

FADE IN:

INT: LEGAL OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

All the trappings of cherry wood paneling, and brass accoutrements abound throughout. All is silent, until...

The double doors of a boardroom burst open as AARON LEVINE (45) storms out, briefcase in hand, with two PARALEGALS in tow. Chaos and commotion continues in the boardroom, as AARON rounds the hallway. The paralegals disperse, and AARON is intercepted by MARGOT, (55) his assistant. They continue in tandem, down the hallway at a rushed pace.

AARON

Seven hours of deliberation over  
a lousy three-million dollar estate?

MARGOT

(authoritative)

Aaron.

AARON

Why can I never say no to these  
cases...these brain-sucking  
cases? I wish to God I would've  
stuck to corporate law...give me  
some good bureaucratic bullshit...

MARGOT

A vacation once every decade  
wouldn't hurt.

AARON

Don't start.

MARGOT

Why do you find normalcy so  
intimidating? It's the human  
thing to do. Detach. Escape.  
Forget. Sharpen the saw.

Aaron and Margot enter Aaron's office; a minimalist's collection of modern scandinavian furnishings, and Bang & Olafsen stereo components all arranged with Feng Shui savvy.

Aaron transfers some papers from his credenza to his briefcase, while Margot looks on from the doorway.

AARON

Yeah, just ask Lou Freeman.

MARGOT

Who?

Aaron glares at Margot as if she should know.

AARON

Lou Freeman, junior partner at Cardenas and Savoy.

Margot shrugs.

AARON

He took a little soul searching sabbatical to India last year, slipped into a bar to sample the local color, and woke up in an alley the next morning...one kidney shy of a pair.

MARGOT

(shaking her head)  
You're over-dramatizing.

AARON

True story. Anyway, I had a few weeks off last year, and I...

MARGOT

Aaron, rehab doesn't count.

AARON

'got back in shape, and a hell of a tan.

MARGOT

A definite improvement. Oh, I almost forgot...

Margot hands Aaron a black & silver watch.

MARGOT  
It shouldn't give you any more  
trouble.

AARON  
(emphatically grateful)  
Oh, thank God. I'm like the walking  
dead without it.

Aaron studies the watch carefully.

AARON  
This is the second repair this  
year...piece of shit.

Margot exchanges eye contact with Aaron in silence  
for a beat, which provokes Aaron's curiosity.

AARON:  
(rolling his eyes)  
What's on your mind, Margot?

MARGOT  
Silicone.

AARON  
You? Oh please.

MARGOT  
(offended)  
Not me. Our new paralegal...and  
don't pretend you don't notice.  
None of the partners can concen-  
trate...I'm sick to death of all  
this frat-house humor, and...

AARON  
Margot, I had to do something.  
You were on vacation, and I  
had to replace Naomi.

MARGOT  
She was doing fine, and showing  
some real promise when I left.

AARON

She didn't fit in.

MARGOT

Fit in? To what? A thirty-six-"D"?

AARON

Enough! I'm the litigator, remember?

Margot backs off for a beat, realizing the line she has just crossed, but her concern for Aaron gets the best of her.

MARGOT

Aaron, do you know how long  
I've been with the firm?

Aaron attempts to walk past her, shaking his head, Margot grabs his arm, stopping him in mid-stride.

MARGOT

(continuing)

I've seen this before. There's  
no polite way to say it...I think  
you're losing your edge.

Margot leans in closer to Aaron who is suddenly attentive.

MARGOT

(confidential)

Put some distance between your work  
and your life, before you can't tell  
one from the other. And what about  
a family?

AARON

(uncomfortable)

Oh, Christ Margot.

MARGOT

You and Natalie are still young.  
Give me one good reason why...

Their conversation is abruptly interrupted by a heated exchange between the BATTLING SPOUSES, in the lobby,

adjacent to Aaron's office.  
They are quickly escorted out.

Margot and Aaron exchange glares, and a beat of silence.

AARON  
I'll give you two.

Margot sighs, holding her forehead.

AARON  
A volatile combination like that  
should be denied the right to  
procreate. It amazes me that they  
figured out how, let alone reach  
a settlement.

MARGOT  
The Chandlers? That wasn't a  
marriage...it was a train wreck.  
You and Natalie, on the other hand  
...what are you afraid of?

AARON  
(ignoring Margot's comment)  
It's just a matter of time before  
they bring the kids into it.  
Trust me, you'll see. I can't  
wait to meet the offspring!

MARGOT  
(offering Aaron his overcoat)  
At the reading of the wills perhaps?

Aaron places his watch on a nearby desk as he wrestles  
into his coat.

AARON  
A divorce-probate package deal?  
Hmmm, I like the sound of that,  
Margot.

Margot checks her watch.

MARGOT  
(admiring)

You're hopeless...and you're late.  
Isn't Mrs. Levine expecting you?

Aaron steps into a waiting ELEVATOR .

AARON  
Yes. I'm late...always late.  
But never forgetful.

Aaron taps a finger on his forehead.

MARGOT  
(sighing)  
I know, Aaron.

Margot effortlessly tosses Aaron the watch which he left on the desk.

MARGOT  
'Mind like a steel trap.

Aaron catches the watch through the crack of the closing elevator doors, and clumsily drops his briefcase, looking up at Margot as the doors close.

MARGOT  
Give Natalie my regards.

INT: ELEVATOR - MOVING - LATE AFTERNOON

Aaron straps on his watch, as the elevator slows to a stop at the 7th floor.

INSERT:

L.E.D. FLOOR INDICATOR STOPPING AT NUMBER "7"

ON SCENE:

Aaron peers down at his watch.

AARON  
Come on, damn it.

A LARGE MAN in a wrinkled, dark suit enters without a word, stands next to Aaron, and sizes him up and down.

Aaron nervously peers over his shoulder through the corner of his eye.

INSERT:

L.E.D. FLOOR INDICATOR STOPPING AT NUMBER "6"

Aaron becomes red in the face, and looks at his watch as the man exits.

As the doors begin to close, Aaron can't resist the temptation...

AARON

Something wrong with the fucking stairs?

The man turns slowly toward Aaron, who only catches a glimpse of the man's profile through the closing elevator doors.

Aaron smiles, amused at his clean getaway.

INT: LOBBY OF POSH OFFICE BUILDING - LATE AFTERNOON

The elevator doors open as Aaron is rushed by TAYLOR, (34) a leggy blonde, dressed impeccably.

Taylor backs Aaron into the elevator.

TAYLOR

There you are.

Aaron is stiff, and surprised. As Taylor locks him into a deep kiss before he can even clear the elevator doors, he gradually melts into her embrace.

AARON

What are you doing here?

TAYLOR

(teasing)

'thought you could give me a lift.

Taylor moves in dangerously close.

TAYLOR  
Going up?...forty-second floor...  
ladies' lingerie.

The doors begin to close, as Aaron blocks them with his one free arm.

AARON  
Come on, we're late as hell.

They exit the elevator and rush across the lobby.

TAYLOR  
No fault of mine, I'm afraid.

AARON  
Not this time.

EXT. VALET STAND - NIGHT

Aaron shuts Taylor's door, and rounds the front of his late-model Mercedes. Without eye contact, he slaps a tip into a VALET'S hand as he passes.

With a chirp of its tires, the Benz speeds out of the drive. A DARK FIGURE comes out of nowhere, stepping into the path of the Mercedes, which screeches to a halt. The figure stands stationary.

INT. MERCEDES - SKIDDING - NIGHT

Aaron slams on the brakes, and Taylor stiff-arms the dashboard, to brace for impact.

INSERT:

Taylor's tennis bracelet which loosens at the clasp, and falls to the floor.

ON SCENE:

Aaron slams his open hand on to the horn in anger.

AARON  
Shit! You stupid bastard!



The figure raises his head, and smiles at Aaron through the windshield, then quickly disappears. Aaron is momentarily frozen, as he recognizes the same man whom he encountered in the elevator.

Taylor adjusts herself, and peers through the windshield for the source of the near collision.

TAYLOR  
Did I miss something?

Aaron speeds off, much more alert.

AARON  
'Nerves are a little frayed  
tonight, 'sorry.

Taylor reaches over to Aaron, grasping his thigh.

TAYLOR  
Listen, arriving late is much more  
fashionable than arriving dead...  
you need to relax, and slow down.

Aaron nods, and smiles at Taylor, reassuringly.

EXT. FLOATING BRIDGE - LIGHT TRAFFIC - SUNDOWN

Aaron's Mercedes rushes by.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DUSK

Aaron's Mercedes pulls up on the outer fringe of the parking area, the headlights go out, as the passenger door opens.

INT. MERCEDES - IDLING - NIGHT

AARON  
I'm sorry we're late.

TAYLOR  
That's alright, honey...

Taylor leans over to Aaron as they exchange another pas-

sionate kiss.

TAYLOR

...I'm certain Natalie will understand.

Taylor opens her door to leave, as Aaron reaches over, grasping her arm.

AARON

(stern)

Taylor?

Taylor turns to see Aaron's sincere expression.

AARON

Please...be careful.

TAYLOR

(dreamy)

I can't wait until this whole charade is over.

Aaron nods, speechless as Taylor exits the Mercedes, and walks away as Aaron speeds off.

INT. OPULENT HOTEL BALLROOM - COCKTAIL PARTY - EVENING

Throughout the room, beneath a large banner which reads: "BEAT BECKER!" appear other election signs bearing the name of "NATALIE LEVINE" (41) who is surrounded by a loyal THRONG OF WELL-WISHERS stirring their cocktails, and sharing a laugh.

SUPPORTER

So Natalie, what's the first thing you'll do when you take office next November?

NATALIE

Aren't you being a bit presumptuous Daniel? For God's sake don't jinx my campaign before we're even airborne.

WOMAN

Well, you are the favored

contender, after all...

NATALIE

Favored? By who? Certainly not by the majority of local business. Let's not forget what put Fox County on the map; real estate.

The bystanders nod in agreement.

NATALIE

(continues)

And I think we all agree that capitalizing on our richest resource will be our self-destruction, in less than a decade if we don't curtail commercial development by this time next year. We've got lots of work to do.

RANDALL NYGARD, (36) approaches Natalie from behind, accompanied by a well-dressed woman in her 70's. She seems nervous, and uncomfortable with the crowd. Randall taps Natalie lightly on the shoulder.

NATALIE

You all know Randall, my right arm?

Randall shakes the first hand offered to him.

RANDALL

(pensive)

Natalie, a word?

RANDALL

Natalie, I'm sure you remember Mrs. Stenberg.

Natalie offers a blank expression, and glances at Randall for assistance.

Randall rescues her from her memory lapse, whispering in her ear.

RANDALL

The Stenberg estate?

Natalie politely her hand, patting with the other.

NATALIE

Of course, my condolences, I was so sorry to hear of your husband's passing. He did so much for our state. I was a real fan.

MRS. STENBERG

And were he alive today, he'd be one of yours, I assure you.

Randall wastes no time getting back to business.

RANDALL

Mrs. Stenberg has extended a kind offer for the use of her estate for our September rally.

NATALIE

(enthusiastic)

Outstanding! How can we say no? What a gracious gesture...

Mrs. Stenberg motions her to stop.

MRS. STENBERG

Please, consider it a gesture on Mr. Stenberg's behalf.

Mrs. Stenberg walks away. She seems sad. Natalie and Randall watch her exit the room.

RANDALL

(smug)

What was it again you called me?  
Your right arm?

Natalie embraces Randall.

NATALIE'S P.O.V.

A small crowd shuffles over toward Natalie and Randall.

ON SCENE:

NATALIE

(under her breath)  
Randall, I can't handle all these  
questions alone. Please stay  
close.

She releases Randall from her arms.

RANDALL

You're not alone.

Randall points to the back of the room as he clears his  
throat to redirect Natalie's attention.

Natalie takes a sip of her champagne as she peers across  
the ballroom.

NATALIE'S P.O.V.

Aaron enters the ballroom. He seems self-conscious, and  
a bit out of place.

ON SCENE:

Natalie motions toward Aaron for the benefit of her  
peers.

NATALIE

Hmmm...my late husband.

Her supporters release collective laughter.

RANDALL

Let's give Mrs. Levine some  
time with her number-one contri-  
butor, shall we?

Natalie and Randall make their way across the ballroom  
toward Aaron.

NATALIE

(through a permanent grin)  
We're gonna get crushed aren't we?

RANDALL

Relax Nat, we still have three months left. We'll lobby hard. The conservationists are eating up your wildlife initiatives, and Douglas County? Hell, they'll never let the growth amendment pass...you're their only hope. And just look at this reception. Fox is definitely in our corner.

NATALIE

Two counties out of forty-two? Let's do the math...

RANDALL

Don't get cynical on me, Nat, not now, we've worked too hard.

Natalie pats Randall's hand.

NATALIE

You're right. Of course.

Randall is distracted by something, and excuses himself.

RANDALL

'be right back.

Natalie approaches Aaron, and kisses him on the cheek.

NATALIE

Don't tell me...the Chandlers still splitting hairs over their estate?

AARON

I could've stayed at the office longer, but hey...

Aaron raises his glass.

AARON

...free booze.

Natalie glares at Aaron. Her concerned expression speaks volumes.

AARON  
(defensive)  
Limited to just one, of course...

NATALIE  
(whispering)  
I'm glad you're here.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Across the ballroom, a plain clothes SECURITY OFFICER whispers something in Randall's ear. Randall nods, as he makes eye contact with Aaron.

ON SCENE:

AARON  
(furtively scanning the room)  
How's everything going?

NATALIE  
Fabulous, for the most part.

Randall approaches the Levines.

NATALIE  
Randall. You remember my husband.

Randall offers Aaron his hand. They shake.

RANDALL  
(effervescent)  
Of course, Aaron, how've you been?  
I thought these political gatherings weren't your cup of java.

AARON  
Actually, I...

RANDALL  
(interrupting)

You should be proud of your wife...she's going to make one hell of a legislator.

NATALIE

And I owe that to one hell of a campaign manager.

Randall spreads his arms wide.

RANDALL

Team players, one-and-all.

Randall reaches out to grab the arm of a passer-by, and continues.

RANDALL

...some of us, of course more reliable than others...where have you been?

Randall swings the girl around to join their circle. It's Taylor.

TAYLOR

'sorry...rush hour, you know.

NATALIE

(uncertain how to introduce him)  
Taylor, this is Aaron...uh, my husband...Mr. Levine.

TAYLOR

(steady)  
Mr. Levine.

AARON

It's a pleasure.

RANDALL

(to Taylor)  
Stirring up some useful P.R. I hope.

Natalie wastes no time getting back to business.

NATALIE



Taylor, we're joined at the hip  
till morning, okay?

(to Randall)

Keep an eye on him.

RANDALL

You bet.

Aaron and Randall pause for a beat, watching Natalie and Taylor disappear into the crowd. Natalie mentions Mrs. Stenberg to Taylor, as they pace across the ballroom.

RANDALL

Well this is a rare appearance,  
Aaron. 'Business slow?

AARON

On the contrary.

RANDALL

Why don't you join us for the  
Open Space Inspection next  
weekend? We're taking Natalie's  
campaign off-road, so-to-speak.

AARON

I'll have to skip it Randall,  
I'm not much of an outdoorsman.

Aaron sips his Gin and Tonic.

Randall studies Aaron's demeanor.

RANDALL

No, I suppose not.

Both men seem to be at a loss for words, for a beat. Randall redirects his attention across the room toward Natalie.

RANDALL

Fox County will be an endless  
sea of rooftops if Becker serves  
another term.

He pauses for a beat, contemplative.

RANDALL  
(continuing)  
You know I'd do anything to see  
Natalie win this election, Aaron.

AARON  
What more could you do?...  
when do you sleep?

Randall takes a step closer to Aaron, and looks him in the eye.

RANDALL  
(confrontational)  
I manage. Though I wonder how  
you sleep. And I wonder how such  
a successful attorney can be  
such a lousy liar.

AARON:  
Who the hell are you talking to?

RANDALL  
I'm telling you, whatever game  
you're playing with Taylor better  
stop right here, and right now.

Aaron glares at Randall for a beat.

RANDALL  
'you think I'm an idiot?I get  
paid to watch over Natalie in  
your absence. I have friends  
in high places with sharp eyes,  
and big mouths.

Aaron shamefully glances at the floor, then back at Randall with a tightened jaw. He's been exposed.

RANDALL  
Relax. There's a lot more than  
the reputation of your firm at  
stake here, Aaron...but maybe  
that's enough for you. Watch

your step...I'm warning you.

Randall ambles away from Aaron, his eyes still fixed upon Aaron as he joins the gathering crowd.

Aaron puts down his drink, and stares across the ball-room floor for a few beats.

Randall joins Taylor and Natalie who has her back to Aaron. Taylor's eyes lock on to Aaron for a beat as Randall turns to look over his shoulder at Aaron. Natalie turns to look as well.

Aaron turns away from Taylor's gaze. He is joined at the bar by another well-dressed businessman.

AARON

(to bartender)

A double this time.

Across the room, Natalie, Taylor and Randall are all looking in Aaron's direction.

RANDALL

(halfway whispering)

Son of a bitch.

TAYLOR

(offended)

What's he doing here? Natalie!

NATALIE

Shhh. The least I could do was send him an invitation. It's just like him to actually show up.

RANDALL

I'll take care of this.

Natalie reaches out to stop Randall's advance.

NATALIE

Wait, let's have some fun.  
Watch this.

Natalie looks over toward Aaron, and waves.

Back at the bar, Aaron and the gent next to him, ART BECKER (55), simultaneously return Natalie's wave. Stopping in mid-motion, they turn and face each other, both are embarrassed.

AARON

Mr. Becker. I hardly recognized you without your entourage.

BECKER

Mr. Levine. Aaron is it?

(to bartender)

Bourbon and soda.

(back to Aaron)

Nice to finally meet you.

AARON

(unimpressed)

Likewise.

The two men shake hands firmly.

The BARTENDER hands Becker his DRINK.

BECKER

Thanks, son.

Natalie, Randall and Taylor observe from across the room.

RANDALL

(stewing)

Becker's got his head so far up the developers' asses, he can see daylight.

NATALIE

(calming)

Go easy.

Taylor takes this exchange as an opportunity to walk away.

Aaron and Becker work on their drinks back at the bar.

BECKER  
(scanning the room)  
Nice little gathering, don't  
you think?

Aaron nods.

BECKER  
Much more than I expected from  
a little county like Fox.

AARON  
(bold, self-confident)  
So tell me Mr. Becker, I'm  
curious, all differences in  
opinion aside...

BECKER  
Yes?

AARON  
(continuing)  
Besides the balls it took to show  
your face at my wife's party, what  
do you think you've got that she  
doesn't?

Becker polishes off his drink, and leans in closer to  
Aaron, brandishing his empty glass before Aaron's eyes.

BECKER  
(subduing his tone)  
More than just this much of a  
chance. You can bet on it.

Aaron returns to his drink, insulted.

BECKER  
(continuing)  
Not to mention, the confidence  
of every other registered voter  
with half-a-brain and a bank  
account.

Becker pauses, and studies his empty glass.

BECKER  
(continuing)

Everyone, that is, who's smart enough to realize that the die of progress is already cast, my friend.

Aaron doesn't respond, and appears unimpressed. Becker motions to the bartender for a refill. The bartender quickly obliges.

BECKER  
(continuing)

All this preaching of preservation, and inhibited growth versus progress, and revenue...no contest.

BECKER  
I don't have a problem being forthright with you, Aaron...I've already lost your vote, am I right?

Aaron turns to face Becker.

AARON  
(scoffing)

Spare me...it's not your style to count on votes...'too risky. It's much easier to bank on greed. Am I right?

Becker turns his back to Aaron, as his attention shifts to a distinguished gentleman who passes by.

BECKER  
Mayor Kent, so nice to see you.

The Mayor shakes Becker's hand.

Aaron examines his drink, and seems to feel Natalie looking at him. He makes eye contact with her across the room. Nonchalant, he pours most of his double Gin and Tonic into Becker's Bourbon while his back is turned.

Natalie, who had been watching Aaron from across the

room shields her laughter with her hand, as Randall looks on, shaking his head -unimpressed.

Back at the bar, Becker swivels around to find Aaron getting up to leave.

AARON

Well Mr. Becker, you're a real  
good sport for coming... 'drink's  
on me.

Aaron pats Becker on the back, and leaves the bar.

Becker shrugs, takes a deep swig, and gags. He glares at his drink, then at the bartender who's mixing another stiff one.

BARTENDER

(uneasy)

What?

EXT. HOTEL ENTRANCE - NIGHT

VALETS are running back and forth, fetching cars while Aaron steps outside for a smoke. He lights up a cigar, and sits against a planter box. He seems at ease, and somewhat entertained by the chaos surrounding him.

For a moment, he looks down at his shoes, pulls a handkerchief from his jacket, and wipes off a blemish.

He stops, frozen for no apparent reason, and slowly looks up.

A limo is idling in front of him, and the passenger in the rear fixes a cold stare upon him. Aaron immediately recognizes the man from the elevator whom he encountered earlier that evening.

Aaron lets out a quivering breath, and rises to his feet as his cigar, still smoking falls from his teeth, to the ground.

A hard rain seems to come from out of nowhere.

The rear window closes as the limo accelerates, and van-

ishes out of sight as Aaron steps off the curb, standing frozen in awe.

A horn honks behind him, nearly sending him into orbit.

A cab pulls up with a lowering rear passenger-side window. It's Taylor.

AARON  
What's your hurry?

TAYLOR  
(upset)  
Three's a crowd, Aaron.

AARON  
Taylor, listen I...

TAYLOR  
(interrupting)  
Natalie's looking for you, you  
better go back inside, I'll be  
alright. For now.

She moves closer to Aaron to clarify her point.

TAYLOR  
For now, Aaron.

Taylor motions the driver to speed away, as her gaze burns a hole in Aaron's conscience. Aaron stands motionless, watching the cab disappear into the rainy night.

Commotion in the hotel lobby captures Aaron's attention, as he turns to see Natalie descending the grand staircase, escorted by press, and well-wishers.

Aaron nearly clotheslines a passing VALET .

AARON:  
Black Benz.

Aaron reveals a wad of twenties.

AARON



'sooner, the better.

The valet takes Aaron's ticket, and rushes away without a flinch.

EXT. HOTEL VALET TOWER - NIGHT

Aaron is sitting, catatonic in his idling Mercedes as Natalie chats up the last remnants of her fans.

As the small group disperses, Natalie enters the passenger side as Aaron winks at the valet who opens her door. The expectant valet circles around to the driver's side as Aaron guns the engine, and speeds off. The valet watches the Mercedes reach a safe distance before he grabs his own crotch in defiance.

VALET

Yuppie tight-ass.

INT. MERCEDES. MOVING - NIGHT

NATALIE

(sincere)

Aaron, tell me everything.

AARON

(nervous)

What?

NATALIE

Becker...What the hell?

Aaron sighs with relief.

AARON

Well, he held an invitation, didn't he? Are you that surprised?

NATALIE

It was just a formality, but I never dreamed...

AARON

(shaking his head)

He was just sizing you up,  
Natalie. He's a piece of work,  
that guy.

Natalie leans her head against Aaron's shoulder.

NATALIE

You're a piece of work...he's a  
prick.

EXT. MERCEDES. MOVING - NIGHT

The Benz exits the busy street, and enters an isolated  
drive that is nearly void of light.

CUT TO: INT. MERCEDES. MOVING - NIGHT

Natalie is rambling as usual, as Aaron watches the wet  
road. His mind is wandering.

NATALIE

...then next week Taylor has  
arranged a luncheon with the  
Shriners. I suppose it's a tactic  
to counter Becker's latest b.s.  
He's got all these suits convinced  
that I'm Carry Nation returned  
from the grave.

Natalie looks for a response from Aaron, but he offers  
none.

NATALIE

(continuing)

I don't even know what Shriners  
do. What do I say? What do I wear?

AARON

You're asking me?

NATALIE

(thoughtful)

Yes. I'm asking you. Consulting  
you, counselor.

Aaron shifts his eyes from the road to Natalie, and back

again.

NATALIE

I'm not sure you realize how much your presence meant to me tonight. I'm frightened Aaron.

AARON

You? Come on.

NATALIE

I didn't ask for this opportunity. They asked me.

Natalie turns to look out her window.

NATALIE

(continuing)

And tonight, just when I'm almost ready to snap, across the room, I see your confidence in the face of my greatest fear, and I'm suddenly filled with a strength that I didn't know I had.

Aaron remains silent, watching the road.

Natalie turns again toward Aaron.

NATALIE

I couldn't make it through this without you. I don't have the strength.

Aaron turns to meet Natalie's eyes, but doesn't look at her for long.

AARON

Why don't you just relax. It's been a long day...

NATALIE

(finishing the sentence)

...and my feet are killing me.

Natalie removes her seatbelt, and reaches down to

remove her shoes. Her hand emerges with a sparkling diamond tennis bracelet.

NATALIE  
Aaron? I know this.

Aaron turns toward Natalie with wide-open eyes.

Natalie holds her head in her hand.

NATALIE  
(disgusted)  
It's Taylor's...isn't it? Aaron?

Aaron closes his eyes tightly, and turns his head away. He is speechless for a beat while Natalie waits for an answer.

NATALIE  
(louder)  
Aaron?

NATALIE  
(screaming with warning)  
Aaron!!

The interior of the Mercedes fills with light, as Aaron grips the steering wheel, bracing his arm across Natalie for impact.

FADE TO WHITE.

SFX: SPINNING TIRES ON WET PAVEMENT, COLLISION OF TWO HEAVY VEHICLES, SHATTERING GLASS.

FADE IN:

Aaron is lying on his back, just inches from the driver's side door, amidst the wreckage of his Mercedes. The rain continues to fall as his motionless body, and expressionless face spin further and further away.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

AARON'S P.O.V.

A blurry image comes into sharp focus. It's a huge bouquet of roses in a vase on a bedside table.

DR. GEERY  
(O.S.)

Those are from your secretary.

A NURSE cranks up the juice on Aaron's I.V. as DR. GEERY'S face moves in closer to examine Aaron.

AARON  
(O.S.)  
Margot.

DR. GEERY  
(beaming)  
That's right.

Dr. Geery shines a small light into Aaron's eye.

DR. GEERY  
I'm Doctor Geery. What else do  
you remember?

ON SCENE:

Aaron attempts to sit upright. He is unshaven, with a few scratches on his face, and a large bandage covers a wound on his forehead. He falls back into his pillow with his eyes slightly crossed.

Dr. Geery places his hand on Aaron's chest.

DR. GEERY  
Take it easy Mr. Levine...  
you're medication is kicking in.

Dr. Geery stands up, and makes a note on his clipboard.

DR. GEERY  
You're a lucky man Aaron, your  
seatbelt broke a few ribs, but

probably saved your life.

Aaron turns his head away from the bouquet to the surgeon, wincing a bit from pain. He raises his arm, examining the tube stuck into his flesh.

AARON  
(whispering to himself)  
Natalie.

DR. GEERY  
Do you remember what happened?

AARON  
How is she?

DR. GEERY  
She's in ICU. She's lost a lot  
of blood.

Aaron turns his head in disgust.

DR. GEERY  
Her blood type is in short supply,  
it's very rare as you know, and...

AARON  
(sarcastic)  
...and you're doing everything  
that you possibly can.

DR. GEERY  
(defensive)  
It's important that we remain  
optimistic, Mr. Levine. We're  
scanning the rare donor registries,  
and life flight is en route from  
Redstone with every drop they  
can offer. It's just a matter  
of time.

Aaron turns to face the surgeon with sincere conviction.

AARON

How much time?

Before Dr. Geery can answer, an announcement through the overhead speaker interrupts him.

DISPATCH OPERATOR  
(O.S. over intercom)  
Blue Team to ICU...Blue Team to  
ICU...Doctor Geery...Doctor  
Geery...

A team of E.R. NURSES rush by the open door of Aaron's hospital room.

DR. GEERY  
Excuse me.

Dr. Geery quickly exits Aaron's room to follow the team.

Aaron struggles, determined to prop himself up.

AARON  
Doc?!...Doctor!

Aaron removes the top sheet, and finds his torso wrapped in elastic bandages. He groans in agony as he forces himself upright. His head hits the pillow hard, and he has an erratic coughing attack.

AARON'S P.O.V.

The ceiling goes blurry.

ON SCENE:

He lies still for a beat. As the announcement is repeated on the intercom. Suddenly, he yanks the tube from his arm, and bolts out of bed with a renewed strength.

He follows Dr. Geery down the hallway.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Rounding a corner in the ICU hallway, there is a room full of nurses who are working on SOMEONE.

SFX:

THE CONSISTENT TONE OF A FLAT-LINING HEART MONITOR

NURSE  
Ready, team?...Clear!

SFX:  
HUM OF ELECTRIC CURRENT

NURSE  
Doctor?

As Aaron enters the room, a nurse steps out of the way, offering him just a glimpse at NATALIE, as the surgeon leans over her to check for response.

Aaron looks on in horror.

DR. GEERY  
Again.

The team members look around at each other, acknowledging this exercise in futility.

NURSE  
Ready?

Aaron looks on, and braces himself for the voltage on his wife's behalf.

DR. GEERY  
(O.S.)  
Wait.

All eyes are on Dr. Geery as the room goes silent, except for the steady tone of the EKG getting gradually louder. Dr. Geery removes his stethoscope from his neck, lets out heavy sigh, and stands motionless.

Aaron shakes his head and covers his open mouth, his composure slipping, as reality sinks in.

INT: HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Aaron, now dressed, wearing a cold expression of determination, rushes down a hallway, past the reception desk. Unnoticed by the staff, he throws on his over-



coat. He is still bandaged, and is favoring one leg with a slight limp.

He stops, and makes use of a phone booth to shield himself from two scrub-clad surgeons who pass him without so much as a glance.

Aaron continues toward the exit.

EXT: FRONT ENTRANCE OF HOSPITAL - DAY

Aaron exits the front door, looking over his shoulder, amazed at his uninterrupted escape.

EXT: BUSY STREET IN FRONT OF HOSPITAL - DAY

Aaron limps along the sidewalk, raising his arm to signal every taxi that passes by. After several failed attempts, he becomes fatigued, and sits on a bench at a bus stop. As he sits, he clutches his mid-section, wincing from pain.

Aaron doesn't notice the ad for ART BECKER on the bench.

SFX:

HELICOPTER PASSING ABOVE AT CLOSE RANGE.

Aaron raises his head, and shields his eyes as he tracks the helicopter flying toward the hospital roof behind him.

He hangs his head, and roughly rubs his hands through his hair. He convulses, fighting back tears of grief and anger that quickly defeat him.

A transit passes by, which seems to come out of nowhere, and startles him as he jerks his head up in response.

His eyes lock on to something as he rises from the bench.

AARON'S P.O.V.

An older model taxi is parked, and idling at the curb, just beyond the bus stop.

ON SCENE:

Aaron approaches the cab, opens the rear door, and enters.

INT: TAXI. IDLING - DAY

Aaron eases carefully into the back seat of the cab, and barks an order to the DRIVER.

AARON  
(gruff)  
Just get me home. Broadmoore.  
You do know the way to Broadmoore,  
don't you?

Aaron waits a beat for an answer.

AARON  
(reminding)  
West of the water, South of the  
slums?

The cabbie nods without hesitation, and pulls out into traffic without turning to check his blind spot.

A timeless Sinatra ballad on the cab radio lulls Aaron to sleep.

AARON'S P.O.V.

The passing scenery of office buildings, storefronts and pedestrians through the windshield gradually fade to black.

FADE TO BLACK:

The ballad segues gradually into the piercing blues guitar of Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Aaron is startled awake. He examines his surroundings.

AARON'S P.O.V.

The scenery through the windshield has completely changed to a seamless forest of giant cedar trees which

flank an endless, empty, unmarked road.

ON SCENE:

Aaron studies the view through his window in disbelief.

AARON  
(to driver)

Hey!

There is no response from the driver.

Aaron begins tapping on the glass partition.

AARON  
I knew it! you've gotten us  
lost!

Aaron's eyes lock onto the rear view mirror.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Through the rear view mirror, the driver's eyes, glassy, never-blinking, and shrouded by dark circles are locked onto Aaron's.

ON SCENE:

Aaron falls back in his seat with eyes wide.

AARON  
(under his breath)  
Oh my God.

Aaron tries his door handle, then the other. With no luck, he panics. He slams his fists against the partition.

AARON  
Son-of-a-bitch, stop the cab!  
Stop the cab now! Let me out!  
Do you hear me?!

CUT TO:

Aaron's orders fall on deaf ears, as the driver calmly lights a cigarette, stuck tightly in the corner of his

mouth. He turns up the volume on the radio, as the riveting guitar riffs get louder as Aaron continues pounding on the glass.

AARON

Pull over! God damn it, pull over  
you psycho mother...

EXT: ROAD - DAY

The cab passes by with Aaron's muffled profanity and Blues Guitar emitting from the inside.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK SEAT OF CAB - MOVING - DAY

Aaron is still screaming at the driver.

AARON

(frantic)

Listen, what do you want?!  
Money? What? Answer me!

The driver's eyes shift from the road to the mirror, keeping an eye on his passenger.

Aaron falls forward against the partition, and is knocked back into his seat as the cab comes to a dead stop.

The cab idles as the driver turns to confront Aaron, face-to-face. He is the mysterious man whom Aaron has seen in three different places before.

Aaron's face becomes void of color as he realizes who is driving.

AARON

I know you.

DRIVER

(thick, Nordic accent)

Get out.

CUT TO:

The door locks pop up.

ON SCENE:

AARON

First tell me where the hell I am!

DRIVER

(louder, angry)

This is as far as I go! Out!

Aaron fumbles for the door latch, and quickly escapes.

EXT. EMPTY ROAD - DAY

The cab speeds off, hardly allowing Aaron the time to clear the doorway, as he collapses onto the road.

Aaron rises, and fumbles into his coat pocket, pulling out a pen. He squints toward the cab.

AARON

(shouting)

I've got your number, you kraut  
son-of-a-bitch! You just lost  
your job!

Aaron attempts to write on his hand. He shakes the pen and tries again - no ink. He slams the pen to the ground and shrieks in anger.

He stands motionless, watching the cab disappear into the distance.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT: EMPTY ROAD - DAY

A few hundred feet further down the same road, Aaron's limp is not as obvious as before. He looks anxiously over his shoulder, repeatedly.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT: EMPTY ROAD - DAY

Further down the same road, Aaron is still walking in the same direction, still observing both directions.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT: EMPTY ROAD - DAY

Further down the same road, Aaron stops, and sits down, exhausted at the roadside. He looks skyward, and begins to sob.

AARON  
(gathering himself)  
Get a grip. I'm goin' home...  
gotta get home.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Through Aaron's tears, clouds pass through a patch of blue sky between two towering walls of giant cedars.

AARON  
(whispering)  
God, get me outa here. I've had  
a hell of a weekend.

SFX:

THE FAINT SOUND OF A SMALL CHILD WEeping IS BARELY NOTICEABLE AGAINST THE WIND PASSING THROUGH THE TREES.

ON SCENE:

Aaron still has his head raised, with his eyes closed.

SFX:

THE CHILD'S VOICE CONTINUES, BARELY NOTICEABLE.

Aaron's eyes open wide, then squint as he strains to listen.

The wind subsides just long enough to allow Aaron a direction in which to follow this voice.

Aaron immediately rises to his feet, and leaves the

roadside for the dense treeline. He stops, looks up into the trees, then back to the road for one last look in both directions. Satisfied, he disappears into the forest.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT: THICK FOREST - DAY

Aaron steps quietly between the moss-covered giant cedars. He steps into a muddy bog, and sinks his feet deeply into the mud. He curses, and quickly steps across the mud to safety.

He stops to brush off the mud, and straining his ears, he once again hears the faint cries which seduced him from the safety of the road.

He cups his hand around his mouth, but before he can shout, the small voice cries out from his left, causing him to shift his course, and double his pace through the trees.

MAGGIE  
(quivering)  
I wanna go home...I wanna go home.

AARON'S P.O.V.

With his bare hands, Aaron moves thick brush away, as he follows the direction of the voice. He stops to listen, and hears a small child sobbing quietly.

Rounding the trunk of a large cedar, he discovers MAGGIE (8) sitting indian-style at the base of the tree, rocking back-and-forth, clutching her wrist. She is dirty, her clothing is torn, and she is crying.

ON SCENE:

Aaron nervously scans the area, and briefly deliberates his next move.

AARON:  
Ah, hell.

Aaron carefully approaches Maggie.

AARON  
Hey, little girl.

AARON  
(gently)  
What are you doing out here?

Maggie looks up at Aaron. Her baby blues wide, and fixed on Aaron distract him momentarily from the crude, blood-soaked bandage which binds her wrist.

AARON  
Are you lost?

Maggie shivers as a slight gust of wind blows into her face. She refuses to answer.

AARON  
My name's Aaron...you're hurt.

MAGGIE  
Are you the police?

AARON  
A cop? Not even close.

Aaron scans the general vicinity, then sits down next to Maggie.

AARON  
Where's your Mom?

Maggie looks down at her wrist, and cries quietly, offering no answer.

Aaron examines her bandage.

AARON  
Jesus, what happened to you?

Maggie struggles to stand up. Aaron holds her down.

AARON



Not so fast, just hold on a  
second. Who wrapped your wrist?  
Your mom?...your dad?

Maggie nods.

AARON  
What's your name?

MAGGIE  
Mu...Mu...Maggie.

Maggie appears slightly uncomfortable with this stranger who came out of nowhere. She pulls her wrist away slightly.

AARON  
Maggie, I'm not as scary as I  
look, will you please let me  
help you?

MAGGIE  
Help me find my Dad?

AARON  
Yeah. Yeah, let's find your Dad.

Aaron unwraps Maggie's bandage, and discovers an ugly gash on her wrist, which releases some fresh blood. Maggie turns away, and gasps.

AARON  
It's okay...it's okay.

Aaron stand up, and tears off a piece of his shirt tail, and wraps her wound clumsily, but effectively.

AARON  
This just isn't our day, is it?

Aaron pulls his watch from his wrist, looks at it for a beat, and proceeds to secure it to her upper arm. Maggie rubs the bandage, looks up at Aaron, and smiles.

AARON  
There. We'll need to loosen that

in a few minutes, but it should  
do the trick. Just don't lose it,  
okay?

Maggie nods in agreement.

AARON

Which direction did you come from?  
Do you remember?

Maggie looks around, biting her lip, confused, disori-  
ented.

Aaron kneels down.

AARON

(continuing)

Alright, maybe if you close your eyes,  
and retrace your steps...picture  
things that you passed on your  
way here.

Maggie closes her eyes tight, and nods.

AARON

Do you remember anything?

Aaron stands up. Frustrated, he looks around the  
perimeter, with arms akimbo.

MAGGIE

(blurting out suddenly)

Rocks!

AARON

(sarcastic)

Rocks? You saw rocks? Maggie,  
you'll have to think harder...  
there's lots of rocks.

MAGGIE

Lots of rocks.

AARON

Lots of rocks?

Maggie nods.

MAGGIE  
Big ones!

AARON  
Big ones?

Maggie nods again.

MAGGIE  
I can see 'em.

AARON  
Where?

Maggie stands up, and leads Aaron to a clearing. She points up to an eroding bluff with a huge boulder field beneath it. A slight plume of white smoke rises into the treeline above.

AARON  
Your Dad's up there...by the  
campfire?

Maggie nods and drops her head to examine her bandage.

MAGGIE  
(somber)  
Mommy, too.

Aaron rises quickly, smiles, and takes Maggie by her good hand.

AARON  
That's a signal fire. They're  
looking for you. Come on.

Aaron takes the lead as they make their way through the forest.

EXT: BASE OF STEEP BLUFF - DAY

Aaron and Maggie approach, and study the rocky outcrop.

AARON

(to himself)  
Shit...

Aaron paces at the base of the outcrop.

AARON  
(louder)  
Shit!

Aaron looks down at Maggie, who frowns up at him judgmentally.

Aaron, embarrassed by his profanity shifts the focus to Maggie.

AARON  
Did you climb down this thing  
by yourself?

Maggie nods.

Aaron shakes his head in disbelief, and cups one hand around his mouth.

AARON  
(shouting)  
Hello!

There is no answer. Aaron looks down at Maggie.

AARON  
Are you sure they're up there?

Maggie stands motionless...listening.

Aaron cups both hands over his mouth this time.

AARON  
Hello!!...Hello?!... 'anyone  
up there??

They wait for a beat...still no response.

AARON  
If I lost a little girl like you,  
I'd be out looking for you.

Maybe we should get back to the road.

Aaron starts for the trees, and turns to see Maggie still standing at the cliff's base, looking up.

AARON  
Maggie?

Aaron approaches her, bends down, and takes her hand.

AARON  
(strict)  
Maggie, there's a road down below. If we wait, someone will stop to help...help us find your parents.

Maggie shakes her head "no", and points toward the top of the cliff.

MAGGIE  
(defiant)  
My Daddy's up there.

AARON  
(gruff)  
Maggie, please...he would've answered by now. Please, let's...

A gunshot stops Aaron in mid-sentence as he looks up toward the clifftop. A flare rises against the trees into the sky.

AARON  
Damn...Maggie, stay here!

Aaron scales the bluff, and reaches the top, after slipping a few times. His inexperience as a mountaineer is embarrassingly obvious to Maggie, who dodges small rocks that Aaron sends careening downward.

AARON  
Look out, Maggie! Stand back!

Maggie clears away from the cliff.

EXT: TOP OF BLUFF - DAY

Aaron's hand stretches above the cliff top, and latches on to a fixed boulder which he uses as leverage to hoist himself up to the safety of the plateau.

Aaron scans the scene before him which steals his breath away.

AARON'S P.O.V.

The twisted fuselage of a vintage small-engine aircraft lies mangled at the edge of the cliff. Smoke lightly billows from what's left of the engine. A man lays motionless, against a large boulder beneath a tattered, and scorched sleeping bag. Another sleeping bag, in much better condition covers something (someone) within an arm's reach.

ON SCENE:

Aaron swallows hard, as he scampers to his feet, and runs to collapse at the man's side. A flare gun still smokes in the man's grip.

Aaron nudges the man, who offers no response. Aaron turns his attention to the other sleeping bag. He carefully slips a corner away to reveal the discolored face of an attractive blonde woman in her mid-30's. Her head is wrapped in a colorful scarf. She is not breathing.

Aaron turns abruptly, and finds Maggie standing behind him. She had somehow managed her way up the cliff. Her eyes are wide, and fixed upon her dead mother. Maggie begins to hyperventilate.

Aaron quickly covers the corpse.

Maggie weeps quietly under her quivering breath.

PAUL  
(groggy)  
Maggie?

Aaron and Maggie are silent, as they both look over in

Paul's direction. They slowly move in closer.

PAUL  
(relieved)  
Maggie.

Paul takes Maggie's hand, and smiles as a slight trickle of blood falls from the corner of his mouth. He looks up at Aaron, then into his daughter's eyes.

PAUL  
I knew you could do it sweetie.

AARON  
I found her in the forest below.  
She's a very brave girl.

Paul nods, his pride shining through his pain.

Aaron looks over toward the other bedroll, then back at Paul.

AARON  
(continuing)  
Your wife...I'm sorry, but...

PAUL  
(interrupting)  
I know.

They exchange a silent beat.

PAUL  
(concerned)  
Listen to me...you need to get  
her out of here, now.

Paul clutches harder onto his daughter, and points to the wreckage.

PAUL  
(continuing)  
Take that duffel. There's a  
compass, coats...please get  
her to safety...please.

AARON

There's a road not far from here.  
She'll be fine...and so will you.  
I'll send for help right away.

Aaron stands up.

PAUL

(glazed over)  
A road...out here? What are you  
talking about?

Paul coughs up some more blood.

AARON

Maggie, please get your dad's bag.

Maggie hesitates, not responding to Aaron's direction.

PAUL

(stern, quivering)  
Now Maggie! Do as he says...do  
exactly as he says!

Maggie leaves her father, and runs to the wreck to grab  
the duffel.

In her absence, Aaron examines Paul's torso. He peels  
away a corner of the bedroll, slowly.

AARON

What's your name?

PAUL

Paul.

AARON

You got a last name, Paul?

PAUL

What are you doing out here?

Steam rises from a gaping chest wound which soaks his  
flannel shirt with blood.

AARON



(helpless)  
God Damn...I don't think...

PAUL  
It's too late. Just get my baby  
out. Please.

AARON  
I'll get her out. I promise.

Paul hands Aaron a pistol.

PAUL  
Take this. Even the odds.

Aaron examines the sidearm.

AARON  
I don't really think it's nec....

Paul coughs deeply, grimacing with pain. His eyes roll  
back, the focus sharply, deeply into Aaron's eyes.

PAUL  
(coughing)  
Do I...do I know you?

AARON  
Aaron, I'm Aaron...and don't worry.  
Maggie will be fine.

PAUL  
(confident)  
I know.

Paul nods, and smiles. He looks over at his plane as  
Maggie emerges from the wreck.

PAUL:  
Nice landing, huh? 'just like  
Lindberg.

Paul surrenders his final breath, as his eyes close,  
and his head collapses.

Aaron turns and intercepts Maggie as she runs toward

Paul.

MAGGIE  
Daddy? Daddy!

AARON  
Remember what he said, Maggie...  
just remember everything he said.  
It's just you and me now, kiddo.

Maggie nods, with her eyes fixed on her father. She is in shock, and fresh out of tears.

Paul and Maggie walk to the edge of the cliff, hand-in-hand. Maggie turns to look over her shoulder for one last glimpse at her parents' remains.

AARON  
It'll be dark soon. We'd better  
get going.

They begin their descent.

EXT. SMALL CLEARING IN TREES - DAY.

SFX:  
DISTANT THUNDER.

Maggie gazes up through the trees. She stands next to a dry riverbed where Aaron is walking around, staring at the ground, scratching his head.

AARON'S P.O.V.

A trail of his own footprints through a muddy bog end abruptly at the edge of the river bed.

ON SCENE:

Aaron rubs his beard, apparently perplexed. He paces to-and-fro, still looking at the ground. His shoes are still muddy.

AARON  
(frustrated)  
It doesn't make any sense.

The road was here...Christ,  
it was right here.

Aaron looks down at Maggie, whose eyes are wide, she still appears in shock.

Aaron musters up some much-needed confidence.

AARON  
We're gonna get outa here.  
This way.

Maggie carefully steps around the mud, and catches up to Aaron.

EXT. SMALL SUNLIT MEADOW - DAY

Maggie walks in Aaron's shadow. Turning to check on Maggie, Aaron notices Maggie examining her mother's scarf. She fold it neatly, while she sniffs quietly.

AARON  
Where'd you get that?

Maggie slips the scarf into her coat pocket.

MAGGIE  
(hesitating)  
My mom.

Aaron stops, and kneels down to Maggie's level.

AARON  
You know as long as you keep that  
real close to you, it's like  
having your Mom in your pocket  
...she's always with you.

Aaron removes his watch from Maggie's arm and flips it over.

AARON  
Look.

INSERT:

The backside of the watch reveals an inscription which

reads: TO AARON. FOREVER, NATALIE.

AARON  
(O.S.)  
My wife gave this to me...and I  
will probably never...

It hits him.

ON SCENE:

AARON  
(continuing)  
...ever see her again. I don't  
know why bad things sometimes  
happen to good people...

Aaron deliberates for a beat.

AARON  
(continuing)  
Sometimes we need to abandon  
the familiar, in order to face  
the unfamiliar...but as long as  
I have this gift...as long as I  
have this to look at...in a  
way, she'll always be close. At  
least, a little piece of her.  
So you keep your Mom as close  
as you can...okay?...

Maggie nods, as Aaron fixes the watch back onto Maggie's arm, then shifts his gaze to the thick forest in front of him.

AARON  
(under his breath)  
...We'll need all the help we  
can get.

Maggie stays at Aaron's heels, with her head hanging low, as they disappear into the endless expanse of dense forest to continue their search.

EXT. TOP OF WOODED SLOPE - SUNDOWN

Aaron appears, breathing irregularly. He scans the horizon, and wipes the sweat from his brow.

INSERT:

ENDLESS HORIZON OF SUNLIT TREE TOPS

ON SCENE:

Aaron ponders his predicament. He turns away from the edge of the slope.

AARON

God Damn. Where'd the day go?

EXT. CLEARING ON A HIGH POINT - SUNDOWN

Maggie is seated by a small campfire, rummaging through her father's duffel. A pair of heavier coats lie on the ground. Maggie pulls out a .38 revolver.

AARON

(O.C. calmly)

Maggie. Listen to me.

Maggie looks up at Aaron, as he approaches her carefully.

AARON

Please put that down, slowly  
...real careful.

Aaron removes the pistol from her side, and shuffling to the opposite side of the fire from Maggie, he takes a seat in the dirt.

Aaron examines the weapon clumsily, and manages to open the cartridge. He ejects one round into the palm of his hand.

Aaron shakes his head, glancing at Maggie, sternly.

AARON

(relieved)

Whew.

Aaron returns the round to the cartridge.

AARON

You don't mind if I hold on to  
this for now, do you?

Maggie musters a pseudo smile, and shakes her head "no"

AARON

Good.

Something on the pistol catches Aaron's eye. He moves  
in closer to the fire for better light.

INSERT:

On the pistol, the name "BROOKS" is clearly, but crudely  
etched into the side of the barrel.

ON SCENE:

AARON

(to himself)

Brooks.

Maggie looks up at Aaron with wide eyes.

AARON

Is your last name Brooks?

Maggie's eyes grow large. She buries her head between  
her knees and begins rocking back and forth. She begins  
to sob.

AARON

Hey, hey...

Aaron gets up, puts down the gun, and joins Maggie by  
the fire. He reaches for one of the heavy, plaid flannel  
coats, and wraps it around her.

AARON

It's okay...We'll get through  
this, alright? I promised your  
dad, and I promise you, I'll get  
you to safety. It wasn't an ac-  
cident that I found you, Maggie.

I can't explain it...I just know  
there's a reason for all this.

Maggie's tears subside, as she leans into Aaron for  
comfort.

AARON  
(convincing)  
We're gonna get outa here.

Aaron pats Maggie's head.

AARON  
(gloating)  
How 'bout that fire, huh? I'm a  
better boy scout than I thought.

Maggie offers no response.

Aaron notices that she's fallen asleep. Through the  
flickering flames, Aaron stares back into the burning  
embers.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN.

EXT. FIRESIDE FROM PREVIOUS SCENE - DAWN.

Aaron reaches for the duffel bag, removes a compass  
which he studies momentarily. He pulls a wad of papers  
from the duffel, and lifts a business card up for a  
closer look.

INSERT:

Aaron holds up a business card into the firelight which  
reads:

"STAR MINERAL PROPERTIES  
Paul S. Fisher    E.M. Brooks"

ON SCENE:

Aaron's attention is diverted to the rising sun. Aaron  
rises, careful not to wake Maggie, who's bundled up in

the coats.

He walks to the edge of the outcrop as the sun once again kisses the treetops...It's a splendid panorama, momentarily suspended in grandeur.

AARON:  
(whispering)  
You'd love seeing this, Nat.  
I never understood why, until now.

MAGGIE  
(O.S.)  
Do you see anything?

Aaron turns to find Maggie standing behind him, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

AARON  
(nodding)  
I see everything.

Aaron turns to once again face the rising sun.

AARON  
(continuing, to himself)  
For the first time, I see it all...  
...just a day too late.

EXT. WIDE OPEN MEADOW - DAY

Aaron and Maggie navigate through the wilderness. Aaron stops, and pulls out his compass. Maggie walks past him.

AARON  
(disoriented)  
I guess we keep going...West.

MAGGIE  
Why West?

AARON  
(struggling with the formula)  
Well...I figure if we walk with  
the sun...instead of against  
it...we'll cover more miles...  
because we'll have more daylight...



that makes sense...doesn't it?  
...yeah.

Maggie looks at Aaron for a beat. She doesn't buy it.

MAGGIE  
I miss my mom.

AARON  
(welcoming a new subject)  
Well, what was she like, Maggie?

Maggie ponders for a few beats as she and Aaron cross the meadow.

MAGGIE  
She was fun. She smelled good.

Aaron smiles.

MAGGIE  
(continuing)  
We sang a lot...'played games.

Aaron fixes his focus on something. He squints his eyes, and shields them with a single hand.

AARON'S P.O.V.

A slight trace of smoke wafts into the sky against the trees.

ON SCENE:

AARON  
(in disbelief)  
I'll be damned.

MAGGIE  
What is it?

AARON  
Smoke. The good kind.

Maggie runs up to Aaron with her arms outstretched.

MAGGIE

Let me see, let me see!

Aaron hesitates. A little uncomfortable, he clumsily lifts Maggie up next to his chest, and points out the smoke.

AARON

There. see?

MAGGIE

It's far.

AARON

Not too far. A mile or so. We'll double time it, and just hope they're sleeping in.

Aaron puts Maggie down. She hits the ground running.

AARON

Whoa! Not so fast...

Aaron catches up, and together they descend a barren slope, which spills out onto a great green expanse of dwarf evergreens, lush tundra, and sun-bleached boulders.

Maggie and Aaron walk in tandem at a semi-hurried pace, parallel to a treeline. A glistening lake winks at them through the trees.

Aaron starts to whistle a catchy tune. ("I Want You to Want Me" by Cheap Trick) He looks down at Maggie who has been attentive to his whistling.

MAGGIE

What's that?

Aaron goes silent.

AARON

What's what?

MAGGIE

That song?

AARON:  
 (chuckling)  
 Way before your time, kiddo.

Maggie keeps her eyes fixed on Aaron for a beat.

EXT. DENSE CLUSTER OF LODGEPOLE PINES - DAY

MAGGIE (O.C.)  
 (singing playfully)  
 Deedn't I, deedn't I, deedn't I  
 see you cryin'...

Maggie emerges from the treeline into a clearing with Aaron close behind. He's smiling like a proud father.

MAGGIE (cont'd)  
 Oh, oh, deedn't I, deedn't I,  
 deedn't I see you cry?  
 Maggie struggles a bit with the tongue-twister lyrics.

MAGGIE  
 Feelin' all alone without a friend  
 you know you feel like... feel  
 like dyin'... Oh...

Aaron stops in his tracks, startled.

AARON  
 (whispering)  
 Shhh...Maggie, look!

Maggie doubles her pace, and runs ahead.

AARON  
 Wait!..Maggie!

CUT TO:

Through a grouping of huge rocks. Maggie rounds a corner between two boulders, and freezes in her tracks, her eyes wide with fright.

MAGGIE'S P.O.V.

A lone bull elk stands grazing, undaunted by Maggie's presence.

ON SCENE:

Aaron rounds the same corner, and finds Maggie standing before the great beast. The elk bolts away with a snort, at the sight of Aaron.

Aaron laughs, and gives Maggie a squeeze on her shoulder.

AARON

You're supposed to do what I say,  
remember?

Maggie nods her dramatically.

AARON

(teasing)

I think you scared him.

MAGGIE

He was so horny.

Aaron laughs.

AARON

Yes, I suppose he was.

CUT TO:

Aaron walks along the lakeshore, peering across at a small trail of smoke, rising skyward. He turns to check on his companion, now behind him, playfully balancing on a log.

Aaron stops, and calls out in the direction of the smoke.

AARON

(shouting)

Hello?!

Aaron looks down, and spots some footprints in the mud on the lakeshore, leading toward the smoke.

AARON

We're gonna get outa here,  
Maggie... 'almost there.

Maggie and Aaron wind around the end of the lake, and up a steep bank toward the smoke.

SFX: A RED TAIL HAWK SCREECHES OVERHEAD.

Aaron peers skyward, shielding his eyes from the sun.

He hands Maggie the duffel.

AARON

(whispering)  
Here... be real still.

CUT TO:

AARON'S P.O.V:

Aaron pushes the thick brush away, revealing a small clearing with a simple camp waiting behind the protection of an evergreen grove. A crude, white tent is suspended by a piece of twine strung between two tree trunks.

ON SCENE:

Maggie stirs the fire coals with a long bare branch, looking around, listening.

The camp is eerily quiet, with no trace of a single soul.

Aaron picks up an olive-drab, military issue duffel bag, identical to the one in Maggie's possession. It has a name crudely stenciled on it.

INSERT:

"BROOKS" is stenciled in black on the duffel.

ON SCENE:

Maggie turns toward the white tent, and studies it. It

is actually a parachute.

CUT TO:

Aaron examines the green duffel.

AARON  
(curious)  
Brooks.

CUT TO:

Maggie snaps her head in Aaron's direction in response to the name that makes her shudder.

AARON  
Maggie, hand me our duffel bag.  
I'd like to...

Aaron looks over toward the fire.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Maggie is gone.

AARON  
Maggie?

ON SCENE:

Aaron drops the other duffel, and walks toward the edge of the camp. He looks across the valley for Maggie.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Turning back toward the camp, Aaron's forehead meets the butt of a rifle.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATE AFTERNOON.

AARON'S P.O.V.

The flames of a roaring fire come into sharp focus,

reflecting on the barrel of a rifle, pointing at Aaron's nose.

Behind the rifle, BROOKS, a ruddy, unshaven, brute of 44, stares through the sights.

BROOKS  
'you got a name, snoop?

ON SCENE:

AARON  
(choosing words carefully)  
Aaron. My name's Aaron...Hey, I just wandered in from the road.

BROOKS  
(interested)  
Road? Right, there's a road close by then.

Aaron nods, and struggles slightly against the restraints that bind his wrists behind him.

BROOKS  
'Sorry about that, but you can't be too careful out here, now can you?

Brooks lowers his weapon as Aaron looks around the camp, still dizzy from the blow.

AARON  
Where is...

Aaron spots the name, BROOKS on the duffel bag, by the tent. He looks up at Brooks, who is attentive, and curious.

BROOKS  
(suspicious)  
Where's who?

It all comes back to Aaron.

AARON

My...uh, my compass?

BROOKS

Compass? 'haven't seen any  
compass.

Brooks rises, and places his rifle down, trading it for a knife. With his eyes fixed on Aaron, he cuts away a piece of some sizzling varmint on a makeshift spit, which pops and crackles over the fire. He chews it, staring down at Aaron, as grease dribbles down his chin.

A beat of silence seems to increase the tension between them.

BROOKS

This road, is it close?

Aaron looks nervously at Brooks, who throws the knife, with deadly accuracy, sinking its blade into the trunk of a large Aspen.

AARON

It's a hike. A little complicated.  
I'd show you, but as you can see,  
I'm kinda tied up at the...

Brooks raises his rifle toward Aaron.

BROOKS

(warning)

Hey!...nobody likes a wise ass.

AARON

Come on, you've got the gun.  
Untie me, I'm no threat.

BROOKS

No. You're my good luck charm.

Brooks leans in closer.

BROOKS

(continuing)

What do you do when you find a  
lucky charm?



Aaron shrugs, uncomfortable.

BROOKS

You tie it up...around your neck  
to keep it close by! I'll cut you  
loose when I'm good and ready.  
Besides, you might steal my supper  
when I'm not looking.

MAGGIE'S P.O.V.

From the cover of the large Aspen she removes the knife  
from the tree, as Brooks laughs in the background at  
his own attempt at humor.

ON SCENE:

The crackling fire catches Brooks' attention.

He gets up, and disappears behind the tent.

SFX:

BROOKS RELIEVING HIMSELF.

CUT TO:

Aaron sneers in disgust, then peeks over his shoulder,  
and down at his side, reacting to the sound of some-  
thing heavy and metallic dragging through the dirt,  
next to his side.

Aaron snaps his head quickly forward, as Brooks emerges  
from behind the tent. He carries a thick branch, which  
he snaps in two across his knee.

The sound startles Maggie, who rustles in the shrubs  
behind Aaron.

Brooks stares at Aaron, then into the bushes behind him.

Brooks throws the branches on the fire, picks up his  
rifle, and strides briskly past Aaron toward the bush-  
es without saying a word.

CUT TO:

Maggie runs down a game trail, and loses her footing. She falls, and turns over onto her back to find Brooks standing at the head of the trail, stunned.

BROOKS  
(gregarious)  
Maggie. You tough little bitch.

Brooks walks closer, as Maggie crab-crawls backward, away from him. She is terrified.

BROOKS  
'shouldn't have wasted all my  
rounds on your folks.

Brooks raises his rifle to take aim.

SFX:  
A GUNSHOT ECHOES THROUGH THE VALLEY.

MAGGIE'S P.O.V.

Brooks surrenders a piece of his skull to a bullet, and falls heavily forward.

ON SCENE:

Maggie screams, and shuffles away briskly, as Brooks nearly topples onto her.

Behind Brooks, Aaron stands shaking, with a drawn pistol in his one hand, and the duffel in the other. The twine around his wrists hangs in shreds.

AARON  
(a lump in his throat)  
You missed one, shit-breath.

Aaron examines the the pistol, and disposes of it quickly.

Aaron approaches Maggie, giving Brooks a nudge with his foot. Kneeling down next to her, he runs his hand through her hair.

AARON  
(regretful)  
I've never done anything like  
that before.

MAGGIE  
(hysterical)  
He did it! He shot 'em. He didn't  
care. He killed my Mom and Dad.

AARON  
(assessing)  
No...this is no good, Maggie.  
We gotta get out of here, and  
find some help, now.

Maggie stares at Brooks' corpse. She is speechless, but  
nodding in agreement.

Aaron steps carefully forward, and examines Brooks.

AARON  
They were friends...business  
partners, weren't they?  
I think I can fill in the rest  
of the blanks. But, why didn't  
you tell me...warn me?

MAGGIE  
(dazed)  
My dad said...to be seen, and  
not heard.

AARON  
(touched)  
My father used to tell me the  
same thing. 'Kind of old-fashioned,  
don't you think?

Maggie nods.

AARON  
Still, what you did back there,  
would make your dad proud. You  
make me proud.

Aaron stands, and offers Maggie his hand. She reaches out and grasps it for leverage as she stands with Aaron, and shoots him a grin.

EXT. DENSE FOREST - TWILIGHT

Maggie and Aaron walk through trees, then across a field of boulders. They stop, and look skyward. Dark Clouds begin to gather.

AARON  
(apprehensive)  
This doesn't look very friendly...  
'looks like a little rain in the  
forecast.

EXT. BLINDING BLIZZARD - SUNDOWN

Maggie and Aaron are huddled together, wrapped in coats, stumbling through the snow.

Aaron squints into the thick curtain of white. He hears Maggie cry out from behind him. He turns, and runs to her aid.

Maggie is on the ground, snagged on a bundle of barbed wire. Aaron frees her, and tugs on the wire. A fallen fence post pops up out of the snow.

AARON  
Are you alright?

Maggie nods, clutching her wrist.

AARON  
There must be shelter nearby...  
come on!

Aaron and Maggie run across a snow-covered clearing that is littered with long-abandoned mining equipment, and a lone wooden structure partially buried by snow.

INT. COMPLETELY DARK CABIN - DUSK

The darkness is broken as Aaron bursts through the front

door. Maggie runs in next to him, rubbing her hands together. They both spot a pot-belly iron stove in the corner. Aaron closes the door. The cabin again goes black.

DARKNESS.

Aaron strikes a match, and holds it up to light the corner of the room. Next to the stove is a stack of wood, and some newspapers.

He stokes the fire quickly, shivering. Maggie walks away from him.

The fire begins to roar, filling the interior with an amber glow.

Aaron turns to find Maggie standing behind him. Aaron throws his coat around her. She reaches out, and hands him a beer can. Aaron gladly accepts it.

AARON  
(euphoric)  
Where'd you get this?

MAGGIE  
Over there...can I get you  
another one?

AARON  
No. Just one more is one too many.

Maggie walks away, as Aaron hold up the beer can in the light.

INSERT:

ANCIENT COORS BANQUET BEER CAN IN PRISTINE CONDITION.  
AARON TILTS THE TOP FORWARD...THERE'S NO PULL TAB.

ON SCENE:

Aaron fumbles around the fireplace, and locates a screwdriver. He plunges it into the top of the can, and hoists it skyward as it spills over with foam.

AARON  
Victory.

Aaron guzzles long and hard, and raises the can to no one in particular.

AARON  
Thanks old-timer.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Maggie stands, staring at Aaron with heavy eyes.

MAGGIE  
There's no food.

ON SCENE:

Aaron deliberates, and hands Maggie the can.

Maggie reluctantly takes a sip. She grimaces, and hands it back to Aaron.

MAGGIE  
Uccghh!

AARON  
One more sip...it'll help you sleep.

Maggie closes her eyes, and takes a healthy chug.

AARON  
(to himself)  
Barley malt and rice...can't be all that bad.

Maggie hands the can back to Aaron, wiping off her mouth. She can barely keep her eyes open.

AARON  
You gotta be completely drained.

Aaron picks Maggie up, and carries her to an old chair.

AARON:

You must be exhausted.

Aaron eases her into the chair.

He stands frozen for a few beats, pondering as he studies Maggie.

The firelight dances across her cheeks as she breathes deeply. Her eyes grow heavier, as Aaron caresses her hair.

AARON

It's okay to sleep now...you  
don't need my permission.

Aaron wanders across the room.

AARON'S P.O.V.

An old two-way radio sits against the wall, shrouded in dust.

ON SCENE:

Aaron stumbles toward the radio with ecstatic anticipation.

He tries every knob and switch, but gets no power. He reaches around the back of the radio, and pulls out a useless bundle of scorched and ragged wires.

AARON

(softly)

That figures.

Aaron takes a seat at an old card table, and watches Maggie sleep.

SFX:

A WOLF HOWLS FAINTLY IN THE DISTANCE.

Aaron looks out the window.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

From inside, Aaron peers out the cabin window.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WHITE SNOW FIELD - SUNRISE

Dark pointed shadows of treetops creep across the white snow toward the cabin, which is completely snowed in.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Maggie rises from her chair, and joins Aaron, who is still at the table, peering out the window. He is exhausted from lack of sleep, and is preoccupied with the dilemma at hand.

AARON

It stopped snowing. That's the good news.

Maggie looks outside, then notices the radio.

Aaron rubs his temples hard. He reads Maggie's mind.

AARON

(continuing)

It doesn't work...I've tried everything.

MAGGIE

Is it plugged in?

Aaron scratches his head and responds with poignant sarcasm.

AARON

Gee Maggie...now why didn't I think of that?

Aaron shakes his head, a little insulted.

Maggie deliberates for a beat.

MAGGIE

Nobody likes a wise-ass.



Aaron laughs, embarrassed...then suddenly stops.

AARON  
Hold on...

He stops in mid-sentence, and looks under the radio table.

INSERT:

The radio's plug is attached to an electrical outlet in the wall.

ON SCENE:

Aaron quickly rises, and rushes to the window, shielding his eyes, as he peers out into the sun.

AARON'S P.O.V.

A utility wire spans from the cabin to a utility pole, just a few yards from the cabin.

AARON  
Maggie, oh...you're brilliant...  
BRILLIANT!

MAGGIE  
I am?

AARON  
Smarter than the average bear.  
I think you just found a back  
door out of here!

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Aaron and Maggie exit through the front door. They turn, and are startled by what they see. Maggie covers her mouth, and turns her head away in disgust.

AARON  
(nauseous)  
Oh my God.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Waist-deep in the snow, Brooks stands, hunched-over, blue, and bleeding badly from his head, which is wrapped crudely with a torn shirt sleeve. He is out of breath, and shaking, with a crazy glint in his eye, he holds the pair at gunpoint with his rifle.

BROOKS  
(panting, shivering)  
That's the thing about snow.  
You can track a one-legged flea  
through it if you're savvy.

Brooks stumbles, and laughs in response to his failing legs.

AARON  
(warning)  
Maggie, get inside.

BROOKS  
Yes, get inside, Maggie...

Aaron and Brooks exchange a beat of silence.

BROOKS  
(continuing)  
I'll be right with you.

Maggie runs inside.

AARON  
You're not going to make it.

BROOKS:  
That makes two of us...

Brooks tips his head toward the cabin.

BROOKS:  
(correcting himself)  
...well...three.

Brooks raises his rifle, clumsily lining up his sights on Aaron.

AARON  
(with nervous anger)  
Brooks...it is Brooks, isn't it?  
First name? last name? Hell, I  
don't give a shit. You must be a  
lousy shot.

BROOKS:  
Think so?

They both freeze momentarily. It's a showdown. Brooks' rifle against Aaron's only weapon; his sharp cross-examining skills.

Aaron dives behind a stack of cord wood, which explodes with ricochets, and flying wood chips from Brooks' rifle.

AARON  
(taunting)  
I'd stick to close-range targets  
if I were you!

Brooks reloads his rifle, and takes a step closer.

AARON  
(continuing)  
Just like Maggie's parent's.  
Point blank range, right?

BROOKS' P.O.V.

Brooks fires a shot at Aaron's head, just above the wood pile.

ON SCENE:

Aaron ducks back down, unscathed. He continues to badger Brooks.

AARON  
Did you figure the crash would  
finish Maggie off? You didn't  
have the balls to do it...did  
you? 'couldn't kill a little  
girl...well I'm touched!

A portion of the wood pile collapses, leaving Aaron completely vulnerable. He jumps to his feet...but they won't move.

Brooks fires another shot at Aaron.

Brooks examines his rifle and looks back in disbelief at Aaron, who stands uninjured.

Aaron dives for cover behind the remaining stack of fire wood.

BROOKS

They deserved every round! Nobody  
cashes in on my sweat!

Brooks pops off another round into the wood pile. Aaron flinches.

BROOKS

(continuing)

Nobody takes the credit for  
my sacrifice! Come out here,  
and see what it's like to take  
a bullet...for nothin'!

Brooks fires wildly, repeatedly at the pile of wood, which he reduces to kindling. Aaron stands motionless, through the foray, then checks himself for wounds.

AARON

(more confident)

Partnerships. They're over-rated,  
I can relate.

Brooks collapses in the snow with the rifle frozen in his grip. The wound on his head begins to bleed again through the bandage.

Aaron cautiously approaches, and stands over Brooks, whose eyes are wide, and sharply fixed on Aaron's face.

BROOKS

(struggling for breath)

You're a dead man...a dead man.

Brooks laughs, and then releases a final breath with a cluster of steam from his mouth.

Maggie runs to Aaron, embracing him, careful not to look at Brooks.

AARON

He can't hurt you now. You're going to be okay. Let's grab the gear, and get going.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Aaron, with duffel in hand, and Maggie close behind emerge from the front door and approach the place where Brooks fell dead. His corpse and his rifle are gone.

AARON

Maggie?

MAGGIE

Where'd he go?

AARON

(bewildered)

Son of a bitch. We're in big trouble.

Without a word, Maggie and Aaron double-time it away from the cabin, and into the forest.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Maggie and Aaron emerge from the treeline, breathless. They stop dead in their tracks, with eyes wide in disbelief.

AARON'S P.O.V.

A parachute hangs, caught in the trees, dangling from the end is Brooks. He is blue, with a thick, sharp branch protruding from his chest. A swarm of flies circle the gaping wound.

ON SCENE:

Aaron slowly paces around beneath Brooks' corpse, which shows early signs of decay.

AARON  
This is insane.

Aaron turns to Maggie, points toward the parachute, and continues. Pathetically attempting to convince Maggie, and himself.

AARON  
(insistent)  
I just watched him fall dead!  
I watched him die...before my  
eyes...twice! Is this a joke?

Aaron turns, and looks skyward.

AARON  
No one's going to believe this...  
I'm losing my mind.

Maggie approaches Aaron, who is painfully confused. She offers him her hand. Aaron makes eye contact with Maggie who appears renewed with an internal strength. Aaron is touched, smiles, and takes her hand. He pulls her close...face-to-face.

AARON  
(exhausted)  
Do you know something that I  
don't know?

Maggie nods...and points behind her. Aaron squints in the same direction, and stands up straight.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Through a clearing in the trees, a silver tower draping with power lines glistens in the sun.

MAGGIE  
We're almost home.

They walk in tandem toward the welcome sight of the

power lines. Aaron looks back for another glimpse at Brooks' corpse. This time, it's still there.

EXT. EDGE OF FOREST - DAY

Maggie and Aaron continue in the same direction, with a huge valley before them. The long train of power lines stretch down a long, steep slope into the valley, where a small mountain town is just waking up to the rising sun.

Aaron and Maggie walk beneath the power lines, following them.

They descend the last few yards of the slope, and cross over a paved road. Maggie runs ahead toward the town.

MAGGIE

Come on! Come on!

Aaron crosses the road after her, looks ahead, and stops. An expression of confusion chases his smile away.

There before him is a town that appears frozen in time.

Aaron falls to his knees, overwhelmed.

AARON'S P.O.V.

A few cars pass by others that are parked. They are all vintage 1940 models. An ancient Texaco station offers gasoline at pennies a gallon. A 1946 police cruiser is parked outside a diner. Two SOLDIERS emerge from a barber shop. PEOPLE walking to-and-fro are dressed in period attire.

ON SCENE:

Aaron studies the scene...turns away for a beat, then slowly pivots to look again. He doesn't trust his own senses.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Maggie is a fair distance away, running toward the town.

ON SCENE:

AARON  
(shouting)  
Maggie...Maggie wait!

She doesn't respond. Aaron rushes toward her.

AARON  
(louder, desperate)  
Maggie!

Maggie stops, turns and scans the hillside. She covers her mouth, steps toward Aaron, looking to-and-fro as if she has lost sight of him. She turns away, and continues toward the town.

AARON  
(helpless)  
Maggie?

A voice from behind startles Aaron.

DRIVER  
She can't see, or hear  
you anymore, Aaron.

Aaron slowly turns, and reluctantly peers over his shoulder to face the voice.

DRIVER  
(continuing)  
...for she no longer stands in  
death's shadow.

AARON'S P.O.V.

The old taxi is parked along the road, and the mysterious driver walks slowly toward Aaron, who backs away, still in shock from the sight of the old town.

DRIVER  
(continuing)  
This is as far as you go.



AARON

You. You stay the hell away from me.

DRIVER

Who then will explain?

The driver steps carefully closer toward Aaron.

AARON

(shouting)

Not another step!

Aaron turns toward the town for a second look. He closes his eyes tightly, then opens them again.

AARON

This can't be real...what have  
you done to me?

The color escapes Aaron's face as he turns away, slightly losing his balance. He grips his stomach, and bends over, breathing faster, nauseous.

DRIVER

Me? You have yourself to thank.  
If you had stayed on the road  
where I left you, ignored her  
cries for help, things would've  
taken a much different turn...a  
most...unfortunate turn.

Something at Aaron's feet catches his attention. He reaches down, and picks up the scarf which had fallen out of Maggie's pocket.

DRIVER

(continuing)

You said it best, Aaron...sometimes  
you must abandon the familiar,  
to face the unfamiliar.

AARON

(a bit more comfortable)

Who are you?

DRIVER

(struggling to remember)  
 Leopold...my name's Leopold. It's  
 been so long, I'd nearly forgotten.

Aaron walks toward Leopold, and points to the town  
 behind him.

AARON  
 Well, Leopold...I want an  
 explanation. You seem to have  
 all the answers. You've been  
 stalking me...you...you leave me  
 for dead in the middle of nowhere  
 ...and now we're standing in God-  
 damned Mayberry. I think I'm  
 entitled.

LEOPOLD  
 (laughing)  
 I suppose so, my friend.

Leopold approaches Aaron.

LEOPOLD  
 (confidential)  
 We're spirits, Aaron.

Aaron stands straight up, and looks Leopold in the eye  
 defiantly.

AARON  
 (mocking)  
 Spirits?

LEOPOLD  
 (bowing with a flourish)  
 Spirits. To whom time and proxi-  
 mity is irrelevant.

Aaron slaps his hand forcefully against his own arm,  
 which is scraped, and bleeding from his journey through  
 the forest.

AARON  
 Then explain this? Flesh  
 and blood, Leopold...flesh and

blood! You're irrelevant!

Aaron walks away, and scans the town before him, rubbing his eyes.

LEOPOLD  
(amused)  
Call it what you wish. It wasn't  
clear to me at first either.  
Humor me a moment.

Aaron faces Leopold again, with arms crossed.

Leopold paces in front of Aaron.

LEOPOLD  
In the beginning, we walk, step-  
ping among a multitude of souls  
...at least until, at last, we're  
singled out by one, and recog-  
nized...as you recognized me.

Aaron shakes his head slowly in disbelief.

LEOPOLD  
Do you remember? Come now, you're  
an educated man, Aaron.

AARON  
That day...that day in the elevator?

INSERT:

SEQUENTIAL MONTAGE OF PREVIOUS SCENES:

LEOPOLD STEPS INTO THE ELEVATOR WITH AARON.  
LEOPOLD WALKS IN FRONT OF AARON'S MERCEDES.  
LEOPOLD WATCHES AARON FROM THE BACKSEAT OF THE LIMO.

LEOPOLD  
(O.S.)  
Some of us wander for ages, before  
our opportunity to interact pre-  
sents itself. What are the odds  
of encountering someone who's  
just moments away from facing

death? For me, it seemed like  
an eternity...but you...

Leopold laughs heartily, and motions toward the town.

LEOPOLD  
(contemplative)  
...your purpose was complete,  
before you even realized your own  
predicament. You did more...so much  
more than just save a young life  
today...you may never know.

ON SCENE:

Aaron turns to confront Leopold.

AARON  
(whispering)  
Spirits?

LEOPOLD  
For all our tasks, good and bad...  
we are still judged, as always,  
just as in our earthly lives.  
Rewards they abound for most, but...

Leopold is interrupted by a sudden commotion in the trees behind him, as Brooks appears once again, from the woods. He glares at a startled Aaron, and runs toward the town, into the street where he's struck by a passing car, with a bone-shattering "thud". The vehicle continues on its journey, as though nothing had happened. Brooks has disappeared...again.

Aaron watches in amazement, stepping closer to where Brooks was struck, searching for his remains

LEOPOLD  
...and eternal punishment is the  
unfortunate lot for others.

AARON  
(astonished)  
My God, is this how it all works?

Leopold shrugs, with a knowing grin.

AARON

Will she be alright? Maggie, will she be safe?

LEOPOLD

Well, she's much better off now than when you found her.

AARON

Why her?

LEOPOLD

(introspective)

A childhood is such a treasure to hold...and such a tragedy to sacrifice. Oh, what I would give, to be a child once again.

Aaron and Leopold share a beat of silence, as if they are reading each other's minds. They both smile.

LEOPOLD

(motioning to the cab)

We're finished here. Time to go. A much more pleasant experience this time, I assure you.

INT. TAXI CAB. IDLING - DAY

AARON

What happens now?

LEOPOLD

(laughing)

Good question. I'm just as curious as you are.

Leopold continues laughing. Passing the Texaco, he lays on the horn repeatedly. Aaron stares out the window at people on the street who are oblivious to the cab's presence. Leopold's contagious laughter infects Aaron as he chuckles to himself, eases into the back seat, closes his eyes, and places his hands behind his head. He is completely relaxed, as Leopold turns up the radio,

attempting to sing along with "Old Blue Eyes".

AARON'S P.O.V.

As Leopold's singing continues, passing scenery of trees, boulders, and foothills through the windshield gradually fade to black.

FADE TO BLACK

Leopold's singing becomes more faint.

CUT TO: AARON'S P.O.V.

From the bus stop bench in front of the hospital, the face of a toothless BAG LADY is just a little too close, as her tone-deaf singing picks up where Leopold's left off. Was it all a dream?

ON SCENE:

Aaron bolts up, breathing heavily. He studies his surroundings until they are familiar again. He slides down the bench, a safe distance from the bag lady. The bench now features a different advertisement, replacing Becker's political rally cry.

Aaron rubs his aching head. Turning around, he sees the hospital behind him, he reaches down, raises his sleeve, and reveals a loose cluster of bloody bandages loosely holding a small I.V. syringe to his arm.

AARON'S P.O.V.

A helicopter flies in from behind the hospital, and hovers above the roof.

ON SCENE:

AARON  
(whispering)  
Natalie.

Aaron jumps up from the bench, and limps away toward the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

The elevator door opens, Aaron stumbles out, and down the hallway at a frantic pace.

DISPATCH OPERATOR  
(O.S. over intercom)  
Blue Team to ICU...Blue Team to  
ICU...Doctor Geery...Doctor  
Geery...

Aaron continues down the hallway, as a team of E.R. NURSES round a corner in front of him. Dr. Geery follows close behind.

Aaron speeds up, his limp getting worse, as is the pain in his chest, as he clutches his rib cage.

AARON  
Natalie...oh, God...please.

Aaron approaches the crowded hospital room which is alive with commotion.

NURSE  
We're not too late. There's  
still time.

Aaron hangs his head, and something toward his feet captures his attention. His eyes grow wider.

CUT TO:

Aaron's ankles and shoes are still covered with the mud, and grass from his long journey.

ON SCENE:

Aaron raises his head, mouth open with surprise.

AARON'S P.O.V.

The nurses surround the hospital bed.

DR. GEERY

Clear!

One nurse steps away to reveal the patient on the bed.

It is Aaron, himself. He is stone blue.

ON SCENE:

Standing in the doorway, Aaron's eyes widen, as he begins to convulse. An invisible, powerful force draws him in like a vacuum, closer to his own corpse, lying still in the bed.

CUT TO:

Aaron's corpse, still lying in the hospital bed, receives voltage. His eyes burst open, and he hyperventilates. His eyes roll back beneath his heavy eyelids.

An oxygen mask is placed over his face, as his eyes dart back and forth, across the masked faces of the medical team.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Dr. Geery moves in closer to observe. He snaps his fingers in Aaron's face.

DR. GEERY

(authoritative)

Right here, right here...look at me.

Breathe, Aaron, breathe deep.

Dr. Geery stands up straight, and addresses Aaron, and the nurses.

DR. GEERY

You're going to be just fine.

He'll be just fine.

FADE TO BLACK.



DR. GEERY  
(O.S.)  
Alright, get him stabilized,  
and back up to X-Ray. Now, people!  
Dispatch Dr. Warner! I want the  
responsible party...

The surgeon's orders fade off into complete quiet.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

AARON'S P.O.V.

A blurry image gradually becomes sharp to reveal a huge bouquet of roses in a vase on a bedside table.

NATALIE  
(O.S.)  
I thought I'd lost you.

Natalie sits beside him, fully dressed, apparently in good health. Though she is still bruised from the accident. She smiles, and wipes a tear away.

ON SCENE:

Aaron sits up, embraces Natalie tightly, and weeps.

AARON  
(fighting tears)  
I thought I lost you, too. But  
I just lost my way.

Dr. Geery enters Aaron's room.

DR. GEERY  
Aaron, I'm glad to see you're  
awake. Do you know what day it is?

Aaron keeps his eyes on Natalie.

AARON

'No idea. And I don't care...as long as it's not my last.

DR. GEERY

Hardly. Some orderly got his signals crossed. 'seems you got someone else's I.V. 'didn't quite agree with you. You're fine now... but you should see the other guy, whew!

AARON

Does he need a good lawyer?

Dr. Geery laughs, as he examines Aaron's chart.

DR. GEERY

(continuing)

This weekend has been one for the books...'close calls for both of you. If not for a quick-thinking intern, and a last-minute blood donor,...well, we'd have a couple extra beds available.

Aaron and Natalie exchange a glance, and join their foreheads.

AARON

I'd like to thank them personally.

DR. GEERY

I'm afraid that's impossible... I'm sure you can appreciate professional confidentiality.

AARON

Of course.

DR. GEERY

You're healing nicely, Aaron, and you should be joining Mrs. Sutherland just in time to celebrate.

Dr. Geery exits, and winks at Natalie.

AARON  
(inquisitive)  
Celebrate? What have I missed?

The T.V. above Aaron's bed catches Natalie's attention. she reaches for the remote, and turns up the volume.

INSERT:

ON THE T.V. MONITOR, BECKER IS WALKING DOWN THE CAPITOL STEPS, SWARMED BY REPORTERS, AND CAMERAMEN, WITH A NEWSPAPER SHIELDING HIS FACE. HE STEPS INTO A DARK SEDAN, WHICH QUICKLY SPEEDS OFF.

REPORTER  
(O.S.)  
...recent investigation which exposed alleged extortion, illegal appropriation of State and Federal funds...and in light of the recent scandal Arthur Becker has withdrawn from the senate race, leaving the offices of Natalie Levine holding the torch for the next term, by default. Mrs. Levine could not be reached for comment, as she is still recovering from a recent automobile accident. Arthur Becker's office offered no comment...

ON SCENE:

Aaron watches the T.V., absorbing every word.

AARON  
(stunned)  
Unbelievable.

INT. LEVINE'S MASTER BATHROOM - MORNING

Aaron wipes the fog from the mirror, and looks at his reflection, closely. He smiles, and begins to shave away his beard.

CUT TO:

Natalie sits before her mirror, applying her makeup.

Aaron embraces her from behind.

AARON

Do you know how proud I am of you?

NATALIE

No. Tell me. Or show me...take  
your pick.

Aaron pats his bandaged ribs.

AARON

(playful)

Oh, 'sorry, doctor's orders...no  
strenuous activity.

NATALIE

Excuses, excuses.

Aaron kisses Natalie passionately.

NATALIE

Are you sure you're up to coming  
along? Whidbey is a long drive.

AARON

Hey, I cheated death to be here.  
I wouldn't miss it. For anything.  
And this time...we're taking a limo.

NATALIE

We'll fit right in. 'Just another  
supporter, with an environmental  
soft-spot...showing off for the  
benefit of their peers.

Aaron rolls his eyes.

NATALIE

I have a feeling there's a hidden  
agenda. I'm told the estate just  
went on the market.

AARON

Did someone say "open house"?

NATALIE

In this particular case, I'd be  
foolish not to oblige.

Aaron nods with a smile.

INT. WALK-IN CLOSET - SAME MORNING

Aaron reaches in to grab his jacket. He slips it on.

NATALIE

(O.S. overlapping scene)

Honey, when we were in the hospital,  
what did you mean when you said  
you had lost your way?

Aaron reaches his hand into the right pocket, pulling  
out Maggie's scarf.

AARON

(O.S. overlapping scene)

Just a dream I had...while I was...  
while I was asleep.

Aaron clutches the scarf, and stares out into nothing-  
ness.

AARON

(O.S. overlapping scene)

I thought I'd never wake up. But  
I'm awake now.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OUTDOOR GATHERING, PALATIAL MANSION - DAY

Natalie is locked in an embrace with another woman whose  
face is obstructed. They turn together as Natalie  
releases Margot, from her embrace. Natalie grips  
Margot's hands tightly.

NATALIE

Thank you so much for taking care of

the firm. He thinks the world of you.

Margot turns to look over her shoulder.

MARGOT'S P.O.V.

Aaron approaches. A vast lake churns behind him.

ON SCENE:

MARGOT

Oh? What does he say?

NATALIE

He doesn't have much to say...that's  
how I know.

Aaron joins Natalie and Margot.

AARON

What a palace!...I overheard someone  
say that Teddy Roosevelt stayed here  
once...and check out this view!

Aaron turns to absorb the view once again.

AARON

Breathtaking!

Both women exchange a puzzled glance.

MARGOT

I get seasick just looking at it.  
I need a drink.

NATALIE

Thanks for being here, Margot.

Natalie and Aaron watch Margot walk away.

NATALIE

Let's adopt her.

AARON

Adoption...hmmmm...I've been thinking  
of alternative methods actually.

Natalie meets Aaron face-to-face. She studies his expression for a beat. Aaron returns her gaze with the payoff of a slight nod. She embraces him.

NATALIE  
(through a tear)  
What's gotten into you?

Natalie disengages from Aaron's arms.

NATALIE  
(gathering her emotions)  
Don't go away. I want to talk to you about this, in greater detail.

Natalie leaves Aaron's side.

AARON  
(calling out to her)  
Margot keeps my calendar...we'll do lunch!

Natalie playfully shoots Aaron the finger.

Aaron turns to find an older woman holding a tray of drink glasses. Ever the opportunist, he sets his empty glass on the tray with the others. The woman looks up at Aaron and smiles.

MRS. STENBERG  
Well...thank you. Can I get you another one, sir?

AARON  
No thanks. Just one more is one too many.

The woman's cordial expression disappears.

MRS. STENBERG  
You don't say.

Mrs. Stenberg walks away, as Aaron watches her go. He shrugs.

A familiar voice from behind Aaron spins him around.

TAYLOR  
Congratulations, Aaron.

Aaron smiles at Taylor. He can't find words for her.

TAYLOR  
(continuing)  
You just insulted Mrs. Stenberg...  
the hostess.

Aaron is embarrassed, and fails miserably at protecting his composure.

AARON  
What can I say, Taylor?

TAYLOR  
After all you've been through, you  
still don't get it. You can't just  
treat people like trash...You're  
still the same old Aaron. When will  
you...

Aaron silences her as he places something in her hand.

INSERT:

TAYLOR OPENS HER HAND WHICH CONTAINS THE TENNIS  
BRACELET.

ON SCENE:

AARON  
She found it in the car...right  
before the accident. I don't know  
if she's politely skirting the issue,  
or if it's a memory lapse. It doesn't  
matter.

Taylor meets Aaron's eyes with hers. She is now at a loss for words.

AARON  
(gently)



It's okay. But you're wrong...I have changed. And so has our situation. It can't be the same between us. Not now.

TAYLOR

So that's it? 'case closed?

Aaron lowers his head, and turns to leave.

TAYLOR

Aaron, promise me one thing. Don't ever lose your memory.

AARON

I promise.

Taylor quickly exits. She passes Randall who is staring at Aaron. He smiles, and winks at Aaron, pointing a "trigger finger" in his direction.

Aaron laughs to himself, and shakes his head as Randall turns to face Natalie on the podium.

DISSOLVE TO:

A sea of faces focus on Natalie who is at a podium atop the grand entry steps.

NATALIE

...and I can't thank you enough for your thoughts and prayers through this difficult period, and for keeping our hopes and dreams alive, for a state which stands on the threshold of a long, and successful future...without the threat of corporate greed, and interference!

(APPLAUSE)

Aaron walks along the fringes of the crowd toward the back steps of the impressive mission-style home.

Natalie motions toward the back of the crowd at rolling

hills, and seaside cliffs.

NATALIE

(continuing)

Isn't this spectacular? I can't imagine life without views like this! Leo Stenberg understood this. He fought in 3 wars, and he surveyed most of our state highway systems, back in the day, and built this wonderful home for his bride.

CUT TO:

INT. MANSION - DAY

Aaron enters the home, and makes his way toward a great stone mantle which displays a line up of old family photos. Natalie's speech echoes through the inside of the large room.

NATALIE

(continuing)

Leo had a vision. He knew what his highways were capable of doing to our beautiful state. So he planted a seed, so -to-speak. We have him to thank for many of our parks and reserves. Thanks to him, and his vision, they can never be touched, ever! Though he's no longer with us, Thanks to you, Mr. Stenberg's voice still echoes through the canyons, forests, and beaches that make our state beautiful, and worth fighting for. You're standing in his backyard...it spans from here to the horizon. And it's up to us to keep it that way.

(APPLAUSE)

Aaron picks up a photo, and examines it closely.

INSERT:

Aaron holds the old photo closer, which reveals the image of Leopold, the mysterious cab driver.

ON SCENE:

Aaron's eyes grow wide, as he takes two steps back from the mantle.

NATALIE  
(continuing)  
And my special thanks to Maggie Stenberg, for hosting this celebration, and opening up her beautiful home.

(APPLAUSE)

Aaron turns toward the back of the house, in Natalie's direction, responding in disbelief to her poignant words.

He turns back toward the photos.

AARON'S P.O.V.

Aaron spots a photo of Maggie as a young girl.

Aaron turns to find Mrs. Stenberg staring at him from across the room.

CUT TO:

The photo slips from Aaron's grip, falling in slow motion to the wood floor.

CUT TO:

A tray of drink glasses falls in slow motion to the wood floor.

CUT TO:

The photo still falling in slow motion, closer to the wood floor beneath Aaron's feet.

CUT TO:

The drink glasses shatter, spilling red wine and liquor onto the wood floor.

ON SCENE:

Mrs. Stenberg collapses onto the wood floor.

Aaron rushes to her aid.

CUT TO:

EXT. PODIUM AT THE STAIRS - SECONDS LATER

Aaron bursts through the crowd, screaming.

AARON

We need a doctor! Find Doctor Geery...  
someone help me, please!!

INT. MRS. STENBERG'S ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Aaron and Randall carry Mrs. Stenberg into her room, onto the bed.

RANDALL

I'll get the doc...stay with her!

Aaron crouches down, closer to MAGGIE (70). He reaches out, checking for a pulse.

CUT TO:

Aaron's hand clutches her wrist, turning it over, revealing the deep scar from her injury as a child. He removes his hand quickly, as her eyes flutter open.

AARON

Maggie? It is you.

Maggie nods, biting her lip, and whincing a bit. She clutches her chest.

AARON

Stay still, the doctor's on his way.

Aaron looks deep into Maggie's eyes, he shakes his head in disbelief. He is overwrought with emotion.

AARON

Nobody's going to believe this.

MAGGIE

(struggling for breath)

Do you...know something...I don't know?

Her eyes close, and she stops breathing.

Aaron leans back with both hands over his mouth. He releases a quivering breath. Something captures his attention.

CUT TO:

Under Maggie's hand a black object protrudes. Aaron's hand pulls his watch free from her grip.

He examines it closely as his eyes well up.

CUT TO:

Dr. Geery runs down the hallway, with the Randall in his shadow. He throws the door open to find Aaron crouched over Maggie, holding her hand.

Aaron turns to face the doctor.

AARON:

She's gone, Doc.

Dr. Geery leans over Maggie, and checks her for vital signs.

DR. GEERY:

I warned her. I told her this was too hard on her heart...all this excitement...

Natalie steps through the doorway, her mouth agape.

NATALIE

Oh dear God, is she alright?

DR. GEERY

(shouting)

Has anyone called an ambulance?

Someone call an 911!

Randall pulls out his cell phone, and disappears into the crowd..

NATALIE

Doctor Geery, what can we do?

Dr. Geery removes his tie and jacket.

DR. GEERY

Everything possible. I promised confidentiality, but you're looking at your blood donor, Mrs. Levine. She saved your life, now if you'll excuse me, I need some room to try and save hers...please!

Everyone clears the doorway.

Aaron is still holding Maggie's hand, with his eyes fixed on her face.

DR. GEERY

Mr. Levine, please.

AARON

If it's okay with you, Doc... I'd rather stay.

Aaron places her hand on her chest, and lets go. Her mother's scarf now rests in her grip.

SPIRITUAL P.O.V.

Leaving Aaron and Dr. Geery in the bedroom, moving down the hallway, across the living room, past the mantle, outside, and over the crowd, stopping at the fringe of the property. A male, and a female child, dressed in

period attire run past from either side, and into the tall grass ahead.

The little girl stops, turns, and looks back toward the house. It's Maggie. She turns to look at the small boy, who stops, smiles, and motions to her to join him.

She runs past him, as he looks toward the mansion, and smiles thoughtfully. He stands, frozen for a beat, and runs to join Maggie. They disappear into the grass.

INT. MAGGIE'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Aaron is leaning his head against the glass. His face is eerily lit by the daylight coming through the window which he is peering through. A smile comes over his face, and he raises his hand resting it flat, against the glass.

FADE TO WHITE.

END.