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Gator

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Gator

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

Erik Hansen

B.A. University of California, Berkeley, 1982

May, 2013

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FADE IN:

EXT. BAYOU - DAY

A WHITE BLINDFOLD conceals the woman's eyes. A coffee-skinned Creole beauty, 25. She sniffs the air, not sure of her surroundings; not sure of the decisions that have brought her to this place. Her name is RITA PERAULT.

She's in a metal flatboat, supporting herself with one hand on the rail. A heart-stopper in a sun dress.

A MAN sits behind her, steering the outboard motor.

They're slicing across a lush bayou, surrounded by grasses, cypress trees and live oaks.

VARIOUS ANGLES

Seen through trees and hanging Spanish moss, of the boat passing by.

EXT. BOAT - DAY

The man, JEFFERY SULLIVAN, 40, wears a suit. There's some military in his bearing, a sharpness in his eyes. Right now, those eyes are greedy and triumphant, drinking in --

RITA'S BACK

Sitting in front of him. Her sundress shivering in the breeze.

HER NECK

So long, so beautiful. The boat hits something. She grips the rail; turns her head to say something, but holds still.

MEMORY HIT --

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

Rita in the same attitude, standing at a drawing table in a large, communal workspace; reviewing her work - ADVERTISING COPY AND DESIGNS for a computer product.

JEFFERY stands behind her. Drinking her in. That back. Those legs. The slender arms.

She senses him, turns, sees him -- and SMILES. So beautiful, so genuine, it seems that she...really likes him.

He smiles back, a big, open smile.

CLOSE ON JEFFERY'S EYES -- His PUPILS DILATING.

Wooshhhh...

Against the black of his pupils, we see Rita dozens of times over. Walking, turning, working, texting, smiling...

That smile. The eyes looking up from her work, shyly, attracted...something more?

We enter her eyes...

INT. JEFFERY'S OFFICE - DAY

Pulling out from a PHOTO of a younger Jeffery in his navy whites; insignia: Lieutenant Commander. His office is navy-tidy, spic and span. It opens to the same communal space where Rita works. The most prominent diploma on the wall is from the Navy Postgraduate School.

The most prominent photo, framed, on his desk: Jeffery and his wife, an attractive, 40-something blonde.

He sits behind his desk as Rita, standing, shows him some sketches. But he's looking away, deep in thought.

RITA

You said you wanted to really focus on the sophistication of the encryption, so I was more thinking this guy, and he's saying, "military strength encryption in your home computer."

(he's absent)

....you don't like it.

JEFFERY

It's fine. Uh, Rita, do you want to have a seat? For a moment?

RITA

Okay.

She sits, apprehensive. She watches as he walks to the door, closes it, click, then returns to his ergonomic chair.

RITA (CONT'D)

You know, these are just like preliminary. I've got a whole bunch of...

He gestures. She shuts up and looks at him, wide-eyed. Maybe she can see that he, actually, is nervous.

JEFFERY

Okay. First. I want you to know that I know that I will never cross the line. In the workplace. Never, under any circumstances. The line is the line and I respect it. Do you understand?

She knits her brows, baffled. He bulls on.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

I would never want to make you uncomfortable here. You understand? If I'm making you uncomfortable right now, I apologize. Will you please let me know at any point if I'm making you uncomfortable?

RITA

(uncomfortable)

Okay.

JEFFERY

Good. Because, I don't know, maybe I'm crazy, in which case I'm truly sorry.

RITA

Why??

JEFFERY

Because in my mind I feel...this chemistry between us. No. Wait. Back up. Delete. There's chemistry over here, on my side. I make no presumption about your feelings. But the honorable thing...for me...I feel, is to acknowledge, in case you were wondering...does he have feelings for me, or am I crazy...I just want you to know, you're not crazy.

She looks up; her eyes are bright, shining. The smile on her face is somewhat crazed. She jumps to her feet.

RITA

Okay!

Her drawings spill on the floor. She quickly gathers them up.

RITA (CONT'D)
I'll work on these drawings and
get something to you that you like
a lot better. I promise. Okay?
'kay. Bye! Thank you!

Clutching her portfolio, she exits.

Jeffery sits there, thinking about how well this went. Not well.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

He talks to three young COMPUTER ENGINEERS. They're looking at a huge BLOW-UP DIAGRAM of a USB PORTABLE DEVICE. It looks like a small USB stick that would plug into a computer.

Jeffery looks away, annoyed with himself.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\MEN'S ROOM - DAY

An industrial-grade bathroom. He looks at himself in the mirror; now he's really upset, berating himself.

JEFFERY
Fuck.

He leans in to examine his thinning follicles, pushing them back with his fingers.

Up close, his wounded eyes are lined with crow's feet.

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR - NIGHT

He drives home down Claiborne Street in New Orleans. Going over it again and again, deep in self-recrimination.

EXT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

His vehicle (Honda CR-V) pulls into his driveway (attractive, modest uptown two-story) behind his wife's car (2008 silver Lexus).

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR - NIGHT

He sits there for a moment, composing himself. Lights are on inside the house. Warm and inviting. A WOMAN comes to the window, back-lit, looking out through the curtains. She waves. He waves back.

He sighs.

HIS PHONE BUZZES

He takes it from the console. He's got a text message.

CLOSE ON SCREEN:

Rita:

U r not crazy

The letters get bigger and bigger: not crazy. crazy. zy. z.
Z. We enter the screen, the pixels, black, white...
microscopic circuits...

EXT. BAYOU - DAY

The white of the day. Rita is blindfolded. The engine has
been cut; it's putt-putting in place.

JEFFERY (O.S.)

Turn around. Face me.

She swivels on the bench to face him, steadying herself on
the side of the boat.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Know where you are?

RITA

No.

JEFFERY

Good.

He loosens his tie.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

You don't really know me, do you?

RITA

I...thought I did.

JEFFERY

But I know you. You'd be surprised
how much attention I've paid.

RITA

I would?

JEFFERY

You have a birthmark behind your left knee. And another on your shoulder blade. You put too much sugar in your coffee and thousand island dressing and cheddar cheese on your salads. You picked up that stray cat last year and had little flea bites on your ankles for three weeks. When you come into my office sometimes, you get a deep blush on your neck, and sometimes you get little pimples on your forehead, along the hairline, that you cover with make-up. Scared?

(no answer)

Think I'm crazy?

She doesn't reply. Grappling with the possibility that she's made a huge mistake.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Okay. See if you can untie that knot.

She lifts her arms, trying to untie the knot behind her head. He avails himself of this unwitnessed moment: there's something uncivilized in the way his eyes revel in the vulnerability of her breasts; her bare arms; under her arms.

RITA

I can't.

JEFFERY

Navy training. I'm the only person who can untie them. Just pull it off...there you go.

She does. He's smiling at her. She looks around at the bayou.

RITA

Wow.

They are smack in the middle of a beautiful water channel in BAYOU TERREBONNE.

We rise higher and higher to see them in the middle of a lacy network of bayous, more water than land. Rising higher to see the green Southeast Louisiana countryside. In the distance, across many bayous, WE PUSH IN TO REVEAL the skyline of New Orleans.

JEFFERY (O.S.)
What do you think? One hour from
the city.

RITA (O.S.)
Beautiful.

Back to them --

He's unbuttoning his shirt. She looks at him, doubtfully.

JEFFERY
Swim? I'm going in.

RITA
Really? What about snakes?

JEFFERY
(taking it off)
Round here? Just some king snakes
and water snakes. They're harmless.
Okay, maybe a few cottonmouths, and
some copperheads, rattlers...

RITA
Please, don't. Seriously, don't.

JEFFERY
(removing shoes and socks)
Sure you don't want to go in? Seize
the day? Carpe a little diem?

RITA
I hate snakes.

There's something fastidious in the way he arranges his
shoes, shirt, and tie in a neat little pile. He's down to his
t-shirt and pants, sporting a little gut, but his arms are
strong. He flexes them.

JEFFERY
Not bad for a middle-aged computer
engineer. What do you think?

RITA
Jeffery! Seriously, I don't know
where the car is. What if you get
bit?

JEFFERY
I bite back.

He jumps in. The boat rocks. She yelps and grips the side.
Splash.

UNDERWATER

Jeffery plunges into the brackish water. A couple strong strokes deep into the depths, then he turns, rising.

His heads breaks the surface.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Come on. You're missing it!

RITA
(laughing)
You're crazy! You...jerk.

JEFFERY
Ah, coming from your lips...the
sweet music of a white-winged
unicorn.

He swims away from her.

UNDERWATER

Tracking his body, stroking the water, kicking strongly.

GOING DEEPER

The shadows of fish swim by. A long water snake.

DEEPER STILL

To find an enormous SHADOW hugging the bottom. A big GATOR. It pushes itself off, stirring sand, propelled by its powerful tail. It suddenly turns, coming towards us fast, revealing its blunt snout, protruding teeth and slitted eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

CLOSE ON -- A LARGE "GATOR" CAKE

featuring a frosting alligator in the same pose. The cake is zanily, over the top colorful. A KNIFE cuts through the gator. People CHEER.

MAN (O.S.)
It's official! Here we come, world!
A Gator on every desktop, laptop
and tablet on the planet!

PULLING BACK TO REVEAL -- about twenty people (computer designers, interns, mail-room workers) gathered around. A lot of hand-shaking and back-slapping.

The BANNER on the wall features their LOGO (a gator-head emblazoned over the planet) and the words:

SPLASH! GATOR TECHNOLOGIES LAUNCHES!

Good work everybody!

Slicing the cake is (Jeffery's partner) MICHAEL DUNCAN, 30s, attorney-businessman, the shark of the operation. He's in a jovial mood, loving this moment.

The LIGHTS ABOVE FLICKER -- going dark for an instant and then returning.

MICHAEL

Perfect timing! We can start paying
our electric bills!

Everyone laughs. The slice is plated.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This one's for our resident genius,
Jeffery. Where's Jeffery?

People look around for him. Jeffery's standing by his office door, by himself. Looking grim. He waves them off.

JEFFERY

Dig in.

He surveys the scene. The celebration which he's about to ruin. Rita approaches him with a drink in her hand.

RITA

Congratulations, Mr President
Genius.

JEFFERY

Thanks.

RITA

Are you okay?

He shakes his head, grim.

RITA (CONT'D)

Did I do something?

JEFFERY

No. This weekend, you still...?

RITA

If you are.

He nods -- looking over her shoulder, he sees a tall, skinny, goateed software designer, CHRISTIAN, 25. Christian is staring at them, jealous, a hardness in his eyes.

INT. JEFFERY'S OFFICE - DAY

Michael closes the door. He and Jeffery are joined by KENDRICK BALES, 30s, African-American, the third partner. The money guy, the good-looking one, outgoing, charming, deadly. The party continues outside, but not in here.

MICHAEL

What is it?

JEFFERY

The battery.

KENDRICK

Oh Jesus. The battery's fine. You tested it a million times.

JEFFERY

Not in the real world. I need one more remap. Two more weeks.

MICHAEL

Two weeks? Are you fucking kidding me?

JEFFERY

A two week delay won't kill us. Shipping a defective product will.

KENDRICK

I can't believe this. HP. He wants to fuck with HP.

MICHAEL

Jeffery -- the 2250s are going out in two weeks and our product's gonna be in that box.

KENDRICK

We're like these nobodies from nowhere who...who clawed our way onto the most favored partners list. And you want to just blow them off?!

JEFFERY

Guys, let's take the emotion down a notch; talk like adults.

Kendrick folds his arms, waiting. Jeffery picks up a USB DRIVE from his desk.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Google, Microsoft, HP...they're all still in business, right? Nobody's gone bust because they delayed a product launch.

(holding up USB drive)

Pentagon-grade security on a USB drive with a battery that never dies. You don't think HP will wait for that? If they don't, we've got six more vendors standing in line. We'll be billionaires in five years if we do this right.

Michael and Kendrick want to be swayed.

MICHAEL

Jeffery, do you swear, do you truly believe, there's a glitch in the battery?

JEFFERY

Why else in god's name would I do this?

MICHAEL

I don't know. Your lizard brain, maybe.

JEFFERY

What?

MICHAEL

It's scary sending your babies out into the world, so this little gator in your brain finds all kinds of reasons to slow it down, delay what it sees as possible failure. It's classic.

JEFFERY

I'm not afraid.

Michael nods at the partyers through the window.

MICHAEL

Good. Then you go tell them the party's over.

EXT. BAYOU TERREBONE WATERWAY - DAY

Far from the city, the bayou is rich in flora and fauna. The air is heavy with the sound of birds, tree frogs, cicadas.

VARIOUS ANGLES

Great live oaks, dripping Spanish moss. Huge, sharp-leaved palmetto plants. Irises. Thick grasses.

Dragonflies and birds ply the humid air.

A small, crusty FISHING BOAT chugs along.

FISHING CAMPS line the channel. Not much more than broken-down wood shacks on stilts.

Jeffery and Rita putt-putt past the fishing camps. Rita taking them in.

RITA

Wow. It's another world out here.

TWO SWAMP GUYS are standing at the water's edge next to a falling down shack with a ragged Confederate flag on the side. Rita waves.

RITA (CONT'D)

Hi!

They look up. Their faces weathered, dirty, hard.

SWAMP GUYS POV -- The city guy and the Creole girl going by. Jeffery's hand raised in greeting.

No wave in response. Just a long, hard look. Their eyes say: you're not welcome here. Go home.

EXT. JEFFERY'S CAMP - DAY

The boat glides up to a clean, well-tended camp, off by itself, with a small, sturdy wood dock.

JEFFERY

Here we go.

MOMENTS LATER

He helps Rita from the boat; she's carrying a small overnight bag.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Welcome, ma'am, to our river-view estate.

RITA
Thank you, sir.

She looks over her shoulder, in the direction of the Swamp Guys. Worry crosses her face. He sees it.

JEFFERY
We'll be fine. Semper paratus.
(off her look)
"Always ready." To protect and...
you know.

She smiles, liking this. He smiles, liking her smile.

INT. JEFFERY'S CAMP - DAY

SUNLIGHT flashes through WHITE WINE as it pours into a glass, a deep, golden light.

RITA'S LIPS sip the wine.

Jeffery sips the wine. His eyes fastened on her in her sundress, showing him her lovely back.

She's browsing the bookshelf, looking at his photographs and knick-knacks. She comes to a PHOTO of Jeffery and his wife.

He grimaces -- opens his mouth to say something, decides against it.

She moves on.

The cuff of his pants leg is trembling.

She takes a long, deep swig of wine. Her breathing rapid. The space between them alive with sexual tension. A moment long awaited fast approaching...

JEFFERY
I can realistically say that one
year from now, we're gonna blow up.
We'll be ten times as big as we are
now.
(she walks back)
Tulane has an eighteen month MBA
program, meets nights and weekends.
(MORE)

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

I was thinking we, the company, could put you through it, you get your MBA, and then you can run our marketing department; it's gonna be huge.

She sits across from him, reaching for her purse.

RITA

Me and school don't exactly get along.

JEFFERY

You're smart. You can do this. I'll make sure you do, alright?

Changing the subject, she takes out a pack of cigarettes.

RITA

Do you mind?

JEFFERY

No. I...didn't know you smoke.

RITA

Just when I drink.

A look of disapproval flashes across his face; she lights a cigarette, her fingers slightly trembling. She extends her glass. He refills it. The sounds of the bayou come through the window. It's a moment.

JEFFERY

Here we are.

RITA

Yeah.

JEFFERY

At last?

RITA

(gulps some wine)

Hm mm.

She puts the glass down. They look at each other. Is this it? Is it now? Her tongue wets her lips, her eyes shining.

Jeffery stands; goes to his bag. Fleeting disappointment flashes in her eyes.

JEFFERY

I have something for you. Actually, I had it made specially.

He unzips his bag.

ANGLE INSIDE BAG -- Fresh underwear, neatly rolled;
toiletries in tidy containers; the grip of a pistol...

He removes a small, GIFT-WRAPPED BOX. He returns to his seat
and hands it to her.

RITA

Wow. I didn't expect a...wow.

She unwraps a jewelry box. She opens it, revealing an
ALLIGATOR BROACH encrusted with sparkling green stones.

RITA (CONT'D)

Oh my god.

JEFFERY

Okay, those are not emeralds.
They're actually silicon germanium
carbide crystals; I just tinkered
with the molecular structure to get
that nice emerald look, which I
actually think is a lot cooler.

RITA

It is insanely beautiful. You are
so sweet. Thank you.

JEFFERY

Turn it over.

She turns it over -- it's inscribed: "To Rita. From President
Jeffery. Gator Technologies."

RITA

(chuckles)

President Jeffery! That's funny.

JEFFERY

Yeah.

RITA

I think I know who helped you with
this.

JEFFERY

Who?

RITA

Christian.

JEFFERY

Huh. Did he tell you?

RITA

Oh no. Just, he has all these posters on his walls. It's like his obsession. Crystal structure and atoms and molecules and stuff.

JEFFERY

You were at his place?

RITA

Uh, yeah. Last year.

This is serious:

JEFFERY

Why?

RITA

We just kind of...dated, briefly.

JEFFERY

I thought it was you and Alex...?

RITA

After Alex. And, actually, before Alex.

JEFFERY

That's nice. We've got a real... team bonding thing there.

She sits back, miserable, knowing that she has really, really stepped in it. She looks at Jeffery.

HER POV -- A forced smile on his face.

HIS RIGHT EYE -- The pupil CONTRACTS to a pin-point. We enter it...

RACING with the PHOTONS along the OPTIC NERVE...becoming a CASCADE OF NEUROCHEMICALS...

They race along a neural circuit, entering the OCCIPITAL LOBE, becoming a glowing ELECTRICAL CHARGE which descends to...

THE AMYGDALA

A small, meaty lobe that flares red, burning with inflamed light.

BACK TO JEFFERY

Wounded, trying to hide it, he looks down --

Rita is holding his hand.

RITA
I love my broach. Thank you. It's
genius...like you.

She stands, leans forward. Gently kisses his lips.

He lets out a heavy sigh. His breathing instantly charged. He stands, reaching for her, embracing her.

They have their second kiss. Their third kiss -- more passionate.

RITA (CONT'D)
Oh wow.

She looks around -- sees the bedroom door cracked open. The bed inside. She takes his hand, pulls him...

RITA (CONT'D)
Shall we?

He looks at the bed -- doesn't budge.

JEFFERY
Wait...your skin's so beautiful in
this light. Let me look at you.

She smiles shyly. He strokes her hair line. He caresses the side of her cheek; her jaw.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
I love this line. This neck. This
beautiful, graceful neck.

His hand runs down her neck. Trying to sop up every sensation. It gets under her dress at the collar bone, pushing it back --

She unbuttons as Jeffery exposes her shoulders. She shivers in the heat as he pulls the dress down, past her hips, to the ground. She stands in front of him in bra and panties.

He drinks her in. His eyes finally getting what they want. His fingers travel up her bare arms...

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Sweet arms...perfect smooth
shoulders...

To her shoulders, then under her arms, slowly down her sides. He grips her ribcage in both hands, below her breasts.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Sweet little ribcage.

They are both crazily aroused.

The bra clasps in front. He unclasps it...

Pushing it aside, exposing her. She straightens her shoulders, her breasts rising to meet his touch.

He looks in her eyes. Lowers his head to take a nipple in his mouth, circling it with his tongue.

RITA
Come here. Come here.

She pulls his head up and kisses him hungrily. Her hand reaches for his groin, rubbing him through the fabric.

RITA (CONT'D)
Oh my god, he feels good. He feels so good.

JEFFERY
Wait.

RITA
What?

JEFFERY
Let's...come here.

He pulls her down to the floor. With his back on the carpet; her straddling him, topless.

RITA
Like this?

JEFFERY
Yeah, yeah. Come here.

He pulls her forward, lowering her breasts to his mouth. He licks her nipples. Her head lolls, eyes closed, savoring it. For a moment.

RITA
Come on, Jeffery. Please, please, please, don't make me beg.

She shifts her weight and reaches for his zipper.

JEFFERY
Wait, wait.

RITA
What?

JEFFERY
Slow.

RITA
(reaching for him)
No.

JEFFERY
No, no, no, no.

RITA
What?

JEFFERY
Stop.

RITA
Why?!

JEFFERY
This time, I just...want to leave
my pants on.

RITA
What?

JEFFERY
There's things we can do to make
you happy, I promise. Let's talk
about things we can do.

She sits back, folding her arms across her chest.

RITA
What's wrong?

He tries to pull her back down.

JEFFERY
Nothing. Come here.

She resists.

RITA
No. Tell me what's wrong.

JEFFERY
Nothing. It's just...the moment is
kind of...

RITA
Kind of what?

JEFFERY
It's fine. Come back.
(rubbing her side)
Come on. We'll see what happens.

RITA
(reaching for her dress)
No. No, thank you.

JEFFERY
Maybe we can. Maybe...

RITA
Wow. This is getting weird and
insulting.

JEFFERY
I'm sorry.

She stands, pulling on her dress.

RITA
What the hell just happened?

JEFFERY
(beat)
I'm married.

Her look is incredulous -- this just occurred to you??

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

A PASSENGER JET descends into Louis Armstrong International Airport.

INT. AIRPORT\GATE C - NIGHT

PASSENGERS disembark. Some stride purposefully to the main concourse. Others mill around.

ANNE SULLIVAN, late 30s, emerges from the jumble, wearing a stylish light coat, a bag over her shoulder. Flight-weary at the moment, her face has an attractive, thoughtful quality. A warmth and openness in her eyes missing in her husband's.

As she walks away from the gate...

ANGLE ON A TELEVISION in the waiting area.

CNN: Winds battering the Bahamas. The banner says:

DORIS LEAVES 12 DEAD

HURRICANE WARNINGS ISSUED FOR GULF COAST

INT. AIRPORT\MAIN CONCOURSE - NIGHT

Anne begins to smile, approaching the main concourse. Her eyes searching.

OTHER PEOPLE waiting for loved ones. They greet each other with hugs. Where's Jeffery?

There --

Off to one side, staring down, deep in thought, looking frankly fucking miserable. Finally, he looks up -- sees her -- manages a smile. He comes towards her.

They hug and kiss.

ANNE

Hi, baby.

JEFFERY

Hi. Oh, this is good. This is good.

He holds her tight. A long hug. She looks into his face.

ANNE

Boy, they really roughed you up, didn't they?

JEFFERY

Yeah.

INT. AIRPORT\WALKWAY - DAY

Jeffery wheels her suitcase towards the garage.

ANNE

I knew they were going to throw HP in your face. But if anything goes wrong, believe me, they're...

JEFFERY

I know.

She takes in his expression.

ANNE
Who was the biggest asshole,
Kendrick or Mike?

JEFFERY
Joint effort.

ANNE
Fuckers. Riding your coattails. You
never should've hooked up with them
in the first place.

He shrugs.

INT. AIRPORT\PARING GARAGE - NIGHT

BEEP BEEP

He unlocks the Honda CRV as they approach it, wheeling the
suitcase to the back hatch.

JEFFERY
Oh. I forgot to tell you. Some
jackass in a pick-up backed into me
at Lowe's. Pete's gonna take it to
the shop tomorrow.

Anne walks up to the passenger door --

It's BADLY DAMAGED -- CRUMPLED IN. Cardboard in the window.

ANNE
Oh my god. Poor baby, I'll never
leave you home alone again.

CLOSE ON: THE DAMAGED DOOR...

ANNE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Does it open?

JEFFERY (O.S.)
I'll get it.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

PULL BACK FROM THE DAMAGED DOOR TO REVEAL --

Rita inside, sunk down in her seat, staring stonily ahead.

BLAM BLAM BLAM

THREE GUNSHOTS --

PAN TO JEFFERY, standing on the side of the road in his suit, his back to us, holding his handgun in a practiced stance.

BLAM BLAM

He fires off two more shots at a receding GREEN PICK-UP TRUCK. The truck skids to a halt, fishtailing. The driver's door opens...

Jeffery hurriedly crosses in front of us. We HEAR his door open and slam. The vehicle shifts into gear, backs up...

PAN DOWN -- to FIND the GREEN GATOR BROACH ON THE GRAVEL.

A car wheel rolls over it.

CRUNCH

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\BEDROOM - NIGHT

Anne's face stares up at us. She frowns, preoccupied.

Jeffery's going down on her. Head between her legs, hands cupping her butt, with gusto.

He looks up.

JEFFERY

What is it?

She sighs.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

You're not into it?

ANNE

I am, but...you know, I just got off the plane. My mind's still...

JEFFERY

Okay. Come here.

He stretches out beside her; pulls her legs onto his body.

ANNE

What? Like this?

She straddles him. He pulls her forward, towards his head.

JEFFERY

Yeah. Come on, all the way.

ANNE

What?

JEFFERY

Come on. Ride me.

ANNE

Jeffery. I'm tired. I don't feel like being moved around like a sex toy. What's going on with you?

JEFFERY

I missed you.

ANNE

Well, I missed you, too, but this is gonna have to wait. I'm sorry.

She climbs off, stretches on the bed next to him.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Are you mad?

JEFFERY

(turning away)

No.

Not mad? How about frustrated? Furious? His eyes blaze.

EXT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Midnight blue sky; just the faintest hint of dawn behind the silhouettes of houses and trees.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\BEDROOM - NIGHT

Anne whimpers in her sleep. She reaches out, puts her arm around Jeffery, and sighs contentedly.

A MOMENT LATER

He's gone; her hand on the empty sheet.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She comes down the stairs in her nightgown; sees a light on in the kitchen.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\KITCHEN - NIGHT

She enters to find Jeffery standing in a suit, drinking coffee. She blinks in the light, dissheveled.

ANNE
This early?

JEFFERY
Yeah. Gotta go.
(beat)
We're gonna have to share your car
for a couple days, okay? Pete's
picking the Honda up.

ANNE
That's fine. I'll just unpack and
clean today. But...did you get the
new battery?

JEFFERY
Battery?

ANNE
(he should know this)
My car battery.

JEFFERY
Uh, no. Not yet.

ANNE
And the kitty bowls are empty
outside.

JEFFERY
Shit. I'm sorry. I forgot.

ANNE
That's fine, baby. You're busy
slaying dragons.

She kisses him. Sits at the counter. He begins to turn away,
but she tugs on his shirt-sleeve to hold his attention.

ANNE (CONT'D)
I rented a car yesterday. I hate
driving in that city, but...I
wanted to go back and see some
places. I wanted to see how it was
that we ever possibly met. So I
went back to the Burmese
restaurant. Remember? The place I
never ate? That was the one Heidi
insisted we go to.
(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)

It was closed, of course. She secretly wanted to see this guy in the neighborhood. So I said fine. I left her and walked over to Geary. I was hungry and, my one day in San Francisco, I wanted to see Chinatown. Right? So I took the bus. To the corner of Geary and Market.

(smiling at the memory)

It was so alive; smells and sounds, the cable cars clanging, and this old Chinese guy with a wispy white beard at the corner, handing out flyers to his restaurant. And all these people rushing around him. Nobody taking a flyer. So I walked up to him and said, "I'd like a flyer, please." and he smiled at me, this big, one-toothed smile. Can you imagine -- what if I was one of those people who just walked by? What if I never asked for that flyer?

JEFFERY

We wouldn't be standing here.

ANNE

I remember going up those stairs, by myself -- with the musty old red carpet. I really felt this sense of anticipation with each step, like I was going to discover something wonderful at the top.

(she takes his hand,
emotional)

And I did. Okay, y'all looked and sounded like a bunch of drunk navy yahoos, but I knew there was a gem amongst them.

He kisses her.

JEFFERY

I have to go.

He carries his mug to the sink.

ANNE

I actually took the bus, again. To retrace my steps.

(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)

But this time, when I got off,
there was no guy handing out
flyers, no way to know about the
restaurant. No way I'd meet you.

JEFFERY

(rinsing his mug)
Yeah, it worked out.

ANNE

Jeffery, what I'm trying to say is,
if things are meant to work out,
they will.

He looks at her, impatiently. He doesn't really want to get
into this.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I just feel that this is all going
to be fine.

JEFFERY

Boy, one week in California...

ANNE

Ha ha.

JEFFERY

(one last kiss)
Bye.

ANNE

Wait.

JEFFERY

What?

ANNE

How do you feel?

JEFFERY

I feel that, actually, it's
borderline crazy to say things are
"meant to be." As if God or the
Universe wanted eight million Jews
to die or eight-hundred thousand
Tutsis in Rwanda. It's solipsism
to the highest degree. All those
little steps you think led to us
meeting? Random. If you had taken
another bus you'd have met some
other guy, and you'd be saying the
same thing to him.

ANNE

But that's not what happened.

JEFFERY

Yes, it is! That is what happened!
Don't you see: I'm random! You're
random! And then you turn it into a
nice little story.

ANNE

Bullshit.

JEFFERY

Well, right. Of course, it's not
really random. There's cause and
effect. These secret connections
you're always looking for, they're
real, but they're not what you
think; they're not personal. You
know what I'm saying? It goes so
far beyond...it is so fucking
arrogant to think that you can
begin to fathom the workings of the
universe, and, then, guess what?
It's all about you, it's all about
me, it's all about us. It's not!
Every fucking ant on the picnic
blanket thinks it's all about him,
but, believe me, he's wrong. He's
just a fucking ant with a rich,
fucking fantasy life -- until
somebody shakes the blanket.

Her eyes are wide, hurt.

EXT. CLAIBORNE AVENUE - DAY

Anne's late-model silver Lexus heads west.

INT. ANNE'S CAR - DAY

Jeffery drives, looking sullen. Something catches his eye --

Across the divide, a GREEN PICK-UP TRUCK is going in the
other direction. He frowns, suddenly alarmed -- trying to
make out who's driving. It passes.

He looks in the side mirror --

ANGLE IN MIRROR

The green pick-up keeps going in the other direction.

He relaxes.

EXT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

An industrial neighborhood in New Orleans. The Lexus pulls into the parking lot of a series of near-identical industrial shops. The lettering on this one says, "Gator Technologies, Inc."

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\TECH LAB - DAY

POV THROUGH A MICROSCOPE -- The ragged terrain, hills and valleys of a silicon chip.

Wearing laboratory whites, Jeffery looks through the microscope. He turns to a LAB TECHNICIAN.

JEFFERY

Let's relax this. Dilate the
cathode tip and bring it to 10,000.

The Lab Tech nods.

Jeffery sees Kendrick and Michael on the other side of lab window, looking in, angry.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

The three of them stand inside the loading dock. Jeffery trying to keep his cool. The other two not so much.

KENDRICK

What? You work five days a week
now?

Jeffery glances into the open-area workshop -- SEES RITA in the distance, at her design table.

JEFFERY

My team was perfectly capable of
the remap without me; same as if I
was here.

MICHAEL

No, not the same. You're the
leader.

KENDRICK

You give us this big speech and
then...

(MORE)

KENDRICK (CONT'D)

I mean, Rita's fine, but seriously?
You couldn't wait two weeks to fuck
her?

JEFFERY

Back off. Do not use that language.

KENDRICK

I'm sorry. Have intercourse.
Sensitive, consensual intercourse.

JEFFERY

We did not...have sex.

MICHAEL

We're not gonna parse sex acts with
you, Jeff: fuck her, suck her,
premature ejaculate on her stomach,
whatever, you weren't here.

KENDRICK

Jesus! You're supposed to be the
scientific, reasonable one...

Jeffery's EYES HARDEN --

Michael and Kendrick's voices FADE OUT.

JEFFERY'S POV -- Across the workshop, CHRISTIAN talking to
Rita. She smiles at him. They laugh. She touches his arm.

SECONDS LATER

JEFFERY is crossing the workshop, striding towards them --
fake smile, eyes of death. Christian turns. His eyes widen;
he should run, but pride roots him in place.

JEFFERY

Good morning.

CHRISTIAN

(wary)

'Morning.

Rita's eyes flit up, then back to her work. Jeffery gives
Christian a long, hard stare. Christian shifts nervously.

CHRISTIAN (CONT'D)

Okay. I'll, uh, I'll go and...

JEFFERY

Wait. You're our "resident physics
expert," right?

Christian's eyes dart to Rita. Did she say that?

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

You need to weigh in on the shearing problem with the carbide atoms. I mean, that's our problem, right? Thermoconductivity. What do you suggest? Re-layering the atoms, SiC4, SiC6?

CHRISTIAN

I...I don't know.

JEFFERY

You don't. You're a PhD, right?

CHRISTIAN

Yeah. Mechanical engineering and thermo-dynamics.

JEFFERY

Thermal dynamics?

CHRISTIAN

Yeah.

JEFFERY

Good. Just the man I need. The hot water faucet's broken in the men's room. Go fix it.

CHRISTIAN

You're kidding.

Jeffery's eyes say he's not.

Christian scurries away. Jeffery looks at Rita -- she just shakes her head.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\JEFFERY'S OFFICE - DAY

He stands with his back to his closed door, trying to get a grip on himself.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

He returns to her worktable.

JEFFERY

I'm sorry. That was rude.

She keeps working. Eyes down.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
I want to apologize. For
everything.

RITA
Don't you have a deadline?

He leans in to speak quietly, urgently.

JEFFERY
If we don't talk, it's just going
to get worse.

RITA
I didn't ask for any of this.

JEFFERY
I know. Neither did I.

RITA
What? You started it.

JEFFERY
No. Yes, but....that's not entirely
fair, Rita. You sent me signals.

RITA
What?

JEFFERY
With your eyes. Come hither. You
know you did.

RITA
Who cares?
(whispering)
You don't think the police are
gonna come looking for us?

He looks around, then leans in, talking low.

JEFFERY
No. Nobody called the police, I
assure you. Look, I know it seems
like I went out of control, but I
didn't. I'm a navy-qualified
marksman. I fired in a deliberate,
skillful manner. No one was hit.
No one was injured. I promise you.

She looks up at him, finally.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

BLAM BLAM BLAM

CLOSE ON LEFT TAILLIGHT -- exploding as bullets hit it.

CLOSE ON RIGHT TAILLIGHT -- shattering.

BLAM BLAM

THE RIGHT REAR TIRE IS BLOWN

The truck fishtails, comes to a stop. A beat. The driver's door opens...

JEFFERY stands in the middle of the road, slowly lowering his weapon, staring at the truck.

The rage in his eyes relaxes into another thought -- what the fuck am I doing?

He hurries back to the CR-V.

INT. JEFFERY'S CR-V - DAY

SLAM. He closes the door, looking over at Rita. Her sundress is rumpled; she looks away from him, drunk and disheveled.

The CR-V is no longer on the country road -- they're parked at the pump at a GAS STATION on the outskirts of Houma.

JEFFERY

I'm just going to pull up so we can talk. Okay?

She turns to him -- not so pretty. Feeling like shit and not giving a shit.

EXT. HOUMA GAS STATION - DAY

The CR-V pulls up to the station's convenience store and parks.

INT. JEFFERY'S CR-V - DAY

He turns off the ignition with things on his mind.

JEFFERY

As far as your job is concerned, I want you to know, it's safe.

She shakes her head. Who cares?

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
You're an excellent employee.
Nothing irreparable has happened.

She looks at him and sighs, drunk and exasperated. Outside her window, A GREEN PICK-UP TRUCK pulls alongside them and parks. A couple of guys get out, go into the store.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
It's just, she...my wife, Anne...
she hasn't done anything to deserve
this. I mean, she would lay down on
the tracks for me.

RITA
I have a headache. Why are you
telling me this?

JEFFERY
Because. What I'm getting at...I'm
only here because you're like this
white-winged unicorn that flew into
my life. I always thought that guys
who cheat are scumbags, but then I
met you, this white-winged
unicorn...and I knew, this girl's
once in a lifetime. I have to allow
myself this one experience. That
doesn't make me a scumbag. I care
deeply about you and Anne. You're
both two human beings I care about.
How is that scummy?

RITA
I know, Jeffery, you're perfect.
The perfect husband. Perfect boss.

JEFFERY
No, no. Jesus, I'm not saying that.
Far from perfect.

RITA
I feel sick. God, I hate myself.

JEFFERY
I'm...why?

RITA
I thought I was smarter than this.
I thought you were a gentleman.

JEFFERY

I am! What...? I stopped.

RITA

No. Right. But you managed to get me naked, right? So you can whack off and still be a great husband.

JEFFERY

Wow. You are so off base.

RITA

Fucking asshole.

JEFFERY

Jesus. Rita...

RITA

I want to go home. I feel sick.

JEFFERY

Rita, you're not hearing me. I care about you. I'm trying to be a good guy here.

The MAN in the green truck has returned. He throws open the truck door -- BANGING into the CR-V's passenger door.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Hey, asshole, watch it.

(to Rita)

I want you to feel good about...

RICHARD WILDE, 50s, a grizzled gator hunter, leans into Rita's window.

WILDE

Uh, what was that? What'd you say?

JEFFERY

I said...be careful.

WILDE

No, that ain't what you said.

JEFFERY

Look, you opened your door with a little too much force and it struck mine. No big deal, alright? Just be more careful in the future.

WILDE

Oh, okay.

JEFFERY

All right?

WILDE

Yeah. I got it. Thank you. Be more careful.

JEFFERY

Great.

WILDE

And you, you might refrain from calling people names in the future. All right, chief?

JEFFERY

Right. Great. Take care.

Wilde's head withdraws. He swings open the truck door again, this time with force, BANGING into Rita's door. She yelps.

He gets behind the wheel and sits there, eyeing Jeffery.

Rita stares at Jeffery, too. Wondering what he's going to do next.

Does he have a choice? He gets out...

EXT. HOUMA GAS STATION - DAY

Comes around to stand in front of Wilde's vehicle. A second MAN is sitting in the passenger seat.

Jeffery gestures -- you gonna step out and settle this?

Wilde stares him with a smirk. Starts the truck and backs up. Jeffery comes around to look at the passenger door --

It's got a deep scratch.

JEFFERY

Hey! You fucking asshole...!

Brake lights.

Jeffery looks into the pick-up truck's bed: it is filled with DOZENS OF ALLIGATOR CARCASSES. He frowns.

Suddenly, he's JERKED FROM BEHIND; slammed into the side of the CR-V.

CRAWFORD, 40, 6'5" in overalls and white shrimping boots, grabs his lapels, leaning into him.

CRAWFORD
Hey man. You fucked up.

Wilde and the other guy, TROY, 20s, get out of the truck.
They walk over.

WILDE
I'm an asshole? That's some harsh
language, coming from a Honda CR-V
driver. You think we okay with
being talked to like that?

JEFFERY
Let me go.

WILDE
Now hold on. We gotta work this
out.

JEFFERY
You deliberately hit my car door.
What'd you expect me to do?

WILDE
Well, you might use some common
sense and think where you are.

JEFFERY
Look, I'm sorry. I overreacted.

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Rita turns around to look. Sees Jeffery's back pressed
against the window.

EXT. HOUMA GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

A WOMAN walks from the pumps to the store. She walks around
Wilde's truck; it's parked in her way. She glances over --
sees Jeffery surrounded by the three men --

Jeffery sees her -- sees other patrons at the pumps, exiting
the store, looking at him -- a public humiliation.

WILDE
Boys, that sound sincere?

TROY
Not really.

WILDE
Mister, how about it? A sincere
apology and we all good. Make it
from the heart. That works wonders
with we country people.

Rita has stepped out; she comes around the vehicle.

RITA
Hey! Fuck-heads -- let him go.

WILDE
Oh that's not good.

JEFFERY
Rita! Shut up! I got it.

RITA
Yeah, that's obvious.

JEFFERY
Get back in the car!

She doesn't. She folds her arms and watches, pissed off.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Look, I apologize. Sincerely, I
apologize.

WILDE
And...? Make it good.

JEFFERY
I was in the wrong. You were in the
right. I am very, very sorry.

Wilde exchanges glances with his men. He shrugs. The guys
release Jeffery.

WILDE
I accept. You done the right thing.
Let's go, boys.

Wilde and Troy go back to the green truck. Crawford goes back
to his. Jeffery straightens, brushing off his shirt.

His eyes are blazing.

JEFFERY'S POV --- FOCUSED ON THE GREEN TRUCK -- everything
else disappearing.

He runs to the back of the CR-V, opens it, pulls out his BAG.

He looks around for Rita. She's walking away, purse over her shoulder, dialing a number.

He grabs her shoulder. She whirls -- gives him a cold, sick look.

JEFFERY
Get in the car.

RITA
Fuck off. I'm...

JEFFERY
(furious)
Get in the car. Now. Now. Move!
Move!

He bullies her to the Honda, virtually pushing her in the door, slamming it.

EXT. HOUMA GAS STATION - DAY

The Honda peels out, turns right, onto the road, in pursuit.

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Gripping the wheel in his left hand, he unzips his bag with the other, digging into it.

RITA
What the fuck?!

JEFFERY
Three against one. You saw that.
Nobody fights those odds, if you
have any sense. You let them walk
away; you regroup.

RITA
What the hell are you doing?

He pulls out his pistol, a BERETTA M-9.

JEFFERY
I'm regrouping.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Honda speeds down the road.

EXT. JEFFERY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Eating up the miles. Fields whizzing past.

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The gun rests on his thigh. Up ahead, the green pick-up turns left, onto a smaller road.

RITA
Jeffery. For Christ's sake, it's
not that big a deal. Let it go!

JEFFERY
I'm fine.

RITA
It's just words. Nobody got hurt.
This is crazy!

JEFFERY
The conversation was way too one-
sided. That's a no-go.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The Honda takes the turn, fast, tires screeching.

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Rita holds on for dear life.

RITA
Shit, Jeffery! Stop!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Honda fishtails --- swerving -- banking left, then right

INSERT: THE RIGHT TIRES GO INTO A DITCH --

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR

He pulls the wheel, hard, trying to pop them out.

JEFFERY
Shit!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Stuck in the rut, the tires splash mud. And then -- the CR-V bounces out and stops, angled across the road.

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR

Rita faces Jeffery with a fury.

RITA
Are you fucking satisfied? You
fucking maniac!

JEFFERY
Rita -- hold on!

She turns to look over her shoulder. Through the window behind her -- the Green Pick-Up IS BACKING UP rapidly, headed for them.

CRUNCH!

It slams into the passenger door.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

ANGLE FROM ABOVE

The pick-up pushes the Honda back twenty feet, tires squealing and smoking. The force on the front half of the vehicle turns the Honda around, until it faces the opposite direction. The vehicles stop at angles, facing away from each other.

ANGLE FROM ABOVE

Jeffery comes out of the Honda, weapon raised, heading back towards the truck.

INT. JEFFERY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Rita looks over her shoulder -- sees Jeffery through the back hatch, approaching the pick-up. He leaves her view.

JEFFERY (O.S.)
Let me see your hands, mother-
fuckers!

WILDE (O.S.)
You back off, crazy fucker!

They continue shouting, but their voices fade away, no longer Rita's concern.

She opens her purse; pulls the Alligator Broach out. She holds it up, considering it.

Off-screen: the pick-up's engine roars. It pulls away.

Off-screen: BLAM BLAM BLAM

Rita dangles the broach out her window.

Off-screen: BLAM BLAM

She lets it drop.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - DAY

Establishing Grant Street in San Francisco.

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT/UPSTAIRS - DAY

A group of NAVY OFFICERS are sitting around a table, laughing drunkenly. JEFFERY (fifteen years younger) is holding up his left wrist, showing his SEIKO WATCH.

JEFFERY

Eight years. I've had this watch for eight years -- same battery -- never missed a beat. Ergo, I can make a one-year battery that's one eighth the size.

NAVY OFFICER #1

I'm in. Ka-chinggg.

NAVY OFFICER #2

Kaaa-bullshit.

Behind them -- ANNE is coming up the stairs, led by a Hostess. Anne looks around the room, soaking it in.

JEFFERY

Just remember, suckers, you had your chance to get in on the ground floor.

NAVY OFFICER #1

Jeffery, we'll talk.

NAVY OFFICER #3
Guys...six-o-clock.

All heads swivel to see Anne walking to her table. She looks over at the guys -- and SMILES at Jeffery.

NAVY OFFICER #1
Oohhhhh, Jeff-ery...

NAVY OFFICER #3
You got the face she wants to know better.

Anne sits down -- smiling at Jeffery again.

NAVY OFFICER #2
By sitting on it.

NAVY OFFICER #3
(demonstrating)
Go run your tongue over those pearly whites.

Jeffery glances over, uninterested.

JEFFERY
Go ahead. Knock yourselves out.

NAVY OFFICER #2
What? She doesn't look like Halle Berry?

NAVY OFFICER #3
She is a little whitebread...

NAVY OFFICER #1
She's fine. She's cute.

JEFFERY
Reminds me of my mother.

NAVY OFFICER #3
So? Your mother's hot.

The guys laugh. Navy Officer #2 takes out a SAN FRANCISCO SOUVENIER KEY CHAIN.

NAVY OFFICER #2
Goddamn it, sailor. You haven't gotten laid in six months. Give her this...and tell her one more smile and she gets the key to your heart.

He pushes the key chain across the table. Jeffery gives him a look -- you're shitting me. But he sighs and picks it up...

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\BEDROOM - DAY

Anne (today) stands by the dresser, looking at the San Francisco key chain. She's wearing a NURSE'S UNIFORM.

ANNE
(to herself)
...one more smile. Cheesy. But...
here we are.

She picks up a couple of house keys; as she hooks them onto the key chain, she exits.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\HALLWAY - DAY

She heads down the stairs.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\FRONT HALL - DAY

Her PURSE is by the door. She opens it and drops the key chain inside.

EXT. ST CHARLES AVENUE - DAY

She waits on the center divide of St Charles Avenue. A STREETCAR approaches, heading downtown. It stops and she gets on.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\JEFFERY'S OFFICE - DAY

Jeffery sits behind his desk.

We move in slowly on his face, deep in thought.

MEMORY HIT --

Rita topless, straddling him on the floor. He takes a breast in his hand, licking it.

RITA
Please, please, please, don't make
me beg.

She reaches down for his zipper.

JEFFERY
Wait, wait.

BACK TO SCENE --

Jeffery grimaces with frustration.

MEMORY HIT --

She reaches for his zipper.

RITA
...don't make me beg.

JEFFERY
Wait, wait.
(repeat)
Wait, wait.
(repeat)
Wait, wait...

BACK TO SCENE --

He can't stand it. He jumps up from his desk.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\DESIGN STUDIO - DAY

He walks into the studio, looking for her. She's not at her worktable.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

He crosses the workshop, going to the Tech Lab. He stops --

SEES RITA AND KENDRICK through an open bay door, standing outside on the loading dock, smoking cigarettes, chatting.

Jeffery glares. They keep chatting, not seeing him.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\TECH LAB

In their lab whites, Jeffery and Christian stand shoulder to shoulder over a calimetric measuring device. A couple other LAB TECHS cluster around them, anxiously watching.

CHRISTIAN
See, absolutely no runaway.

JEFFERY
Okay.

CHRISTIAN
Zero, after four million trials.
It's as close we can get to
measuring perfection.

Jeffery is only half-listening.

JEFFERY
Check the helium.

CHRISTIAN
We checked it.

JEFFERY
Check the thermal management
system.

CHRISTIAN
I did. Zero calories. Zero. After
four million trials.

Jeffery looks at him with hostility.

JEFFERY (O.S.)
We're not ready.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\KENDRICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Kendrick and Michael are seated in Kendrick's office. Jeffery
stands inside the door.

KENDRICK
How exactly do you figure?

JEFFERY
I'll spare you the technical
language, but I need another week.

MICHAEL
Jeffery, we talked to the techs.
There's no glitch, no problems. The
battery's perfect.

KENDRICK
They're boxed and waiting by the
door. Let 'em go.

JEFFERY
Another week.

He walks away. Kendrick and Michael exchange a look -- Plan
B.

EXT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

Day turns to night. Everyone leaves.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\TECH LAB - NIGHT

Jeffery is alone in the lab. A MICROSCOPE on the counter in front of him.

The LIGHTS OVERHEAD FLICKER, then return. He leans over to LOOK INTO the microscope, to see --

JEFFERY'S POV --

Pannng down Rita's graceful neck, his fingers tracing it to the nape.

His fingers trace her shoulder. Skim her arm.

Her eyes shine. She's looking at him with love. Her lips part.

ANNE (O.S.)
What is it?

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\KITCHEN - NIGHT

He's deep in thought, standing at the counter with a beer in his hand. Anne's cooking.

JEFFERY
Hm?

ANNE
You haven't said one real word to me since I've been back.
(he looks blank)
I'll be so happy when these stupid things ship.

JEFFERY
(distracted)
Me, too.

She stops and looks at him, exasperated.

ANNE
Jeffery.

JEFFERY
What?

ANNE

Look at me. I'm not wallpaper. See?
Here I am, moving about our
kitchen. See?

(waves a wooden spoon)

This is me cooking. The nice smell
of onions and peppers? Any of this
getting through?

He blinks, a distracted smile.

His phone beeps in the hall.

JEFFERY

Excuse me.

He exits. Anne shakes her head, annoyed. Pours herself some
more wine.

Jeffery returns.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

I've got to go.

ANNE

Where?

JEFFERY

Where do you think?

EXT. CHASE BANK - NIGHT

The silver Lexus is parked in front of the Chase on St.
Charles. Jeffery is at the ATM.

EXT. BYWATER LOFT APARTMENTS - NIGHT

The Lexus pulls up outside a large brick building in the
Bywater neighborhood -- a warehouse turned loft apartments.

He crosses the street, heading to the front entrance, when he
stops, seeing --

THE GREEN PICK-UP is parked a few vehicles in front of his.

He walks to the rear of the truck. He inspects the
taillights; still broken; some temporaries wired in place.

He takes out his phone; SNAPS A PHOTO of the license plate.

THREE MEN are sitting in the cab. The DRIVER looks at Jeffery
in the side mirror.

INT. RITA'S LOFT APARTMENT - NIGHT

Rita is looking out the window.

RITA
It's them. Assholes. I'm calling
the police.

Jeffery stands behind her, in the middle of the living room.
LOUD MUSIC from another loft is coming through the walls.

JEFFERY
Hold on. Some of my actions were
not...police-friendly. Let's talk
about this.

He looks around --

Rita's artist friend, WILLIAM, 28, is sitting on the couch,
his long legs easily stretching across the coffee table.
William is more than a little intimidating, tall, black, with
long-dreadlocked hair; a New Orleans Basquiat. TRAVIS, 22,
piercings and body art, lounges across from him.

Jeffery walks over, extends his hand. Best behavior.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Hey, I'm Jeffery. Good to meet you.

WILLIAM
(coolly shaking)
Yo.

TRAVIS
What's up?

RITA
Jeffery, are you going to take care
of this?

JEFFERY
Yes, I am. Did they follow you from
work?

RITA
I don't know! I was heading out to
the store and they were there.

JEFFERY
We must have left something on the
road...? A pen, a piece of paper
with our logo on it?

RITA
Does it matter? They know where I
live!

He nods, looking around the room. Across from the couch are TWO EASELS with big poster boards on them. Different names are written on them in different free-hand script: ByWater Design, EdgeWater Design, Design Asylum, The Design House, and so on.

JEFFERY
What're you working on?

WILLIAM
Right now, the company name. Check this out. What comes to mind when you hear: The Design House?

RITA
William, please don't distract him.

JEFFERY
What kind of design?

WILLIAM
All kinds. Graphic. Advertising. Interior. Fashion. Whatever. That's why I like "The Design House" -- all your design needs under one roof.

JEFFERY
Hm, that's a big umbrella. You have all those designers?

WILLIAM
We're it, so far. Ground floor.

There's things Jeffery could say -- but he doesn't. He looks at Rita. She looks back, exposed and defiant.

RITA
You gonna tell me I don't know what I'm doing? Thank you, I know that already.

(softening)
I'm trying to have my thing, like you have your thing.

JEFFERY
I get it. That's smart. Now, if you had your MBA, you could...
(seeing her expression)
(MORE)

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
 ...never mind. You're fine. Keep
 doing what you're doing.

She looks relieved -- some of the affection back in her eyes.
 He stands there, looking at Rita, William, Travis, hearing
 the loud music through the walls --

A world with no place for him. He sighs.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
 Okay, I'm gonna go talk to these
 yahoos.

RITA
 You want me to call the police?

JEFFERY
 I can handle this. Calm, cool, and
 collected. Like adults.

EXT. BYWATER APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Richard Wilde sits in the shadows, behind the wheel; his two
 men beside him. Waiting.

Suddenly, they are ROCKED by a car bumping them from behind.
 Their heads snap forward and back.

WILDE
 Son of a bitch!

TROY
 Who was that?!

They look behind them --

The Lexus' lights come on. The high-beams flash. It swerves
 from behind, pulling up even.

Wilde stares down into the Lexus.

Jeffery is looking back at him, taunting.

He punches the gas.

Wilde follows.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREETS - NIGHT

The Lexus heads west on Royal street in the Bywater; the
 green truck follows.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

Jeffery looks strangely relaxed. Even pleased with himself.

INT. GREEN TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

TROY
What's he doing?

CRAWFORD
Leading us away from his
girlfriend. Like we stupid and
can't find our way back.

WILDE
It's okay, boys. He's got a plan.
Don't you want to see what it is?

EXT. ESPLANADE AVENUE - NIGHT

The Lexus turns right; the pick-up follows.

They turn left on Royal Street.

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

Jeffery cruises through the French Quarter, calm, intent. He stops in the middle of the street. Checks the rear view -- they're behind him, also stopped. He gets out.

EXT. ROYAL STREET - NIGHT

The vehicles block the narrow street in front of the 8th District Police Station at the corner of Royal and Conti. It's late; not a lot going on. Wilde gets out and folds his arms. The other two stand on the far side, glaring.

JEFFERY
Gentlemen.
(no reply)
It occurred to me this is how wars
start, right? You push, I push back
harder...everybody loses.

WILDE
(re: the station)
You moving in? Plan on conducting
all your business upstairs? You
better.

JEFFERY

I just want to talk. That's how wars stop. Talking, man to man, seeing neither one of us is as bad as he's come across.

WILDE

(to his men)

Alright, now we start slinging the bullshit.

JEFFERY

I have your license plate number; you have mine. You know where I work, right? So, we're in the same boat. Mutual assured destruction.

WILDE

We ain't in no same boat.

JEFFERY

Alright, how do you see it? Tell me. I want to hear your point of view.

WILDE

(chuckling)

My point of view? You're fucked. Your business, family, girlfriend ...all out in the open, exposed. Your paw's in the trap and you know it. Whereas me, I could fuck you up and disappear forever. I'm the wild man of the swamp, right? No family, no attachments, just these boys.

(nodding at the building)

They never find me.

JEFFERY

Really? Your truck's not registered in the State of Louisiana?

WILDE

You ever been in a street fight, wise ass? Who wins? The crazy one, every time. Man, I'll bite your fingers off. I'll gouge your eyes out.

It's not going well. Jeffery changes his tack.

JEFFERY

Look, the thing is, actually...I wanted to apologize...I'm very sorry about shooting at your truck. I was not...

WILDE

Wait, wait, wait. You didn't shoot at my truck. You shot at me and my boys.

JEFFERY

No, I was...

WILDE

You the dumbshit who brought a weapon into...

JEFFERY

Yes, yes, I know. I was wrong. But you have to understand, I have military training.

Wilde laughs.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

No, it's true. Navy. I'm an expert marksman. Did you ever serve?

WILDE

You ain't fucking serious.

JEFFERY

I was aiming for the taillights, right? And that's exactly what I hit.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey! What y'all doing over there?

They look around -- a POLICEMAN is walking towards the station, holding a cup of coffee and a Popeye's bag.

POLICEMAN

You can't be stopping on the street like that. Move on.

Jeffery waves.

The Policeman heads up the stairs. Jeffery takes out his wallet, pulls out a thick wad of bills.

JEFFERY

Here's three thousand dollars to cover the damage to your truck, and then some. Believe me, you have absolutely succeeded in scaring the shit out of me and teaching me a lesson I will never forget. Would you please just accept this money with my humble apologies and...let's...

He holds the bills out, shielding them from the cop, who is standing at the top of the stairs, sipping his coffee.

Wilde looks at the money -- too much to pass up. He looks at his guys. Then at Jeffery's intent expression.

He takes the money.

A look passes between them. Is it over?

EXT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jeffery stands outside his house. A light is on downstairs; otherwise, all dark. Cicadas whir in the night. Home.

He sighs -- and then sighs again, deeper. He rubs his eyes and let out a little chuckle, heading to the door.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\KITCHEN - NIGHT

His DINNER is on a plate, covered with plastic wrap on the table.

He slowly peels the wrap off. Looks down at the food, thoughtfully.

EXT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

He sits outside on the back steps, eating, listening to the night.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\BEDROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON TELEVISION -- The large white swirl of a HURRICANE.

Anne fell asleep with the TV on; the sound off. Replaying the local news. The WEATHERMAN stands in front of a map of the Gulf of Mexico, pointing to HURRICANE DORIS.

Jeffery turns it off. Anne is in bed, facing away from him; she talks without turning as he quickly undresses.

ANNE

It's a Category Four now.

JEFFERY

Yeah, I saw. Heading for Mexico, fortunately.

ANNE

For us.

He joins Anne under the covers in the dark. He shifts closer to her, puts his arm around her; spooning.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Your problem solved?

JEFFERY

I think so. Hope so. Go back to sleep.

He nuzzles her neck, breathing her in. A couple of moments pass. Anne turns to face him, alert.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

What?

ANNE

(touching his cheek)
You're here.

JEFFERY

Yeah. Go back to sleep.

ANNE

What happened tonight?

JEFFERY

Huh?

ANNE

Something happened. You're different.

JEFFERY

What...how can you tell?

ANNE

Baby, I could feel it as soon as you put your arm around me. You're here...with me.

JEFFERY
You're amazing.

ANNE
What happened?

JEFFERY
You know, Mike and Kendrick have been accusing me of making up the heating problem with the battery. Like I just stopped everything... put everything at risk...to serve my great, unconscious fear of success or failure or...

ANNE
And...?

JEFFERY
And, well, I think they're right.

ANNE
What? Really?

JEFFERY
The battery's perfect.

ANNE
Oh my god.

JEFFERY
Yeah. I know.

ANNE
That's wild. I was sure you were right and they're full of shit.

JEFFERY
And God bless you for it. Never lose that.

He chuckles, kissing her. Then turns on his back, looking at the ceiling. She strokes his chest for a few silent moments.

ANNE
Told you things would work out.

JEFFERY
We'll see.
(pause)
I've been running on some kind of strange fuel. Fear. Adrenalin. If this is my mid-life crisis...

ANNE
I've heard of worse.

He looks at her. So much more to say. He sighs, looks at the ceiling.

JEFFERY
Thanks for dinner, by the way. I
figured I was S.O.L.

ANNE
No, no. You know what they say:
starve a cold, feed a mid-life
crisis.

She cuddles up against him.

EXT. GATOR WORKSHOP - NIGHT

The parking lot is empty. The building sits quiet.

The STEEL DOORS are closed at the loading dock.

BLACK SMOKE leaks out between the doors. Slowly at first, and
then more. From inside, the cracks between the doors are...

GLOWING with the flickering red light of a FIRE inside.

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO - DAY

LIGHTNING FLASHES

Inside the eye of Hurricane Doris. A great swirling MASS OF
CLOUDS straddling the Gulf and landmass of Mexico.

GROUND-LEVEL BELOW

Rain and wind whip the palm trees and beachfront of the
Yucatan. Hotels are boarded up. Traffic lights sway.

Birds huddle in the trees.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - DAWN

PANNING THE ROOFTOPS of the city in the early morning.

In the distance, we hear the growing sound of FIRE ENGINE
SIRENS.

A PLUME OF BLACK SMOKE rises into the sky.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\FRONT HALL - DAY

Bam bam bam....bam bam bam...

Someone POUNDING on the front door. Jeffery enters, half-dressed for work. He opens it.

Kendrick bursts through the door. Pushing Jeffery in the chest.

KENDRICK
You fucking son of a bitch!

He pushes him again. Pushes him again.

KENDRICK (CONT'D)
You son of a bitch! Son of a bitch!

JEFFERY
(fending him off)
Stop! Stop! What are you talking about?

KENDRICK
You know what I'm talking about.

JEFFERY
Back off! Stop! Just talk to me.

KENDRICK
Man, you are going to jail. You're going to prison, you crazy fucker.

Anne enters in her nightgown.

ANNE
What is going on in here? Kendrick, calm down, please. Stop yelling.

He looks at Anne, wildly, then turns on Jeffery.

KENDRICK
You self-destructive crazy son of a bitch. Vindictive, vindictive, asshole.

ANNE
Kendrick! Stop it! Talk to us.

KENDRICK
(to Jeffery)
Unbelievable. She still defends you, after your bullshit?
(MORE)

KENDRICK (CONT'D)

She has no idea who you really are,
does she, you fucking piece of
work?

JEFFERY

(eyes narrowing)

I have no idea what you're talking
about.

KENDRICK

The fire.

JEFFERY

What fire?

EXT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

The Workshop is engulfed in flames. A four-alarm fire, the
area swarming with firemen and engines. Blasts of water spew
into its burning guts.

Jeffery watches, in shock; Anne beside him. Other employees
mill behind the police line.

LATER

Anne stands alone, watching as Jeffery talks to TWO POLICE
OFFICERS.

LATER

Jeffery and Anne are sitting inside the Lexus.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

He's behind the wheel, utterly devastated, in a daze. Anne
looks at him, very concerned, her hand resting on his
shoulder.

ANNE

Why in god's name would he blame
you?

Jeffery looks at her, frowns, takes out his phone.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Who you calling?

JEFFERY

Sam.

A MAN'S VOICE comes over the line.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Jeffery? I'm so sorry. How do
things look?

JEFFERY
Bad. Sam, did Mike and/or Kendrick
talk to you yesterday?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Jeffery, I...you know that's
confidential.

JEFFERY
Okay, let's say...hypothetically,
if they wanted to take steps to
remove me from the company. What
would you tell them?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Well, I'd advise them that they own
sixty percent of the company be-
tween them. So they have leverage,
but they'd need to prove you'd been
reckless or incompetent, and it'd
be a long, expensive court battle
which I'd counsel against. In any
case, Jeffery, this really isn't
the time...

JEFFERY
Thank you.

He hangs up. Staring ahead.

ANNE
My god. They were going to try and
push you out?

He nods.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Are you sure?

He shrugs.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Well, first, that's insane. Second,
you would never do this, even if
they were. Third, you were with
me...

She catches herself, remembering. He looks at her, sadly.
Their eyes meet -- really meet. She knows.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Who is she?

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\BEDROOM - DAY

Anne is packing her suitcase, heartbroken and angry in equal measures.

ANNE
How could you, how could you, how
could you?

He's sitting nearby, his head bowed.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Our camp? While I'm away? That is
so premeditated, so evil. Evil!

JEFFERY
Anne, I swear. Nothing happened.

ANNE
The planning. The lying. How can
somebody act like that?

JEFFERY
Nothing happened.

ANNE
I know exactly who she is. The
pretty one. My god, I feel like I'm
gonna fall over.

(steadying herself)
No, she's not pretty. She's
beautiful. The mistress. You
thought you could stick it out with
me but have your wonderful secret
mistress on the side who makes it
all worthwhile?

JEFFERY
No!

ANNE
I'm sorry, Jeffery, you're not that
special. You don't get two vaginas.

JEFFERY
I don't...

ANNE
You have to choose one. And I'm
making it easy on you.

EXT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE - DAY

SLAM -- she slams the truck on the Lexus. She tries to go to the driver's door, but Jeffery stands in her way.

ANNE

Move.

JEFFERY

No, just listen. One minute.

ANNE

No.

JEFFERY

Anne...

ANNE

What? You're not gonna move?

JEFFERY

No. No! Not until you hear me.

She folds her arms.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Yes, I went there with bad intentions, but I couldn't... Because I love you and adore you. I mean, I faced this huge temptation and I resisted. You should be happy. It's this mid-life crisis I'm going through. I think on some deep, cellular level, my body knows it's aging, it's dying, and it's making me crazy.

She pushes past him, going to the door. She gets into the front seat. Tries to close the door. He grabs it.

ANNE

Let go!

JEFFERY

Anne, if I can't get to the root of a problem, I can't solve it. But I'm at the root. I'm solving it!

ANNE

Let me fucking go.

He releases the door. She slams it. The window rolls down -- halfway. She looks up at him.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry you had to resist that
huge temptation for me, Jeffery. I
can see where that'd drive you
crazy.

The window rolls back up. Anne turns the key in the ignition.

Click click click. Nothing.

The battery's dead.

She throws her head back in misery and looks at him with
wounded, thwarted eyes.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE - DAY

Jeffery stands inside the living room, watching as Anne gets
a jump from an Auto-club mechanic.

MOMENTS LATER

He watches as the Lexus drives away.

LATER

Jeffery sits in the living room, deep in thought, his brow
knitted in anger.

INT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE\BEDROOM - DAY

Sitting on the bed, he pulls open the lower drawer on his
bedstand, takes out the Beretta.

He turns it over in his hand, thinking about it.

Decides against it and puts the gun back. He closes the
drawer.

EXT. PETE'S GARAGE - DAY

PETE the mechanic walks Jeffery around the side of the auto
repair shop. He points to the CR-V.

The door has been replaced; it's slate gray, unpainted.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREETS - DAY

The CR-V heads northeast along Tulane Avenue.

EXT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

A single FIRE ENGINE and NOFD inspector's vehicle are still parked on the scene. Jeffery is parked nearby. He stands at the back, by the CR-V's open hatch.

Wearing sturdy workboots, he pulls on a pair of thick gloves and grabs a flashlight.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

He steps across the threshold. The damage is extensive, charred and smoking -- but not total. A FIRE INSPECTOR, FIRE MARSHALL and a FIREMAN stand nearby. A couple other firemen are deeper inside, looking for hotspots.

FIREMAN

Excuse me, sir. We haven't cleared the site, yet.

JEFFERY

This is my business.

The Fire Marshall nods -- okay. Jeffery takes another couple of steps; stops, wrestling with the horribleness of it.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Do you know how it started?

FIRE MARSHALL

No, sir. Still early days.

FIRE INSPECTOR

But if you ask me, putting all this high-tech equipment in an old building like this was your first mistake.

JEFFERY

It was rewired top to bottom two years ago.

FIRE INSPECTOR

Still asking for trouble.

JEFFERY

You could be right. But you might also snap some photos of the burn pattern and check wood samples for accelerants, while you're at it.

FIRE MARSHALL

You think it's arson?

He gives them a look - what do you think? Continues on inside, turning on his flashlight.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\DESIGN STUDIO - DAY

He approaches Rita's work area.

The REMAINS of her worktable are on the ground, covered with water and ashes.

He kneels, aiming the flashlight, wipes away some ashes -- a GATOR DRAWING is clipped to the board, drenched, but intact.

He goes deeper.

The flashlight finds the far wall -- where all the BOXES were staged to go out -- now a charred mound of melted plastic and metal. Nothing to salvage here.

He stares at the mound.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\JEFFERY'S OFFICE - DAY

The beam sweeps his office. Not much fire damage, but it's been drenched with water.

A framed PHOTO on the floor -- Jeffery and his navy buddies from the Naval Postgraduate school. The Navy Officers. They're sitting at a table in the S.F. Chinese restaurant.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\DESIGN STUDIO - DAY

He pulls on the door to the TECH LAB. It's stuck. He yanks harder -- it opens.

INT. GATOR WORKSHOP\TECH LAB - DAY

He steps inside. Sweeps the flashlight. The space is covered with ashes from above -- but the equipment is intact.

The Battery Pack System, the Charge/Discharge Tester, the Rapid Thermal Processing Wafer System -- all intact.

Jeffery's eyes light up.

EXT. GATOR WORKSHOP - DAY

The CR-V pulls out.

INT. CR-V - CONTINUOUS

He's on his phone as he races through town.

JEFFERY

What capacity are you running at?

INT. SEMI-CONDUCTOR PLANT - DAY

JOHN HALEY, late 30s (in his younger days, NAVY OFFICER #1), is standing at the door of a HIGH-TECH SEMI-CONDUCTOR MANUFACTURING PLANT. A skeleton crew of workers are inside, overseeing robotic equipment.

HALEY

Twenty percent. We lost the tax credits from the state and then, you know, the Chinese undercut us and, uh...

JEFFERY (O.S.)

How long would it take you to retool?

HALEY

However long it takes y'all to get your butts up here.

INT. KENDRICK'S HOUSE - DAY

Jeffery hurries across the lawn of a large, Broadmoor house. The driveway is parked up with cars.

INT. KENDRICK'S HOUSE\LIVING ROOM - DAY

The company's employees are packed into the living room. Christian et al. Chairs have been brought in and people are sitting on the floor. Kendrick and Michael stand in front.

MICHAEL

Our fire insurance will cover salaries and wages for three weeks. I know it's not a lot of time to find a new job, but write yourself a letter of recommendation and Kendrick or I will sign it.

He pauses, looking at the doorway. Kendrick turns and looks. Everyone turns and looks.

Jeffery is standing there. He looks around at all the faces turned to him. Clearly, he was the only one not invited.

JEFFERY
(pointedly)
May I?

Mike and Kendrick exchange a look; not crazy about the idea. But Mike gestures; Jeffery heads to the front.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
I just came from the plant. The damage is extensive, the building is...done. But the equipment, the most important equipment, the chip shooter, the I.C. Mounter, the Battery Pack, it's all good as new.

He stands in front of the room.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
I have a friend, an old navy buddy, who has a semi-conductor plant in North Carolina, Raleigh-Durham. It's running at twenty-percent capacity right now. I say, in two weeks time, we turn it into the Gator Factory. The infra-structure is there; we just need to get our equipment online and start manufacturing these little buggers.
(a wave of hope passes through his listeners)
So...I'm saying road trip; hard work, long hours and pizza dinners. I'm saying everybody in this room is on the ground floor of something special. I'm saying we can do this!

The employees nod and smile, their spirits lifted.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Who's up for a road trip?
(hands are raised)
Who wants to make Gators?

The employees raise their hands, buzzing excitedly. Jeffery turns and look at Kendrick and Michael, who are not caught up in the excitement.

MICHAEL
Finished?

Jeffery looks at him.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
That was really crappy.

KENDRICK
HP's out.

JEFFERY
We have a contract.

MICHAEL
Void. By act of God and your
dithering. They're out.

JEFFERY
We have something they need. We
have the Gator.
(to the group)
We have the Gator.

Kendrick gives him a look of pitying, withering contempt.

KENDRICK
You really think you're the only
person in the world who's had a big
idea? Nobody else could ever come
up with a patent or two?
(holding up a piece of
paper)
Wait. What's this? Oh, a German
company in Stuttgart: Starkhand
Gesellschaft. Just got the HP
desktop security contract. And
Samsung. And Lenovo.

MICHAEL
Stick a fork in us, Jeffery, we're
done.

Jeffery grasps for something to say. Nothing. He looks at all
the expectant employees, staring up at him with a mixture of
hope and fear, waiting for him to respond. He's got nothing.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - AFTERNOON

The sun is lower in the sky over the bayous west of the city.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREETS - AFTERNOON

Cars are honking. Traffic backing up. The light is green, but
a vehicle up ahead is holding everyone up.

It's the silver Lexus.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

Anne sits behind the wheel, her hands at ten and two, staring at her wedding band, oblivious to the noise around her. Her RADIO is tuned to the local news.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
...Hurricane Doris is passing well
to the South of us, but low-lying
communities should still prepare
for a powerful storm surge...

A MAN SLAPS the window. She doesn't blink.

EXT. GULF OF MEXICO\RIO LAGARTOS, YUCATAN - AFTERNOON

Just off the coast, a HUGE WAVE rocks an old fishing boat, lashed by wind and rain.

The water SURGES down a narrow channel dense with trees and foliage, flooding the banks.

FLAMINGOES huddle in an unfinished concrete building.

A LARGE TURTLE drops into the water.

An ALLIGATOR lowers its head below the surface, letting out a low, rumbling sound.

EXT. JEFFERY'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A bright green LIZARD jumps from branch to branch. It climbs to the top of a bush and puffs up its NECK POUCH -- a bright orange red.

Jeffery exits the house --

Wearing boots, jeans, a black polo, and a baseball cap, carrying a knapsack. He gets into the CR-V and slams the door.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 182 - AFTERNOON

The CR-V heads southwest through sugar cane fields.

EXT. AIRLINE HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

The Lexus is in the distance, sitting on the side of the road under an underpass. WE SLOWLY MOVE TOWARDS IT.

ANNE (O.S.)
...yeah...Obsessed...I thought
with...right, the project. He was
still carrying on like he wanted to
be with me, like everything was
normal. It's like...a big invisible
hand just yanked me out of my life.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

Anne is on the phone. Her eyes are closed; tears streaming
down her cheeks. She looks much worse than she sounds.

ANNE
(listening)
What difference does it make?

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
It makes all the difference in the
world.

ANNE
Not to me. The emotional is worse
than the physical...betrayal.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Anne, you have to find out. If he
told you the truth, you have
something to build on; if
not...well, don't go there. You
know...in your heart of hearts, you
don't want it to be over.

This hits Anne hard. She starts to cry.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 182 - EVENING

The sun is setting over fields and swamps.

INT. CR-V - EVENING

Up ahead, Jeffery sees a GREEN PICK UP TRUCK. He accelerates,
gripping the wheel.

He tries to overtake it. A large TRUCK looms in the oncoming
lane. He falls back as it passes.

Then punches it again, pulling alongside. An old guy is
driving -- not his guy.

EXT. HOUMA GAS STATION - EVENING

The CR-V is parked in front of the convenience store where Jeffery and Wilde first met.

INT. HOUMA GAS STATION - EVENING

Jeffery's talking to the STORE CLERK, 50s.

STORE CLERK

No, sir. I don't go in for all that.

JEFFERY

But you know the show, right?

STORE CLERK

Yeah, a bunch of stereotypes about Cajun people and swamp people and toothless, ignorant people I frankly don't have time for. That's all I got to say.

INT. GROCERY MARKET - EVENING

An OLD WOMAN, the clerk, stands at the register, looking at Jeffery dubiously.

OLD WOMAN

Now why you looking for these fellows?

JEFFERY

Because, we're looking for real life gator hunters to star in our show.

OLD WOMAN

They already got a show like that. What they need two shows for?

JEFFERY

Because...uh...we're taking it from another angle...

He points at his cap. It says "Gator Technologies."

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

See? The technology of gator hunting.

OLD WOMAN

What technology? You hang out a rotten chicken and you hook it. I don't see no show there. Sorry. You wasting your time.

EXT. GROCERY MARKET - EVENING

Jeffery takes off the baseball cap, disgusted, and throws it through the CR-V's open window. A CAJUN TEENAGER is getting out of his car.

JEFFERY

Hey.

CAJUN TEENAGER

What?

JEFFERY

You know a guy from around here who drives a green pick-up truck, hunts alligators, hangs out with a short guy and another big guy?

CAJUN TEENAGER

Yeah, yeah.

JEFFERY

Really? Great. Can you tell me where he lives?

CAJUN TEENAGER

Fuck yeah. Just buy me a six-pack.

EXT. RICHARD WILDE'S HOUSE/ROAD - NIGHT

The GREEN PICK-UP TRUCK is parked behind a WHITE VAN in the driveway of a low-slung brick ranch house, spread out from the neighbors in similiar homes.

Jeffery stands on the road, fishing stuff out of his backpack. He removes a MICRO-TAPE RECORDER; puts it in his pocket.

He takes out the Beretta. He pauses. He looks at the house, hesitating.

He stuffs the gun in his belt.

INT. WILDE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The room is dark. Richard Wilde is asleep in his barca-lounger in front of the TV.

ON THE TELEVISION: IMAGES FROM HURRICANE DORIS -- A REPORTER standing on a seawall in front of breaking waves.

Behind the TV, a face in the window peers in.

EXT. WILDE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jeffery walks down the side of the house; the backyard is fenced in, a six-foot chain link. He hoists himself over.

He goes to the back porch door. Turns the knob...it's unlocked. He pushes the door open, peering into a dimly lit kitchen.

The door CREAKS.

There is a long, loud BAYING SOUND as a DOG wakes from its nap. A furious skittering sound as its paws scramble across linoleum. A 70-pound MUTT, teeth-bared, bears down on him.

He slams the door shut.

Its head bursts through the DOG DOOR at his shins, snapping.

JEFFERY

Shit!

He pushes on the FLAP, trying to keep the dog inside, get its head back in. But it struggles mightily, snapping at him. It gets his left hand in its teeth.

SHAKES the hand viciously, ripping his flesh. He yells in pain. Pulls the gun out, sticks it into the dog's neck and fires.

POP

The dog falls limp.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Shit...shit...

He pulls his bloody hand free.

VOICES FROM INSIDE

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

He shot Coolie!

MAN'S VOICE #2 (O.S.)
Fuck! Shoot him! Shoot him!!

Jeffery tumbles away from the door as SHOTS blast through it. He scrambles to the fence and climbs over.

The dead dog's head and forepaws disappear through the flap, then the door opens. Troy comes out, carrying a hunting rifle, looking around. He yells inside.

TROY
Daddy! He's going 'round front!

He hurries to the GATE; rattles it; locked. No key.

TROY (CONT'D)
Fuck!

He hurries back inside.

ANGLE ON SIDE OF HOUSE

Jeffery is pressed against the wall, around the corner, gasping for breath, his hand a bloody mess.

He pulls himself over the fence, one handed, and drops over the side.

He goes to the kitchen door -- it's unlocked.

INT. WILDE'S HOUSE\KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He enters. The dead dog is a shadow at his feet.

The sink is loaded with dirty dishes. Crawfish carcasses on the counter. He grabs a dish rag; wraps it around his bleeding hand. No pain at the moment -- his EYES are fierce; fully intent.

The men are out front, yelling.

INT. WILDE'S HOUSE\LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The room is dark; the TV still on the Weather Channel, the big SWIRL OF DORIS covering eastern Mexico. Jeffery enters, gun raised. Takes a couple of steps. BUMPS into something...

A WHEELCHAIR

He pushes it aside, listening...he hears WHIMPERING.

He turns; a sickly, obese woman, MRS WILDE, is stretched out on the couch, in the shadows, looking at him with tear-filled, terrified eyes.

He kneels beside her. No mercy in his manner.

JEFFERY

Yell.

MRS WILDE

You...you shot Coolie?

JEFFERY

Yell. For help. Do it!

She just whimpers and cries. He raises his right palm and brings it down hard...

EXT. WILDE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Wilde looks around the CR-V. Troy is looking under the truck and van.

Mrs Wilde's SCREAM pierces the night.

INT. WILDE'S HOUSE\LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jeffery waits for them in the shadows. Struggling to regulate his breathing. His eyes blazing.

Troy enters first.

CLOSE ON JEFFERY'S EYES -- The pupils contract.

TROY

Mama, where is he?!

Mrs Wilde points...Troy turns...Jeffery explodes, LIFTING TROY off the ground, carrying him backwards into a curio cabinet with a crash of glass.

Jeffery wrenches the rifle from Troy's hands, chops him under the chin with the butt of the gun. The man sags, gagging.

In a broken pane of glass, Jeffery sees Wilde's reflection in the light of the hallway behind him.

He spins the gun in his hands, chambers a round, rolls, and fires.

Wilde grabs his arm, his weapon falling.

MOMENTS LATER

Jeffery gets in Wilde's face, the Beretta jammed into Wilde's chest.

JEFFERY

You want war with me? I'll give you war. The war hasn't even begun yet.

Wilde looks at him with sullen fear.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

You think I'm a helpless city fool, huh? You have no idea who you're fucking with.

(no answer)

The Fire Marshall found the evidence you left behind. The police have your DNA.

Mrs Wilde prods her husband's head with her toes.

MRS WILDE

DNA? What's he talking about?

WILDE

I don't know!

MRS WILDE

You leave your fucking DNA somewhere?

WILDE

No! I don't know! What the fuck you talking about?

JEFFERY

Millions of dollars in equipment, jobs...possibilities...livelihood.

WILDE

What?!

JEFFERY

Arson -- you fucking coward. The lowest form. I should erase you right now.

He chambers a round, presses the gun to Wilde's temple.

WILDE

No! Don't!

Jeffery CLICKS the TAPE RECORDER on. Blood runs into Wilde's eyes; he's beginning to come undone.

JEFFERY
You started the fire, right?

WILDE
(wiping his eyes)
No.

JEFFERY
You started the fire. Say it. Say,
I started the fire.

WILDE
What fire? What the hell you
talking about, man?

JEFFERY
(slapping him)
Liar! Tell the truth!

WILDE
(starting to weep)
I thought we had a deal, you
crazy...barging in here, killing
and shooting. Man, look at my wife.
She's sick and frail. Gators's
going for eleven dollars a pound.
You think I got time to worry about
your dumb ass? Jesus, it's over, I
thought. What the hell you come
barging in for...?

Jeffery realizes -- he's telling the truth. His face flushes with shame. He lowers the gun.

Troy looks away, embarrassed for his daddy.

Jeffery punches the red button on the recorder.

Click.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 182 - NIGHT

The CR-V is parked in front of the 24-HOUR URGENT CARE facility in Luling, Louisiana, across the road from a vast swamp.

INT. URGENT CARE FACILITY - NIGHT

Jeffery sits in the waiting room. His bloodied left hand is still wrapped in the dishrag, but he has no sense of it.

Deep, deep in thought, he's getting more and more agitated, llacerating himself with recriminations.

He jumps to his feet and heads for the door.

RECEPTIONIST

Sir! Dr. Mike is just finishing up
with his previous...

Jeffery exits.

EXT. WILDE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

BAM BAM BAM

He pounds on the front door.

JEFFERY

Open up!

No answer. He turns and looks in the driveway -- the Green Pick-up Truck is still parked there.

BAM BAM BAM

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Open up! I know you're in there!

He talks loudly through the door.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

I want to talk! I was wrong. I want
to settle this. I'm prepared to be
...very generous.

No answer.

He turns and looks at the pick-up truck. He frowns -- wasn't there another vehicle?

FLASHBACK POV -- The White Van fades into view, then fades out.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Shit!

INT. CR-V - NIGHT

As he races down a dark country road, his cell phone glows in his hand --- dialing ANNE.

The phone rings on the other end.

INT. BYWATER BAR - NIGHT

The phone vibrates. Anne picks it up, looks at the screen. She speaks to the person sitting across from her.

ANNE

It's him.
(to the phone, hitting
IGNORE)
Leave me alone.

She sets it down on the bar.

INT. CR-V - NIGHT

He leaves a message.

JEFFERY

Anne...baby, call me as soon as you
hear this. Please. It's important.
It's urgent.

He clicks off. Scrolls -- finds RITA'S NUMBER. Dials.

INT. BYWATER BAR - NIGHT

A cellphone RINGS inside of Rita's purse. After a moment, her hands reaches in and pulls it out.

Rita looks at the incoming number. Jeffery. She looks at Anne, not sure how this is going to sit with her.

ANNE

Don't tell me.
(Rita nods)
What are you gonna do?

Rita hits IGNORE.

She and Anne are sitting at the bar together. Rita nervous, Anne trying to play it cool.

ANNE (CONT'D)
I guess he doesn't care who he
talks to, as long as it's female.

RITA
Uh huh.

ANNE
The thought of us sitting here
together would literally make his
head explode, he's such a control
freak.

Anne's phone VIBRATES again. She looks at the display. She
presses a button.

RITA
You think he knows?

ANNE
Well, I hope he figures it out.
Good-bye, Jeffery.

The screen says: POWER OFF. She hits it.

RITA
(copying her)
Okay.

She does the same.

POWER OFF

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90 - NIGHT

The CR-V speeds eastward -- ahead on the left is a GAS
STATION.

INT. CR-V - NIGHT

Jeffery glances at the fuel guage: less than a QUARTER TANK.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90 - NIGHT

He speeds past the station.

WE RISE HIGHER AND HIGHER IN THE AIR

To see the CR-V speeding past vast dark fields below. A
lonely vehicle on the highway.

ROTATING in mid-air, WE TURN TO FACE EAST -- RACING above fifty-miles of fields and highway, gas stations and McDonalds, remote homes in the darkness. To find --

THE WHITE VAN BELOW, its headlights cutting into the night.

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Troy drives. Crawford sits between them. They look like shit, but their eyes are filled with murder.

INT. BYWATER BAR - NIGHT

Anne looks at Rita seriously. Studying her.

ANNE
You're how old? Twenty-eight?
Twenty-nine?

RITA
Twenty-five.

ANNE
I remember twenty-five. Twenty-five is still pretty clueless. You probably don't have any sense of that.

Rita lights up a cigarette, wary.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Or do you? Do you feel confused or do you feel pretty on top of things?

RITA
Confused.

ANNE
You knew my husband was married, right? You knew of my existence?

RITA
Yeah.

ANNE
I always wondered what somebody in your position was thinking. I mean, the other woman. I really wanted to ask you that when I was coming over here -- what the hell you were thinking.

(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)

But now that I meet you, I realize
the chance of getting an
articulate, useful answer to that
question is zero. It's all a
mystery to you, isn't it?

Rita stands, stuffing her cigarettes into her purse.

RITA

I should go.

Anne grabs her wrist.

ANNE

Wait. I'm sorry.
(pulling her close)
Can't you let me be a little bit
mean? I mean, my husband's in your
thrall, after all. Stay.

She lets go of her wrist. Rita hesitates.

RITA

No, he isn't.

ANNE

Stay.

Rita thinks about it, then returns to her seat. Anne takes a
sip of her wine. Rita takes a deep drag of her cigarette. She
looks at Anne seriously.

RITA

I'm sorry.

ANNE

Thank you. Now tell me more about
how he's not totally in love with
you.

EXT. BYWATER APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Crawford comes out the front entrance of Rita's building. He
walks a few steps to the van and gets in.

EXT. BYWATER STREET - NIGHT

The women walk back from the bar.

ANNE

...wait 'til you've been married
twelve years...

RITA
I hope so.

ANNE
We'll see. This middle period, the mid-life crises, plural, it's no walk in the park.

RITA
(blurting it out)
I have opinions.

ANNE
What?

RITA
Around my friends. I have opinions. And I can express myself, really well, if people don't act like they've heard it all a million times before already.

A MAN passes them, going the other way.

ANNE
Okay.

RITA
And I know I make mistakes, but I try to learn from them. I'm young, but I'm not stupid or immoral.

ANNE
Don't worry. There's an endless supply of mistakes to make.

They take another couple steps...

...passing behind the White Van -- disappearing from view. Suddenly, behind them, the Man comes running back. The SOUNDS of a brief struggle. The van door sliding closed.

The engine starts; the lights come on and it pulls away; no sign of Anne or Rita on the sidewalk.

EXT. CRESCENT CITY CONNECTION - NIGHT

The CR-V crosses the bridge to New Orleans.

INT. CR-V - NIGHT

Jeffery's on the phone.

JEFFERY

Yeah, her sister. She was going to take it, then she wasn't, and... it's not stolen; it's no big deal; we'd just like to know where it is.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

This is the 2008 Lexus 250?

JEFFERY

Yeah.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

I can help you with that.

EXT. CRESCENT CITY CONNECTION - CONTINUOUS

ANGLE FROM ABOVE THE BRIDGE --

As the CR-V heads to the Eastbank...

The White Van is on the parallel span, heading in the opposite direction, southwest...

INT. WHITE VAN - CONTINUOUS

Crawford stretches DUCT TAPE across Anne's mouth, wraps it once around her head, rips and secures it. Anne's eyes are terrified. She's bound to a WHEELCHAIR, wedged in next to tool boxes and shelves stuffed with gear. Rita is on the floor, gagged and bound to a metal shelf.

Crawford grabs the women's PURSES and heads back up front.

INT. CR-V - CONTINUOUS

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Sir? I have that information you requested.

JEFFERY

Yes?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Your vehicle is located in New Orleans. In front of 3319 Royal Street. I could send the directions to your phone.

EXT. BYWATER APARTMENTS - NIGHT

He strides up to the Lexus, looks inside.

JEFFERY (O.S.)
That's okay. I know where it is.

He runs to the front entrance of Rita's building. It's locked; he waves to a person inside.

INT. BYWATER APARTMENTS - NIGHT

He bangs on Rita's door.

JEFFERY
Rita! Rita! Rita!

EXT. BYWATER APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Back on the street, getting frantic.

He looks inside RITA'S CAR. Nothing. He dials Anne. Runs to the Honda. Her phone ringing on the other end.

INT. CR-V - CONTINUOUS

Gets in. Her voicemail picks up.

ANNE (V.O.)
This is Anne...

He hangs up. Turns the key in the ignition -- the FUEL GUAGE is empty. The starter sputters.

EXT. BYWATER APARTMENTS - NIGHT

He runs to the Lexus, speaking on the phone again.

JEFFERY
Yes...yes...I've found the car, but
I don't have the keys. I need you
to start it for me...yes, go ahead;
I'm standing right here.

Chunk -- The Lexus doors UNLOCK. Jeffery opens the door and gets behind the wheel.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Okay. Go ahead! Start it, please!

The engine clicks feebly, but does not turn over. The battery is dead. He swears under his breath.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Yes...I can see that. Stay on the line. I'll be back in a minute.

MOMENTS LATER

He puts the CR-V into neutral. Unlocks the brake.

He PUSHES the CR-V abreast of the Lexus.

Drags jumper cables between the cars.

Connects them.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

He gets behind the wheel.

JEFFERY

Hello? Hello? ...okay, try it again.

The engine sputters...then comes to life.

EXT. BYWATER APARTMENTS - NIGHT

The Lexus peels out -- leaving the CR-V in the middle of the street.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90 - NIGHT

The White Van heads Southwest.

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Anne is strapped into the wheelchair in back. Her eyes roam the tools and shelves, looking for something she can use to free herself.

She meets Rita's eyes; Rita is weeping, terrified.

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

Jeffery grimaces with pain as he steers, left-handed, working his smart phone one-handed as he drives.

The screen displays a LIST OF CELLPHONE MODELS.

He scrolls down it, coming to: CS900081. He selects it.
Wireless Carrier: Sprint. Band: 3G Phone number:

He taps in the number.

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Troy drives; Wilde in the passenger seat; Crawford filling the space between them, going through the purses.

TROY
Daddy...where we going?

WILDE
Shit. Just straight...for now.

ANGLE INSIDE ANNE'S PURSE -- Her phone is inside a pouch, turned OFF.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

Jeffery looks at his phone screen: CONNECTION FAILED

He swears under his breath. Repeats the same steps, rapidly, one-handed.

INT. WHITE VAN - CONTINUOUS

Crawford is counting the money from Anne's purse. INSIDE HER PURSE -- The phone still off.

TROY
Maybe we should just take 'em back.

WILDE
No. Way too late for that. Fuck me!
We gotta figure this out.

Crawford quietly folds the bills and sticks them in his overalls pocket.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

Jeffery's screen: CONNECTION FAILED

JEFFERY
Goddamn it!

He sets the phone down on the console. He's at a loss.

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Wilde grimaces.

WILDE

It's that fucker who got us into
this situation. Shit, man! He put
us here.

He turns, sees Crawford turning on Anne's cell phone. The
light glows on his face.

WILDE (CONT'D)

Hey. This conversation pertains to
you, too. You wanta weigh in?

Crawford tucks the phone in the chest pocket of his overalls.

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

On the console, Jeffery's phone LIGHTS UP.

The screen says... CONNECTING...

JEFFERY

Alright.

He picks it up. His fingers speed over the screen, selecting
FILES on Anne's smartphone.

Dload....security...GPS...

GPS LOCKED -- Authenticate I.D.

He types in some numbers.

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Crawford leans forward. The phone in his pocket is off.

CRAWFORD

Well, me, I could go for Mexico:
margaritas, señoritas...

Suddenly, a BLUE LIGHT emanates from his pocket.

WILDE

You even know what a passport is?

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

Jeffery's fingers fly over the screen....

GPS -- I.D. Authenticated

Security Certificate Required

A CAR HONKS --- Jeffery looks up --

ANGLE THROUGH WINDSHIELD -- he's drifting into the oncoming lane. A car is racing towards him. He yanks the wheel. It goes by, horn blaring.

He goes back to typing rapidly, assuredly.

The screen turns black, then begins STREAMING DOZENS OF NUMBERS...

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Crawford's pocket glows blue in the darkness; the men don't notice.

WILDE

Tell you one thing, I'm not gonna die in fucking prison.

CRAWFORD

(looking in the back)

Well, if I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die happy.

WILDE

Nobody's dying.

TROY

No shitting, daddy. Hand to god, that's some good looking women.

WILDE

Yeah. You're right.

He looks over his shoulder to the back -- sees the GLOW in Crawford's pocket.

WILDE (CONT'D)

Why the fuck is that on?

Crawford looks down at his pocket, as...

INSERT -- THROUGH WINDSHIELD

Headlamps pierce the dark -- for an instant illuminating -- an ALLIGATOR coming onto the road. Troy yanks the wheel.

TROY

Jesus!

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90 - CONTINUOUS

The Van SWERVES around the gator.

INT. WHITE VAN - CONTINUOUS

They're thrown off balance.

WILDE

What the hell??

TROY

Gator! On the road!

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

Jeffery holds up the phone. It shows a glowing MAP OF THE AREA...

Searching...searching...searching...

A RED DOT appears on the map.

JEFFERY

Yes!

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90 - CONTINUOUS

The Lexus accelerates down the highway.

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Anne struggles against the cable binding her to the wheelchair. Sensing a presence, she stops, looks up...sees...

Wilde looming over them in the low space, staring down at her. Breathing hard. Contemplating her with a look that is not fully human.

He holds up his hand, looks at it -- it's trembling.

He gives her a look; sorry. And turns away.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90/JUNCTION 182 - NIGHT

The van is parked on the shoulder in the middle of vast fields of sugar cane near the junction of LA 90 (west) and LA 182 (north).

The three men are emptying the women's purses into the WATERY DITCH between the road and field.

The purses are hurled into the sugar cane.

They STOMP on the women's SMARTPHONES, shattering them. They kick the debris off the road.

Crawford picks Anne's cellphone BATTERY out of the debris.

He hurls it into the air; it passes in front of --

THE MOON

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90 - NIGHT

The Lexus, racing -- thirty miles over the speed limit.

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

Jeffery grips the wheel, glancing at the smartphone. The RED DOT is stationary, not moving. And then it DISAPPEARS.

JEFFERY

Shit!

He grabs the phone. Zooms in to the area where the red dot disappeared, zooming closer and closer to the junction of two highways...

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90/JUNCTION 182 - NIGHT

THE SAN FRANCISCO KEY CHAIN

Is on the pavement, surrounded by broken glass from the smartphones.

An ENGINE grows louder, and then...

TIRES RUN OVER the key chain. The Lexus roars by.

INT. LEXUS - CONTINUOUS

Jeffery is desperate, getting agitated. He wipes tears from his eyes. Hard to see the road.

It unspools in front of him.

In the distance, BLUE LIGHTS are flashing.

His eyes go wide -- good news or bad news?

He slows, drawing closer. A STATE TROOPER stands at the rear of his vehicle, motioning with a flashlight for Jeffery to go around.

He passes the vehicle slowly, seeing a SECOND TROOPER in front of the car, staring down at a --

LARGE ALLIGATOR

On the roadside in the headlights, flashing its teeth.

JEFFERY

Jesus.

Once past, he accelerates.

A few hundred yards...and then...TWO BIG OBJECTS loom up in the headlights...TWO ALLIGATORS criss-crossed in the middle of the road, making it impossible to pass.

EXT. LA 90 - CONTINUOUS

The Lexus turns around, tires screeching, and heads back the other way.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 90/JUNCTION 182 - NIGHT

He takes the previously spurned left, hard, and speeds north, into the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

A LARGE FLAME

Atop an oil refinery tower blazing in the night.

A DISTRESSED PLANTATION

Is silhouetted against the night sky, in disrepair.

A HERON

Bursts up from the water, into the night sky.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 3127 - NIGHT

A quiet stretch of highway in the moonlight. Swamp sounds. It's peaceful, no traffic here, yet.

A GIANT ALLIGATOR

Waddles onto the pavement. Dry lightning flashes in the clouds above him.

He opens his massive jaw, flashing teeth -- then heads across the road.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 307 - NIGHT

The LEXUS speeds north, entering bayou country.

INT. LEXUS - NIGHT

Jeffery drives, his nerves fraying. Tears rolling down his cheeks. He wipes his eyes.

JEFFERY

No, no, no, no.

Up ahead -- another junction. The green HIGHWAY SIGN offering two choices:

LA HIGHWAY 1010 Belle Rose 35 Miles

LA HIGHWAY 20 LaPlace 24 Miles

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 182 - NIGHT

He runs out of the car. Stands in front of the sign.

JEFFERY

Shit!

He looks down at the pavement, for tire tracks. Nothing.

He looks down the two quiet roads. Nothing.

He looks up at the moon, desperate.

And then...a thought...a thought he's not ready to say. He looks away, struggling with the words.

He looks back up at the moon and says them:

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Help me. Please.

Nothing.

He looks around for something, anything, that can be taken as a sign. A PIECE OF PAPER blows across the road. He snatches it up.

LULU'S PET GROOMING

No help. He discards it. He runs into the middle of the intersection, turning around.

CLOUDS, TREES, MOON, STARS

No help.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Goddamn it! Help me.

He climbs down into the DRAINAGE DITCH on the side of the road, wading into the water, looking for clues, almost weeping as he picks through the sludge.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
What? Where?

Behind him, the SOUND of the car engine sputtering.

He climbs up out of the ditch. To see --

The Lexus RATTLE...and finally DIE. The night is quiet.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Shit!

He walks towards it, illuminated by the headlights. He's filthy, legs covered with dreck, exhausted.

And then, the left headlight beam slowly weakens...and DIES, leaving the car a single-beamed cyclops.

He looks right, down Highway 20. Is that what it's telling him? Go right?

The second light fades as well, leaving him in the moonlight.

He wrestles with the craziness of it...then begins to run down Highway 20.

EXT. HIGHWAY 3127 - NIGHT

THE GIANT ALLIGATOR

Waddles down the middle of the highway like he owns it, not seeing any significance in TWO PIN-PRICKS OF LIGHT appearing in the distance.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

A LATE NIGHT DRIVER juggles a take-out burger, fries, and a beer on his lap as he drives, scant attention left for the road.

Coming up behind him -- the lights of a BIG RIG.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

A FUNNY GOLDFISH hangs from the GPS on the front window.

The TRUCK DRIVER looks exhausted, fighting sleep, listening to the radio.

MAN ON RADIO (O.S.)
...give your home or R.V. the
protection it needs with a Higgins
lightning rod. Because you never
know when lightning will...

He glances in his side-mounted mirror

ANGLE IN MIRROR

Another car behind him.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 3127 - NIGHT

The enormous alligator continues down the road. The headlights growing closer.

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Troy points as a SMALL DIRT ROAD goes by.

TROY
Daddy, should I pull over on one of
these small roads?

Wilde nods.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The Late Night Driver takes a big bite of cheeseburger, the wrapper obscuring his vision for a crazily long time.

Finally, he lowers the wrapper, chewing, to see --

THE ALLIGATOR in his headlights, huge, facing him, jaws open.

He drops his burger, fumbles the drink, stomps on the brake.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Brake lights flash ahead of him -- but the Truck Driver is dozing.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Late Night Driver twists the wheel...

EXT. HIGHWAY 3127 - CONTINUOUS

Braking, the car skids and turns. The Truck PLOWS right into it.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The Truck Driver's eyes pop open. He sees the car WEDGED below him, sparks flying. He turns the wheel, hard to the left.

INT. WHITE VAN - CONTINUOUS

WILDE
Troy!

CRAWFORD
Shit!

The on-coming Truck is JACK-KNIFING, spinning into their lane, propelling the car at them.

Troy pulls the wheel hard left, swerving --
 Just barely SCRAPING past the truck --
 Into the path of an oncoming CAR.
 Troy brakes, swerves right, braces --

EXT. HIGHWAY 3127 - CONTINUOUS

The White Van ROLLS on the highway, shrieking, tumbling,
 sparks flying.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY 3127 - NIGHT

The Late Night Driver's car is upside down, smoking.
 The Big Rig is on its side.

The second car is smashed into a tree, the passengers
 standing nearby in a daze.

The White Van is smashed and dented. But after its tumble it
 has landed right-side up.

EXT. HIGHWAY 20 - NIGHT

Jeffery runs.

He stops, gasping for breath and checks his cellphone -- NO
 SERVICE.

He looks behind him down the highway: no one coming. He
 strips off his dirty, wet shirt and tosses it on the ground,
 leaving him in his tee-shirt and pants.

He tightens his laces.

He resumes running.

INT. WHITE VAN - NIGHT

Banged up and bloody, Wilde opens his eyes -- looks over --
 Crawford is dead, half-ejected through the windshield.

Troy is gone -- ejected through the broken window.

IN THE BACK

The women are unconscious...or dead.

EXT. HIGHWAY 3127 - NIGHT

Wilde criss-crosses the road, desperately weaving, his legs almost giving out from beneath him.

WILDE
Troy! TROY!

No sign of him. He SEES something further back, halfway to the other vehicles.

A lumpy SHADOW in the road. A lifeless form.

WILDE (CONT'D)
No, no no, no!! TROY!

He runs to it. It's the dead, smashed ALLIGATOR, lying on its side. He looks around -- nearby, TROY'S BODY is huddled on the pavement.

EXT. LA HIGHWAY 20 - NIGHT

Jeffery is running.

Sugar cane fields on other side. Gradually, a FLASHING RED LIGHT reflects on the tall stalks.

He turns --

AN AMBULANCE is coming up behind him in the distance, red lights silently flashing.

He staggers into the middle of the road and bends over, his hands on his knees, waiting for it.

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

The EMT -- SHARON TABONEY, 40s -- is wrapping his injured hand. Blonde, husky, outgoing, she speaks with a Morgan City drawl.

SHARON
...the storm down in Mexico. The
storm surge is pushing the salt
water into these wet lands.

Jeffery is covered with sweat, filthy, half dead.

JEFFERY

What?

SHARON

The alligators. All these big gators on the roads. Never seen nothing like it.

JEFFERY

What is it?

SHARON

Salt water from the Gulf. They don't like the saline. We think. Are you okay?

He leans back and looks at her.

JEFFERY'S POV -- SEEING Sharon with incredible clarity. A hallucinatory brightness. Everything else FADES INTO WHITE, leaving only this woman's face, its unaffected humanity, looking back at him.

He shields his eyes.

JEFFERY

It's bright.

SHARON

Sorry. That's how we roll.

They fall silent. Jeffery frowns, looking at Sharon again.

JEFFERY'S POV -- Preternatural clarity. Moving closer and closer to her face, her eyes....

ENTERING HER EYES, until we're...

EXT. HIGHWAY 3127 - NIGHT

HIGH ABOVE, LOOKING DOWN:

On the accident scene. The Ambulance pulls up. A FIRE TRUCK, AMBULANCE and STATE TROOPER are already on the scene. The Big Rig is on its side. The Late Night Driver's car is upside down. The Trooper talks to the people who crashed into the tree.

The White Van is gone.

GROUND LEVEL:

Jeffery walks between the damaged vehicles. The EMTs are behind him, rushing to help the injured: An AFRICAN-AMERICAN MAN, WOMAN, and CHILD sitting on the side of the road by their vehicle.

Jeffery walks towards the bashed-in, upside-down car. Sees the Late Night Driver inside, partially concealed by the airbag.

JEFFERY
(to the EMTs)
Over here!

He crouches beside the window. The Driver's head is pressed against the car's ceiling at an awkward angle.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)
Don't move. Hold on. They'll be
right here.

The Driver wheezes. He can't speak.

Jeffery looks around -- anxious to get moving. But the Driver's left hand emerges from the window, touching his wrist.

LATE NIGHT DRIVER
Hold...

JEFFERY
Sure. Just hold on.

Jeffery takes his hand. Clasps it.

INSERT -- The Late Night Driver holding his burger.

INSERT -- The Late Night Driver ordering at a Sonic.

INSERT -- A KITCHEN. The LATE NIGHT DRIVER'S WIFE is tugging his arm as he heads out the door.

LATE NIGHT DRIVER'S WIFE
You need to eat.

LATE NIGHT DRIVER
I'll grab something on the road.

BACK TO SCENE:

Jeffery looks confused. TWO EMTs rush over; Jeffery releases the Driver's hand.

JEFFERY
Here they come. Good luck.

He stands, backing away, watching the EMTs approach.

He takes a few steps, seeing the Alligator on its side -- a big, bloody shadow on the road.

It begins to GLOW softly. Suddenly, it MOVES BACKWARDS, its "GHOST" returning to its original position on the Highway...the place where it first faced the car.

MOVING BACKWARDS -- It retraces its steps, back into the nearby bayou.

VARIOUS ANGLES:

DOZENS OF ALLIGATORS move in reverse, leaving the fields and roads, backing into their bayous.

From above -- a SURGE OF BRACKISH WATER RETREATS from the wetlands.

From above -- DORIS -- the SWIRLING STORM over Mexico.

BACK TO SCENE:

Jeffery turns around, standing in the middle of the road.

Sees: WILDE, CRAWFORD, TROY, ANNE and RITA hurtling towards him -- suspended in mid-air. No White Van, just the passengers seated as if the van were still around them.

They pass him (going forward, not backward).

Jeffery stares in disbelief --

SEEING ANNE, eyes wide with fear, hovering above the ground in the invisible wheelchair, passing by him, only yards away.

In horror, he watches her brace for impact.

The passengers' bodies LURCH one way as Troy swerves to the left (avoiding the truck). LURCH again as he swerves to the right (avoiding the car).

And then, they TUMBLE, brutally catapaulted in the air.

Jeffery watches as Anne, the woman he loves, goes upside down, hair cascading, her body shuddering from the impact, then again, a second tumble which EJECTS Troy through the driver's window.

Finally, they come to a shuddering stop.

Anne's body is slumped in the air, lifeless.

The WHITE VAN becomes visible around them, battered and smoking.

JEFFERY (CONT'D)

Anne!

He runs towards it...but the van FADES AWAY. He stops.

A lingering THREAD OF LIGHT stretches down the Highway. About half a mile, then it bends to the right, disappearing into the trees.

She's close.

He starts to run. Strongly. His feet pounding the asphalt.

EXT. HIGHWAY 3127 - NIGHT

FROM ABOVE --

Jeffery running.

Ahead of him, half a mile, the White Van is rumbling down a dirt road -- headed for Lake Maurepas.

EXT. LAKE MAUREPAS - NIGHT

The van speeds over a short pier --

SPLASHES INTO THE LAKE

INT. WHITE VAN - CONTINUOUS

Wilde has TAPED his left wrist to the steering wheel, his hand gripping the wheel, determined to endure his own death.

Troy's corpse is buckled into the passenger seat. Crawford still stuck in the windshield.

Water spills in through the windows.

IN THE BACK

Anne struggles to escape. Water lapping at her feet.

EXT. HIGHWAY 3127 - NIGHT

Jeffery comes to the dirt road. He heads down it.

EXT. LAKE MAUREPAS - NIGHT

The van sinks. Bubbles shine in the moonlight as it disappears under the surface.

Jeffery runs onto the dock.

He dives in.

UNDERWATER

He swims to the passenger window. Looks inside.

THROUGH THE WINDOW -- Troy's corpse floats in the seat. Wilde is desperately pulling at the tape on his left wrist, trying to get free.

Jeffery goes to the back door and SLIDES it open.

INT. WHITE VAN - CONTINUOUS

Little visibility. His feet kick. He works his way past the shelves and equipment. His hands claw at tape. Anne is just a shadow. Bubbles stream from his mouth.

EXT. LAKE MAUREPAS - NIGHT

His face breaks the surface. He pulls a body behind him, pulling her up onto the shore. He stretches her out and falls on his knees beside her, reaching for her shoulders.

JEFFERY

Come on!

It's Rita. Dead.

He groans. He stands, gasping for breath. His lungs on fire. Nothing left.

He looks up at the MOON, shining brightly in the sky. A silent prayer.

The moon burns brighter.

When he looks down -- Anne is VISIBLE under the water, glowing blue through the shell of the van. Wilde's body now floats lifelessly up front.

WE WATCH FROM ABOVE, AS --

He dives in, following the light. He enters the van, illuminated by the glow. He pulls at her restraints. He's bent over her, the two of them glowing together.

The SHADOW of a large alligator swims by.

DISSOLVE TO:

DARKNESS

Gradually, the sound of a heart, rapidly beating, gets louder.

Thump thump thump thump THUMP THUMP THUMP!

In the darkness, we see a RED ORGANISM glowing, pumping. Jeffery's heart. Arteries branching out to arterioles branching out to capillaries, fine red traces of light, working hard.

Thump thump thump thump thump

And then, another HEART appears in the darkness. Beating weakly. Its rhythm in counter-point to Jeffery's.

THUMP thump THUMP thump THUMP thump

The second heart grows stronger until the two hearts are glowing, beating at equal strength.

The counterpoint gradually gives way to unison, as the two hearts find each other's rhythm and beat together.

THUMP THUMP THUMP

FADE OUT

VITA

Erik Hansen teaches screenwriting at the University of New Orleans. He received his B.A. in English Literature from the University of California at Berkeley in 1982. He has extensive film industry experience, having sold or optioned half a dozen screenplays to major Hollywood studios and producers, including the feature film "Heart & Souls," starring Robert Downey, Jr., released by Universal Studios. He also co-wrote "The Dog Ate It," which in 1991 won a Student Academy Award (Gold) for best narrative short, and has written and/or directed three UNO Spring Film Projects, including "The Princess Wife" and "Brokedown Paradise." He has written numerous columns on Buddhism, several of which have been selected for the annual anthology The Best Buddhist Writing and the anthology Right Here With You, both published by Shambhala Publications.