Well, it's not quite the complete effect. Here.

*(David crosses to the opposite wall, which is covered with photography prints of the still life in question, with various other images superimposed over it. There are also scores of prints of other works of his. Laura crosses to him and gapes at the images.)*

DAVID

See, I superimpose other images over the still lifes, for the final effect.

LAURA

They're wonderful.

*(David looks at the wall, which Laura is studying closely.)*

DAVID (embarrassed)

Well, no, but... Thank you.

*(Laura reaches up and pulls down a portrait of a beautiful young woman with a crown of roses.)*

LAURA

Is this... Someone special?

DAVID

She's my cousin.

LAURA (relieved, but trying to be subtle)

It's a beautiful portrait.

*(She looks up at the wall, and the camera pans across the various images. There is one of a computer sitting on a table in the middle of a field, and another with David sitting in front of a white backdrop in a brown suit and vest, only he is barefoot and surrounded by clocks; each of these has the sky superimposed over them. There is another series of photographs, all of lighthouses. These catch her eye almost instantly.)*

LAURA

These lighthouses. Where did you take them?

*(David looks at them sadly.)*

DAVID (quietly)

One of the first photos I ever took was of the lighthouse out on the bay. My father and I went out there one afternoon after school, and he showed me how to use his camera. I was seven. He kept that picture, an uneven, out-of-focus snapshot of the lighthouse, framed on the wall of his study as long as I can remember. Then, a few years ago, he and I took a drive up the coast. I would make us stop every so often, whenever I saw a great one. They reminded me...

LAURA

...Of Hopper.

DAVID

That's right.

LAURA

I've been working on a series of paintings, based on his work...

*(A beat.)*

LAURA

Do you think I could borrow one of these? To use for a painting?

DAVID

Sure. Take any one you like.

*(Laura studies the wall for a moment, then selects one of them and gently pulls it down. It is a picture of a lighthouse balanced perfectly between the sky and the water, with the sky grey and overcast, reflected in the water.)*

LAURA

This one. Definitely this one.

DAVID

That's one of my favorites.

LAURA

I'll take very good care of it.

DAVID

I know.

*(There is a moment of silence as they look at each other, and realize that a kiss is imminent. David steps closer, and Laura moves as if she is about to take him up on it, but then ducks away.)*

LAURA

It's getting kind of late... I have someplace to be tomorrow morning.



*(David recovers gracefully and glances at his watch.)*

DAVID

Shall I walk you home?

LAURA

If you don't mind too much, I think I'd rather walk by myself tonight.  
You know.

*(She flashes him a quick smile and holds up the picture.)*

LAURA

To think about the painting I'm going to do.

DAVID (smiling)

I'll walk you to the door.

## ACT ONE, SCENE EIGHT

*(Cut to the front door; David is silhouetted against the doorframe, and Laura is walking down the sidewalk. The sun is setting, casting a ruddy glow over everything. There is no sound; music is playing, as Laura waves goodbye and David waves back. She walks off down the sidewalk and David watches her go. Finally she reaches the corner, and once there she pauses and glances back over her shoulder. He is still standing in the doorway. She waves to him again, and he returns it. Laura smiles to herself and walks briskly down the sidewalk, but before too long she is looking at the photograph in her hand. The camera lingers on the image, and there is a shift of focus; when the camera pulls back again, we are in Laura's apartment.)*

*(She is in her nightclothes, wearing her glasses, and the photograph is pinned to the side of the canvas. The previous painting is sitting on the floor, forgotten, and she is painting furiously on the new canvas, producing a real work of art. The clock reads 1:30 AM.)*

*(Focus on the clock for a moment; there is a focus shift, and light dissolves into the picture as the clock face changes*

*to 9:29 AM. Pull back out; the painting is finished, and Laura is lying asleep on the couch, exhausted.)*

*(Suddenly the numbers click to 9:30, the alarm clicks on and NPR fills the room. Laura groans from the couch and sits up, rubbing her eyes and groping for her glasses. She slips them on, then stands up and stumbles her way over to the painting. She blinks at it blearily; the camera shifts to her POV, a kind of wavery, strange perspective. The painting fills the shot. Suddenly, in the sky behind the lighthouse in the painting, a seagull flies up from behind the lighthouse and off into the sky. Cut back to a side shot of Laura, who gasps in astonishment. She blinks blearily again and stares at the painting, but there is no more movement. She shakes her head and rubs her eyes, then moves off away from the painting, still shaking her head as she goes to take her shower.)*

Setting: Interior, the old man's apartment. The camera cuts back to show the old man sitting at the kitchen table, still reading the manuscript. He sets it down and scratches his chin.

"She shakes her head and rubs her eyes," he mumbles to himself. "...Then moves off away from the painting, still shaking her head but smiling as she goes to take her shower."

He stands and begins to walk to the bedroom. As he goes, we see something we didn't notice before: on the wall next to his bedroom door hangs a large photomontage, like the ones David made. The camera lingers on the picture for a moment, then the old man reemerges from his bedroom wearing a battered old raincoat and a floppy fisherman's cap. The camera follows him as he crosses the room to the table and gathers up the manuscript. Mumbling softly to himself, he goes to the door, undoes the locks, opens it, and leaves the apartment.

Cut to a shot of the roof of the building. The door to the stairs opens and the old man steps out into the cold early evening air. He is still carrying the manuscript. His breath emerging in small clouds from beneath his moustache, he crosses the roof to where a chair is set by the edge of the roof, overlooking a small city square. Other high-rise apartment buildings frame the building behind him, but from the chair you can see the city park, and then the beach off in the distance.

The old man settles himself in the chair with a sigh, then picks up the manuscript again. He lets the light wind toy with the pages in his hands, picking the next spot to begin his reading.

*Flitter. Flap, flitter.*

He lays one gnarled finger down to stop the pages, and reshuffles the pile. In the early moonlight and in the glow of the city, the old man continues to read.

## ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR

*(Open on the quad of a college campus – there are students milling about all over the place, laughing, carrying books, chatting gaily among themselves. The camera pans across the crowd until it rests on two young women walking across the quad, chatting about nothing. One of them is Laura. She is wearing a flowing floral print*

*dress, and her hair hangs loose around her shoulders. She is laughing happily, and then something catches her eye. The camera tracks her gaze – sitting on a bench on the far end of the quad is David, carrying a canvas shoulder bag.)*

LAURA

I'm sorry, Julie. I've got to run – I'll call you later.

JULIE

That's him, isn't it?

LAURA (blushing)

Yes.

*(Julie shoos Laura on her way, and the camera cuts to an over-the-shoulder shot of David as Laura walks up to him.)*

DAVID

Hi.

LAURA

Hey.

DAVID

I was hoping I'd find you here.

LAURA

Oh?

DAVID

Do you have a minute?

LAURA (coyly)

I don't know – I've still got a lot to do this afternoon...

DAVID

Please?

LAURA

Okay. Sure.

*(David reaches into his bag and pulls out his camera.)*

DAVID

I'd like to take your picture.

*(Laura stares at him for a minute. Slowly, a smile lights up her face.)*

LAURA

All right. Let's go to the park.

*(Cut to a slow montage of the two of them in the park, Laura posing as David snaps her picture. He is smiling, and she is laughing. The shutter clicks in a rapid staccato rhythm as Laura spins around the park, leans against trees, kneels at the edge of a pond with a duck, and finally stands at the edge of the lawn with her books in front of her, laughing at something David has said... The camera lingers on that shot: her heart-shaped face is broken into a wide smile that lights up her eyes, her head is cocked to one side. The camera has caught her in mid-laugh. She is slight, even thin – she is holding a small pile of books before her, held tight against her chest. Behind her you can see a few trees at the edge of a wide, rolling green area; the tops of buildings peek up over the tops of the trees. A city, then. A city park. You wonder what her story is.)*

The old man is staring out over the park below him. There are tears in his eyes, which he brushes away with his fingertips. Again, he lets the wind take the pages and play with them, until he lays a finger down in a spot that is still relatively near the beginning of the screenplay. The old man clears his throat, blinks his eyes, and begins to read.

## ACT ONE, SCENE TWELVE

*(Open on a beach, down by the waterfront. The sun is rising. Laura and David are sitting side by side on the sand, looking out at the sun coming up over the ocean. Off in the distance there is a single lighthouse, standing on a long finger of rock. David is staring at the water, and Laura is staring at David expectantly. There is a long moment of silence as Laura's eyes search David's face, and then she looks out at the water. There is another minute of silence, and then Laura speaks, in a quiet voice.)*

LAURA

Do you know why I fell in love with Hopper?

DAVID

Why?

LAURA

Because of the lighthouses. They remind me of love.

*(David looks at her.)*

LAURA

Lighthouses stand on the edge of the ocean and the sky, caught right there between two worlds. And they're there as beacons, guiding ships past the rocks in the night. I mean, wherever you see a lighthouse, you know there's going to be trouble because of the rocks... But you know that someone's there to help guide you through it.

*(David's eyes search her face. She turns to look at him; her eyes are uncertain. The camera cuts down to David's hand as he reaches out and slowly takes her hand. Tentatively, their fingers intertwine, and then weave together so they are holding hands. Cut back up to their faces as they smile at each other, then laugh nervously. Laura looks away from him and out at the sunset, but does not take her hand away. David smiles – at her or at himself is uncertain, perhaps irrelevant – and then he looks out at the sunset as well.)*

DAVID

Do you know why *I* fell in love with Hopper?

LAURA

Why?

DAVID

It's his small states, his small slices of American life. I look at those paintings and I realize that life may never really be that way, but it was to Hopper.

LAURA

You don't think he made those scenes up?

DAVID

Does it matter?

*(Laura looks at him.)*

LAURA

What do you mean?

*(David keeps staring out at the lighthouse.)*

DAVID

Those scenes may not have happened that way, but what Hopper painted is what happened for him. That was the other thing that my father taught me about the small states in our memories – we are their rulers, their emperors. When a memory is out of line, when what actually happened does not quite live up to what the memory means to us, we reshape it, reform it, recast it... If Hopper saw a man sitting at a café on the corner of a street, but what he felt required a waitress and a couple of other clients sitting around drinking their coffee, then that's what he put

into Nighthawks. Or... Or if I were an old man, who had lost his wife of thirty years, I might try to set down my memories in a way that might more accurately describe the magic the two of us had than reality could ever have been bothered to do.

*(It is Laura's turn to search David's face. She gives his hand a squeeze, then looks out at the sunset. She lays her head on his shoulder, and the two of them watch the sun disappear over the water.)*

The old man sets the screenplay down on the rooftop beside him, and weighs it down with a rock so it won't blow away. He looks down over the side of the building at the square below, where the evening's nightlife is just getting started. About a dozen young couples are milling around in the square, talking, laughing, holding hands. He looks at them, looks at the way they hold themselves, at the way they look at each other and hold each other, and he remembers. He cracks his knuckles, clears his throat, and continues to watch them. He holds up his index fingers, extends his thumbs, brings his hands together and then brings them up in front of his face, his fingers forming a picture frame. He slowly pans the frame across the crowd. He imagines he can see their faces up close, see them laughing, see them loving each other the way he once loved her.

And then he sees her. She is standing behind another couple, just in the shadows of one of the trees, and she is looking at him. She is wearing the same beautiful floral dress, and she has a small pile of books clutched to her chest. She is looking right at him, and he can see her smiling.

Off in the distance, above the trees in the square, you can see the beach. A single kite is silhouetted against the deep, rich purple of the nighttime sky, gently riding the wind, and every few minutes it is lit up with a flash of pale light as the lighthouse out in the bay sweeps its light over the gentle, airborne cloth. The camera lingers on the kite for just a moment, and then fades to black.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Geoffrey Long** has always loved to read, write, and design, which led him to found *Inkblots Magazine* in 1995. Oedipus Press, the company he founded to publish *Inkblots*, became Dreamsbay Media Labs two years later and was rechristened The Dreamsbay Company in 2000. He has studied at the College of Wooster, the University of Exeter in England, and Kenyon College, where he received his BA in English and Philosophy in 2000. His writing has appeared in several newspapers and magazines including *Polaris*, *Gothik*, *{fray}* and *Hika*, and has received a few small accolades. His personal site/portfolio is available at [geoffreylong.com](http://geoffreylong.com). He presently resides in the Washington, DC metro area.



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