

Fall 12-20-2013

The Good Killing

Alex F. Aaron
aaaron@my.uno.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>



Part of the [Film and Media Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Aaron, Alex F., "The Good Killing" (2013). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 1719.
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/1719>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

The Good Killing

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 and Theatre Arts
Film Production

By
Alex Aaron

B.A., University of New Orleans, 2010

December, 2013

Acknowledgements

Speaking before a crowd of supporters in Roanoke, Virginia in July 2012, incumbent President Barack Obama, then embroiled in a contentious election battle with Republican challenger Mitt Romney, made perhaps the most significant rhetorical blunder of his career. Discussing the current state of the American economy, Obama remarked simply, “If you’ve got a business – you didn’t build that,” (Larimore). This comment, grossly taken out of context, was hailed by the Republican opposition as proof positive of the President’s anti-business, anti-American, government-driven socialist ideology. In truth, however, the president was making a pointed though not terribly controversial statement about the proper, and otherwise agreed-upon, role of government in supporting economic growth by providing essential services, but this was lost in a fog of opportunistic, partisan distortion. Such political theater has little to do with my acknowledgements, except for this sentimental admission: when it comes to my academic success, I am not ashamed to admit that *I didn’t build that*.

As my graduate studies conclude, I believe it is necessary to identify and thank certain individuals whose constant support, expertise, and encouragement has been invaluable to the pursuit of this degree. Firstly, several members of the faculty of the University of New Orleans’ Department of Film and Theater deserve special praise, including Henry Griffin, Erik Hansen, John McGowan-Hartmann, Laura Medina, John Hamp Overton, Robert Racine, and Danny Retz. Among these educators, I must single out the members of my graduate committee: John McGowan-Hartmann, whose unimpeachable scholarship is matched only by his patience; Henry Griffin, whose analytical skills and deft knowledge of narrative have, hopefully, made me a better writer; and John Hampton Overton, whose critical bluntness has enriched my studies.

Finally, I must also thank my friends and family, who throughout the years have provided me with important material assistance and, more importantly, emotional nourishment. In particular, I am indebted to Ben Matheny, a friend and frequent collaborator, and, most of all, my parents, Stan and Vickie Aaron. Were it not for their stubborn, unconditional faith in me none of this would be possible.

Table of Contents

Abstract	v
Introduction: Concept and Criteria	1
Chapter 1: The Screenplay	4
Plot Synopsis	4
Evolution of Narrative	5
Chapter 2: Elements of Production	15
Casting	15
Cinematography	17
Sound	20
Directing	22
Editing	25
Chapter 3: Personal Analysis	29
Citations	31
Filmography	32
Bibliography	33
Appendix A: Script Drafts	34
Script Version 1	35
Script Version 2	46
Script Version 3	58
Script Version 4	70
Shooting Script	81
Appendix B: Reports	92
Camera Reports: Shoot Day 1	93
Camera Reports: Shoot Day 2	94
Sound Reports: Shoot Day 1	95
Sound Reports: Shoot Day 2	96
Appendix C: Thesis Prospectus	98
Vita	104

Abstract

This paper will provide a far-ranging analysis of the relevant aspects of the filmmaking process as it pertains to the development and production of the thesis project, *The Good Killing*. This analysis will include both a detailed, biographic overview of the making of the film, as well as an in-depth critique of the creative decision-making and practical methodology that guided the production. In this regard, special attention will be first be given to how the project was initially conceived, and, broadly speaking, what was originally intended. Secondly, proceeding sections will examine key elements of the filmmaker's technical planning, performance, and working philosophy, specifically citing directing style, cinematography, sound and editing. Through this evaluative process, the film will be judged from the standpoint of both concept and execution in order to determine overall success.

Keywords: Contemporary Neorealism, Italian Neorealism, The Good Killing, Alex Aaron, 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days, Blue Valentine, Man Push Cart, One Shot, A Separation, Assisted Suicide.

Introduction

Concept and Criteria

It is important to clarify one's goals, if not for exculpatory reasons, then certainly for explanatory ones. And, as my thesis film is no exception to this rule, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations and personal criteria that shaped how this film was approached and ultimately executed. In this regard, my original statement of purpose as a graduate student is particularly instructive. In it, I declare, quite explicitly, my intention to pursue a "brand of politically charged, socially conscious cinema" (Aaron 2). However, this is only one part of the equation. For starters, whether or not *The Good Killing* is clearly representative of politically charged, socially conscious cinema is debatable—although, I would argue that the extent to which assisted suicide is portrayed as not only a valid but morally permissible option qualifies it as such. Rather, what is more significant are the more localized goals and criteria that apply to my thesis project exclusively. Collectively, this set of concerns can be expressed as such: **with my thesis film, I intended to craft a small-scale, improvisational, performance-driven drama in the style most reminiscent of contemporary neo-realist cinema for which the most obvious reverence points are *Blue Valentine* (2010, dir. Derek Cianfrance) and *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* (2007, dir. Cristian Mungiu).** While this directive does not cover the range of complex, multi-disciplinary choices required when making a film, it is useful as a starting point for analysis. What it should not be used as, however, is an all-purpose rebuke of criticism or pointed inquiry into my thesis film. Indeed, I will present, and defend, numerous creative decisions on the basis of this directive, but the fact that any decisions conforms to that directive should not, in itself, make it beyond reproach. In other words, this broadly stated intention should be seen only as an ellipsis—not a period.

So far, I have established that it was my intention to make a film in the neo-realist tradition; however, before I can adequately justify that intention – and describe how it was realized – I must define neo-realism itself. The term was first used to describe a mode of Italian filmmaking that arose in response to the vast socio-psychological trauma of World War II (Fabe 100). Faced with the whole-sale reconfiguration of their social, cultural, and political regime, certain Italian filmmakers sought to reconfigure their cinema as well, focusing their stories on the “poverty and social malaise of a postwar Italy in shambles” (Fabe 100). Although no real program of Italian neo-realism was ever explicitly established, a number of narrative and stylistic trends pervaded the genre: shooting on location as opposed to a studio, use of non-actors, stories that focused on the “lives of the lower rather than the upper classes,” and a rejection of traditional, positive narrative closure (Fabe 100, 101, 103). However, it must said, when I use the term “neo-realism,” it does not refer to Italian neo-realism exclusively. Rather, my conception of neo-realism is one that embraces the artistic and intellectual spirit of Italian neo-realism – if not all of its proposed features – while simultaneously accepting new developments as well.

All of this is to say that while neo-realism as a brand of generic expression still exists, it no longer exactly resembles Italian neo-realism; therefore, a more accurate label for what I am referring to might be “contemporary neorealism.” In this regard, contemporary neo-realism – represented by such films as *Blue Valentine*, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, *A Separation* (2011, dir. Asghar Farhadi), and *Man Push Cart* (2005, dir. Ramin Bahrani) – reveals additional stylistic elements worthy of notice: “recurrent use of long shots”; a consistent refusal to use any score”; and a “realist, almost documentary, austere and minimalist style” almost always affected through use of hand-held camera (Nasta 45; Tutui 27). Although I will demonstrate how my

thesis film widely exhibits these elements, it is also important to consider this: no one element, taken by itself, is sufficient to designate a film as neo-realist. Similarly, no neo-realist film includes every constituent element of the genre. Rather, neo-realism, at its core, is perhaps expressed through its essential dichotomies: reality over fantasy, grittiness over spectacle, ambiguity over certainty, and improvisation over structure.

Chapter 1

The Screenplay

Plot Synopsis

As *The Good Killing* begins, we are greeted with footage from a hand-held camcorder. Peter Tellis, operating the camera, focuses the lens on his friends, Dave and Liz, kissing passionately on the sidewalk of a city street. Playfully mocking the display of affection as “like the beginning of a really boring sex tape,” Peter sneaks up on them, thrusts the camera in their face and insists that Peter “tell the viewers” why he is so happy. He replies that it is his birthday, though not a normal birthday. Tonight, he is celebrating being one year cancer free. Noticing how Dave and Liz are “all over each other,” Peter jokes that Liz must have motivated Dave to beat cancer by withholding sex.

Six months later, we find Peter, and Dave and Liz – now engaged to be married – huddled around a dining table. Dave shockingly reveals that his cancer has returned. And it’s worse. As he puts it, he could “go through every possible treatment and come out on the other side with a one percent chance to make it through a year.” Despite being stunned, Liz insists that they will find a way to cure him, but Dave is less convinced. He tells Liz that the last time he was sick he investigated certain “alternatives.” At the mention of this, Peter produces a plastic bag with two pills in it. Dave presents the bag to Liz, telling her how “peaceful” this option is supposed to be. The implication is clear: Dave wants to kill himself.

Liz, dumbfounded, refuses to discuss this and storms into the kitchen. Dave follows and tries to make Liz come to terms with the reality of his condition, but she will nothing hear of it. Instead, she marches back into the den and angrily confronts Peter for indulging Dave’s desire to kill himself. Peter tries to defend himself. He reveals to Liz that he grew up with a depressive

mother that he abandoned emotionally. He vowed not to do that to Dave. Despite this admission, Liz tells Peter he has to leave. However, before he goes, Dave embraces Peter and thanks him.

Dave approaches Liz and begs her not to blame Peter. When she does not respond, he cajoles her over to the couch and tells her in no uncertain terms: “This is what’s going to happen.” Liz promises to take care of him if only he will let her, but he is beyond that. Liz presses the issue, kissing Dave forcefully. He stops and asks her to accept his decision. She cannot. Starting to unravel, Dave makes a final plea for understanding. Liz breaks down on the floor, crying. Heartbroken, Dave tells her they do not have to talk about this anymore.

Dave goes to make Liz a drink. While he is gone, Liz discovers the bag of pills on the floor. She takes the pills out of the bag and studies them. Suddenly, she swallows both of the pills as David walks into the room. He sits beside her and hands her the drink, unaware of what she has just done. Dave and Liz share one last kiss.



Evolution of Narrative

In the case of *The Good Killing*—as with much student filmmaking—portions of the writing process and preproduction occurred simultaneously; however, for the purposes of this paper, it is more appropriate to first examine the evolution of the script from concept to final draft. From this perspective, it is important to note that, from the outset, the development of the script was colored by a few practical assumptions. Namely, budgetary concerns necessitated that I develop a film with few characters, locations, and manageable art department requirements. In the light of these challenges, I was forced to imagine my thesis film on a somewhat different

scale: smaller, more intimate, and more character-driven. This paradigmatic bent may have, at least initially, been motivated by a lack of certain material advantages, but it did not necessarily limit my options as a storyteller. Indeed, according to Henry Griffin, dramatic storytelling, in its purest distillation, consists of complex characters making difficult decisions in stressful situations. I took this to heart when conceptualizing my thesis and specifically sought to develop a narrative that portrayed multi-dimensional characters in an emotionally charged, hyper-realized setting. In order to justify such a heightened approach, however, it was also imperative that I craft a substantive, dilemma-based conflict that was sufficiently high-stakes. In this vein, I focused on a single issue – assisted suicide, a topic that had always interested me – and drew on the “What if?” principle to build the basic premise: what if you wanted to kill yourself to spare months of arbitrary pain, but you did not have the support of those closest to you? Who do you live for? Yourself or them?

Although the first script drafts of *The Good Killing* contain the most important and recognizable narrative features from the finished film—the same three characters and, essentially, the same conflict—they differ significantly from the finished film in terms of structure and character placement. Firstly, as my Thesis Prospectus indicates, these early drafts are not “mouse traps of narrative convention”; rather, they employ a loose, vignette structure that does not rely heavily on goal-obstacle conflict to drive the narrative (2). Instead, we follow Peter and Dave as they isolate themselves in a hotel room and proceed to get drunk in preparation for Dave’s suicide. In this conception of the narrative, much is made of the mundane: the moments where the characters are simply waiting interspersed with exchanges of quiet, melancholic reflection. Then, the conflict escalates most intensely in the last scenes where Peter and Dave are confronted by Liz, Dave’s fiancé. While there is clearly incident here—and, ultimately,

climax—the early drafts of *The Good Killing* display an aversion to traditional narrative structure.

In addition to key structural disparities, the early drafts of *The Good Killing* also present a markedly different approach to character: specifically, Peter is the protagonist. However, his placement as such in the narrative is treated in equally unconventional terms since he has no concrete goal and, truthfully, only limited forces of antagonism challenge him. My Thesis Prospectus describes this dynamic as such:

It could be said that our main character's goal is to comfort his friend as the moment of his suicide approaches. There is not a concrete antagonist, although the clearest obstacle to Peter's goal is Lizzy, a friend who does not want Peter to help Dave kill himself. Her antagonism is limited to an impassioned plea, but that is the kind of emotional context that is inherent in this story. (3).

LIZ
I'm begging you... don't let him do this.

PETER
Is that the only thing you came here to say?

LIZ
One of our friends is about to kill himself, and you are helping him do it. Please, tell me! What the fuck else am I supposed to say?

PETER
This is Dave's decision, and at some point you have to stop blaming me for that.

LIZ
But you made a choice, too. You chose to help him give up!

PETER
What choice? I've known Dave since I was eight years old. Ok? This isn't something I can walk away from. I can't just say no.

Liz sighs, defeated.

LIZ
How can we call ourselves his friends and let him go through with this?

PETER
I don't think I could call myself his friend if I didn't.

IA: This exchange between Peter and Liz represents the best example of goal-obstacle conflict in the first draft.

At least there is a measure of basic generic consistency in these characterizations: a vaguely defined protagonist pursuing an intangible goal, and an antagonist who, for all intents and purposes, is missing-in-action until the end of the movie. Consistency, however, is not the question. The question is, “Does it work or doesn’t it?”

At this point it should be apparent that these narrative elements, though fitting a certain paradigmatic logic all their own, were deserving of a second look. To begin with, the unconventional pacing and structure did not contribute to the “emotionally charged, hyper-realized” setting I was hoping to achieve. Rather, the events of the narrative in general lacked a forward-moving immediacy that would be critical to creating a satisfying climax, and the lack of a finely realized protagonist and antagonist only exacerbated the problem. In particular, the script demanded that the protagonist, in some way, be rewritten. After all, one could reasonably ask after these early drafts, “Why is Peter the protagonist?”, or more poignantly, “*Is he* the protagonist?” There are some tools we can use to evaluate this. Firstly, the protagonist must be the one taking the most significant action and making the most significant choices. But what are the significant actions and choices that would distinguish Peter in this regard? He does *disagree* with Liz that Dave should have the right to kill himself, but disagreement is not typically the strongest action. In the end, it is Dave who takes the most profound action in the climax—asking Peter to leave—rendering Peter passive even in that moment. In addition, Peter makes no serious decisions (Certainly, the fact that he is involved in this enterprise at all is a serious decision, but he makes it off-screen). However, this is not to say that there is a more fitting protagonist in these early drafts as written; rather, Peter is the unquestionable center of the narrative. What this does indicate is that the protagonist needed to be strengthened.

In order to address problems with the protagonist, *The Good Killing* went through several rewrites that attempted to enhance Peter's placement in the narrative while not fundamentally reshaping the events of the story. In particular, special emphasis was placed on giving Peter a critical decision point and a more visceral set of actions to accompany—and heighten—the climax. In different iterations of the script, this included Peter physically restraining Liz, even to the point of attacking her, so Dave can kill himself (see figures 1B and 1C).

LIZ (CONT'D)
Honey... You're depressed. Ok?
That's the only reason you want to
do this. Come home and we can... I
can help you.

Dave looks to Peter. He does need someone's help, but not
Liz.

DAVE
(to Peter)
Please.

Peter shakes his head. Dave starts crying. His chance is
slipping away. Peter wrings his hands through his hair.
Can he really do this. Then:

PETER GRABS LIZ AND DRAGS HER TOWARD THE BATHROOM.

Dave jumps to the black leather bag and starts emptying it
out.

Peter pushes himself and Liz into the...

INT. BATHROOM, MOTEL - DAY

Peter shuts the door and LOCKS it. He tries to desperately
to hold Liz down, but she is writhing with manic intensity.

She BREAKS OUT OF HIS HOLD and SHOOTS FOR THE BATHROOM
DOOR, but:

Peter GRABS HER HAIR, pulling her back. He wraps his arms
around her and CUPS ONE OF HIS HANDS OVER HER MOUTH to her
muffle her SCREAMS.

1B: In this revised climax, Peter forcefully traps Liz in the bathroom, giving Dave time to commit suicide.

She squirms and fights but she can't get out. Finally, she gets her mouth free and BITES PETER'S HAND.

Peter recoils in pain. Liz unlocks the bathroom door and rushes into the hotel room.

Peter goes to the faucet and runs water over his hand.

LIZ (O.S.)
No! Jesus Christ, no!

14.

Liz HOWLS. The sound of tears mingled with screams and the essence of pure grief.

Peter sits down on the toilet, looking into the hotel room. No tears for him.

LIZ
I understand everything you just said.

Liz pulls a CELLPHONE from her pocket.

LIZ (CONT'D)
But what you don't understand is that I'm fighting for you. Not against you.

Liz dials a number and she puts the phone to her ear. Dave and Peter study her, dumfounded.

PETER
Who are you calling, Liz.

13.

Liz doesn't respond. She waits for a few moments. Then:

LIZ
Yes, can I speak to doctor Stewart?
I need to talk to him about his patient, Dave Vinton.

Dave's eyes flash. He races toward Liz.

Dave reaches her and tries to SWIPE THE CELLPHONE, but she turns her back on him, guarding the phone with her body.

IB con't: As we can see in this case, our main character's actions have become particularly aggressive.

IC: In this rewrite, Dave and Peter work together to stop Liz from contacting Dave's doctor.

IC con't

Dave grabs hold of Liz from behind and reaches over her shoulders for the phone -- HE CAN'T GET AT IT. He looks to Peter.

DAVE Here!
Get the phone!

Peter looks over the scene, hesitant.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Now!

Peter jumps out of his seat and rushes over to Liz. She's keeping the phone at bay from Dave, but Peter comes at her from the front.

Peter tries to pry the cellphone from fingers, but she's holding on for dear life.

LIZ
(into cellphone)
Dr. Stewart, Dave wants to--

Dave COVERS LIZ'S MOUTH with his hands before she can continue.

Peter has both hands on the cellphone. In one swift motion, Peter RIPS THE PHONE away from Liz.

Dave releases Liz and she falls to the ground, sobbing. Dave and Peter stare at her. Frozen. They can't believe what they have just done.

Liz continues to wail, the tears coming out like Niagara Falls.

If nothing else, it was vital that Peter make—and act on—a decision that would influence the outcome of the narrative and clarify the film's thematic arc. However, those actions potentially clarified the arc in the wrong direction. It was my intention to highlight the inherent, unavoidable tragedy of the events in the narrative, not their underlying brutality. Yet with each rewrite, the throughline became more and more bleak as Peter's actions became increasingly violent. In addition, there was still a vital question that had yet to be answered: is this really Peter's story? Is he the character whose interior life and expanding moral universe we want to see exploded on-screen? After repeated attempts to rewrite the narrative in this fashion, my answer became, "No."

If I contend that Peter is not the rightful protagonist, then which among the remaining characters is? Perhaps, it is Dave. Certainly, he is the character who is intent on taking the most drastic action (and the current structure already provided him with an antagonist in Liz). While there is nothing wrong with that narrative arrangement—in another version of this story, Dave is most likely the perfect protagonist—I had envisioned Dave’s journey as being somewhat static. He is the irresistible force that must come up against the immovable object. Instead, I was fixated on Liz’s potential as the protagonist. Indeed, as the lone voice opposing Dave’s suicide, she pursues a clear and tangible goal that can radically alter the trajectory of the narrative. In addition, Liz’s situation is, arguably, the most active and dramatically compelling as she ostensibly becomes “the bad guy” for not wanting someone she loves to kill themselves.

With this in mind, I began reformulating the script to accommodate Liz as the definite protagonist, but this presented a range of new challenges. For starters, Liz’s character would have to be subjected to the same scrutiny as Peter. Put simply, if it was necessary for Peter as protagonist to make a story-defining choice, then it should be necessary for Liz as well. Proceeding rewrites attempted to address this, albeit haphazardly, by having Liz threaten to call the police and expose Dave’s scheme. However, the impact of this decision is undermined as the film abruptly cuts to black before she actually decides whether or not to tell the police (see figure 1D). Secondly, Liz—like Dave—exhibits a moral intractability that is problematic. On one hand, it leads her to pursue her goal—as any protagonist should—with the utmost intensity. On the other hand, it limits her complexity, which makes her more appealing as an antagonist. In order to bridge this gap, it was apparent that Liz would not only have to make a profound choice, but that choice would have to involve an element of deep, inner change.

In the final stages of the writing process, the essential terms of the narrative were recon-

Dave nods. That's it. He pulls his cellphone out of his pocket and puts it on the table in front of Liz.

11.

DAVE

Ok. If you don't want me to do this. You're going to have to call the police.

Liz's eyes widen. Is he serious? She grabs the cellphone and dials 9-1-1. She puts the phone to her ear. A moment passes. Then:

911 OPERATOR This is
911. Please state your
emergency.

Liz keeps the phone to her ear but doesn't say anything. She looks at Dave. He's watching every move she makes.

911 OPERATOR (CONT'D)
Hello? State your emergency if
you're on the line.

Liz waits...

Waits...

ID: From the ninth draft, Liz is given a crucial decision-point, but it does not pay off.

-figured in order to integrate Liz as protagonist and heighten the conflict. Firstly, the film's narrative structure was compressed and streamlined in a more linear fashion. Rather than a "loose, vignette structure" that would jump from scene to scene, the script was rewritten into two scenes: a found footage prologue and a single scene containing the rest of the action. In this final scene, Liz learns that not only has Dave's cancer returned, but he wants to kill himself rather than pursue treatment. Over the course of eight pages, Liz and Dave battle verbally and

emotionally over this fact. Here, unlike in previous drafts, the narrative is advanced not through rumination but through the interplay of goal-obstacle tension that allows the story to reach its emotional peak faster and in more conflictual context. Secondly, in terms of character, Liz is given a distinct, trackable arc. Specifically, at the beginning of the scene, Liz is emotionally resolute and determined that killing one's self is not the answer; however, at the end of the scene, she is emotionally broken and believes it is better to kill herself rather than live without Dave. This undoubtedly constitutes a "deep, inner change"; however, it is my hope that it does not seem like an arbitrary change. Although I acknowledged the importance of Liz's arc, it was never my intention to manufacture a climax around an artificially shocking end. Rather, I arrived at this ending because I believed it was actually the inevitable result of the circumstances of the narrative. At the heart of this story are two characters laying bare that for which they are willing to live and die. In this regard, Liz makes her position quite clear: she lives for Dave. Therefore, when Dave finally asserts that he will kill himself, she realizes she no longer has a reason to live and makes a tragic, and cruelly logical, decision.

Chapter 2

Elements of Production

Casting

As was previously established, *The Good Killing* was envisioned, partially, as a performance-centered, character drama; therefore, the casting process was crucial (truthfully, though, when is it not?). For the roles of Dave and Peter, I decided relatively early that I would cast Ben Matheny and Matthew Martinez rather than holding an open casting call. Although this may seem like an insular decision, I at least feel that it was based on strong reasoning. To begin with, I had directed Ben Matheny in the past and together we had developed not only a strong working relationship but also a shared director-actor vocabulary that I felt would be vital to this production. The selection of Matthew Martinez, on the other hand, involved a somewhat different set of factors. Although I had never directed Matt, I had worked with him in other capacities and I was very confident in his abilities as an actor. In addition, I was intrigued by the fact that Ben and Matt had been roommates and friends for some time. Since, narratively speaking, Dave and Peter are supposed to be life-long friends, I felt that casting two actors who were friends in real life could facilitate a very natural on-screen chemistry.

This still left the question: who would play Dave and who would play Peter? To determine this, I held auditions in which Ben and Matthew read together, each alternating parts. While neither actor clearly performed *better* than the other, the individual sensibilities they attached to the characters were distinct. In this regard, the most decisive factor I observed was the sensitivity, and even shyness, that Matthew contributed to his reading of Peter. Although Ben's reading of Peter was equally affecting, he did not reach the same level of sensitivity that seemed natural for Matthew. Not only that, but Ben and Matthew both suited the peculiar

physicalities I intended for Dave and Peter respectively. To be blunt, Matthew, with his slight frame, was uniquely capable of portraying the more timid Peter, and Ben, who is nearly six feet tall, more closely fit my image of Dave as All-American-type guy—with a twist. Ultimately, these elements proved too compelling to ignore, so I cast Matthew as Peter and Ben as Dave.

The efforts to cast the role of Liz were more involved and problematic. For starters, the role itself—besides being protagonal—called for a high level of emotional dexterity and performance skill. Secondly, the pool of talented female actresses that I was aware of was more limited. To expand that pool, I organized an open casting call for the role of Liz exclusively, but only a few actresses responded and auditioned—none of whom was right for the part. It was apparent I had to retool my strategy. With the help of my producer, Ben Matheny, I utilized a more targeted approach, seeking out specific actresses recommended to me and auditioning them one at a time. It was through this process that I encountered Rebecca Elizabeth Hollingsworth, a theater actress who had recently won the Best Actress prize at the New Orleans 48 Hour Film Festival. In her audition, she displayed the ability to quickly access the emotional center of every situation and communicate that through her performance. On the strength of that audition, I cast her as Liz.

Although the examples listed above demonstrate the decision-making criteria that determined the end of the casting process, it is also important to examine the methodology that led to those decisions. Specifically, how do I run a casting session, what am I looking for, and how do I adjust depending on the actor? To start, when I first encounter an actor in a casting session I allow them to present their own take on the prepared sides (I always provide the sides well in advance so they can be more than familiar with the material). No matter what the result of this first take is—even if it is dreadful—I will give the actor at least one adjustment so they

can find a better performance rhythm. Of course, if the first take goes well, I will give the actor several adjustments. In this regard, my “adjustment scheme” can seem arbitrary and even counter-intuitive as I will provide a range of directions intended to show vastly different flavors of the character. This can be challenging, but it is important for a few reasons. Firstly, it allows you to gauge how well an actor takes direction—a critical point since this was such a performance-heavy film. Secondly, it can reveal an actor’s range. In this case, I wanted to see if my actors could execute not only the broader and more explosive emotional moments, but also the quiet, nuanced ones.



Cinematography

In order to properly evaluate *The Good Killing*’s approach to cinematography, it is necessary to first assess—and justify—the basic characteristics of lighting and camera movement displayed in the film. In this respect, it has been argued that *The Good Killing* operates from a neo-realist perspective, and as such follows certain stylistic markers, such as use of hand-held camera, naturalistic lighting, and long takes. I will detail how my thesis film executes these elements, but a larger question still remains: Why this style? Broadly speaking, these elements usually serve to bridge the verisimilitudinous space between the viewer and the events on screen, creating a more realistic context for the visual presentation of the narrative. In terms of camera movement, a hand-held style heightens this effect by immediately placing the viewer in an unsettled posture, which compliments this film’s display of explosive emotional violence. Additionally, the film’s naturalistic and low-key lighting—largely motivated by practical lights—contributes the appearance of an austere, unembellished realism. This attempt to present

the world in a naturalistic setting is actually formalistically complex and certainly involves more elements that I will describe later, but these are the general principles at work.

As *The Good Killing* follows a bifurcated structure—the film is basically two scenes—it is instructive to analyze the cinematography in two parts as well, beginning with the found footage prologue. From the standpoint of practical execution, this sequence was filmed exactly as it looks. Myself and a minimal crew, which is to say the director of photography (Mark Williams) and a sound recorder (Ben Maner), went on location near Frenchman Street, New Orleans and filmed the sequence through the entire night. Stylistically and philosophically, our mandate was to remain as authentic to the found footage concept as possible. For that reason, we shot entirely on location, utilized only natural and existing light, and—since we were viewing these events through Peter’s camera—Matthew Martinez actually shot the majority of the footage. Finally, as an example of found footage, the sequence is commensurately fluid in visual execution: it is frenetically hand-held, zooms occur frequently, and it is not uncommon for there to be rapid focus changes.

The second, and most notable, aspect of *The Good Killing*’s cinematography is the final scene, which proceeds in a single, uninterrupted take over eleven minutes long. There is much to analyze here, particularly in terms of planning and execution, but firstly it is important to outline the reasoning behind the shot itself. In this regard, it might be argued that there is a vague, programmatic tendency in neo-realism favoring long takes “as the method of visualization best suited to capturing the integrity and polysemous state of the actual world” (Ricciardi 488). Although I would agree that neo-realist films, at least some of them, utilize the long take, I would disagree with this explanation for their efficacy. It is far too reductive to claim that one achieves some version of *reality* by simply stripping away the elements of style and

subjectivity—in other words, the essence of cinema. Rather, I prefer to classify my use of the long take in creative rather than regressive terms. Simply put, I was trying to produce an effect and provoke a reaction through a deliberate, cinematic manipulation. Specifically, my appropriation of the long, hand-held take was intended to place the viewer uncomfortably close to the events. Like a spectator caught in the frenzy of Liz and Dave’s crisis, there is no escape and no “external, safe, or stable position” (Uricaru 13). I must admit, there was also an element of brinksmanship at work, which is to say this: I wanted to take the audience on an emotionally polarizing journey wherein we witness a person disintegrate before our eyes in one take. And I wanted to see if they would believe it.

Whether or not one believes that the final scene’s one shot was conceived in the proper light, it is still necessary to account for how this was achieved. In this regard, there are several factors to consider. Firstly, the shot was designed and choreographed in the presence of the actors as they worked through the scene. Rather than viewing the scene from an objective distance, the shot was designed to be active, even confrontational at times, involving numerous camera moves. Rather than storyboard this process, my director of photography (Mark Williams) took snapshots that tracked each significant movement of the take from start until finish. From that point, there were several rehearsal periods, which of course required the presence of the actors. These rehearsals were laborious but absolutely necessary to prepare us for shooting. When that day came, we were ready—mostly.

The scene was shot by Mark on a Canon 60D DSLR using a 35 mm variable lens. In order to achieve our intended “look,” Mark utilized a spider brace and was directed to film the action as normally as possible. No extraneous movement was added to simulate a “hand-held” look (in my experience, that can contrive the style). Because of the shot’s vast visual range—we

see nearly every inch of that dining room—it was necessary to light the scene primarily using practicals. However, we strategically placed some lights—two 650s and a Kinoflo—outside windows to create ominous spotlights intended to define our location’s boundaries and create the effect of our world being surrounded in some way.

Over the course of two days, the production did nothing but execute this take. In that effort, we encountered several cinematographic challenges. For one, the Canon 60D can not shoot clips much longer than eleven minutes (A few takes, in fact, cut off prematurely). Secondly, as a result of attempting a shot this far-ranging and complex, it was nearly impossible at times to avoid minor errors that would ruin a take, such as missed focus points, shadows, the appearance of crew in reflections, and actors actually running into the camera. Despite these challenges, however, we shot the scene twenty two times and produced 13 usable takes.



Sound

Before I specifically address how audio was recorded on location, it is important to first discuss the unique challenges the sound department faced in this regard. Most obviously, the demands of shooting one shot complicated matters in the extreme. In respect respect, dialogue recording promised to be particularly difficult as the sound recorder—Jeff Bruno—would have to monitor lines of dialogue from three characters over the course of an eleven minute shot *intended* to play continuously. That meant, in essence, there was nowhere for bad sound to hide and no additional coverage to make adjustments. It is difficult enough to record good sound under the relatively controlled conditions of a normal length shot, much less one that is eleven minutes long. In addition, the uneasy spatial arrangement between the characters and the camera

operator prompted some troublesome questions, such as where would the boom operator go? As the camera changes perspective frequently throughout the scene, there was no single location where a boom operator could station himself unnoticed. That necessitated that the boom operator would have to follow the scene directly behind the camera operator at all times, potentially interfering with the camera move.

In order to adequately, and comprehensively, capture audio from the final scene's one shot, the sound department was forced to take an unorthodox approach. Quite simply, if one word could describe this approach, it would undoubtedly be "overkill." Our first priority in this regard was to reserve *all of the sound equipment* we could possibly use. In total, this included, UNO's entire lavalier package, four additional microphones, two Fostex recorders, and two FR2-LEs. During the actual shoot, all three actors were fitted with lavalier microphones to ensure some level of clean dialogue recording. In addition, three of the remaining microphones were strategically hidden in areas of high activity—the kitchen, the couch, near the front door—to capture important physical sounds and general presence. Finally, the boom operator manned the last microphone, although he was only able to boom the dining room since there was no feasible way to fit him into the tight kitchen space.

The "overkill" approach yielded mixed, though cumulatively successful, results. To begin with, the overall sound quality was good, but the ways in which we attempted to broaden our sound recording capabilities—the hidden microphones—proved to be entirely superfluous. These microphones not only failed to effectively capture dialogue, but their recording of the physical sounds was also inadequate. Ultimately, all sound and dialogue was supplied by the boom microphone and the actors' lavalier microphones.



Directing

For the purposes of this paper, I will analyze direction only as it pertains to the crafting of performance; as such, the first element of my directorial preparation was script analysis. This involves identifying your characters' goals and needs and then being able to extrapolate from them coherent actions that inform the performance. In the case of *The Good Killing*, understanding the overarching objectives at work was particularly important since the film plays out, essentially, as two characters struggling to bring the other to their point of view. That necessitates that critical beats are being communicated through performance alone.

In order to determine goal, it is necessary to consider a few factors. Firstly, a character's goal should be specific and external—characters may very well have an internal *need*, but that is different. A goal should not be emotional, like love, or philosophical, like justice; rather, characters should be seeking concrete outcomes, not ephemeral states of mind. With that in mind, I decided that Liz's goal is *to stop Dave from killing himself*. Dave's goal, on the other hand, is *to kill himself*. Finally, Peter's goal is *to help Dave kill himself*. Admittedly, these goals reflect a broader, and more tangible, perspective on what the characters are pursuing. Indeed, in the final scene Dave's suicide does not even appear to be imminent; rather, what is at stake is *his decision* to kill himself. Therefore, can we really say that Dave's goal is to kill himself? I would argue that we could for this reason: Dave's suicide may only be an eventuality in narrative terms, but it is still the undisputed endgame our characters are either working toward, or, in Liz's case, trying to prevent.

From this point, I was able to outline the tactics that each character would take to achieve their goal. Firstly, a brief explanation of tactics is in order. Unlike goal, which reflects a specific but more global objective—what I have called the endgame—tactics are the individual actions

that a character takes, scene by scene and even line by line, to reach that goal. These are expressed as clear, performable actions, primarily in verb form (example tactics: to seduce, to ridicule, to command). In Liz's case—keep in mind, her goal is to stop Dave from killing himself—she tries *to comfort* Dave, *ignore* his desire for suicide, *attack* Peter for helping him, and, finally, she *pleads*. Dave's tactics, unsurprisingly, counter Liz's point by point as he tries to confront Liz with this reality of his situation, force her to consider his position, and demand that she forgive Peter. In my opinion, an in-depth knowledge of what a character is trying to accomplish, beat by beat, is the director's first line of attack in crafting a performance.

In the next stage of the directorial process, I conducted a series of rehearsals in which I introduced the element of improvisation. Improvisation was a useful tool, in this case, as it helped create a more organic, unpredictable, and believably hectic atmosphere between the actors—in other words, more raw and more real. Despite the haphazardness this connotes, my methodology in regards to improvisation is in fact very structured. For one, it always start with the script—not an outline, an actual script. This provided us with a structural framework necessary to define the limits of our improvisation (It was also available to bail us out in case improvisation did not yield superior results). In addition to the script, my detailed analyses of character goals and tactics was, perhaps, even more vital to the process. This is a matter of both fairness and effectiveness. If you are going to ask an actor to supply, out of whole cloth, the substance of dialogue, then you must able to authoritatively explain what a character is trying to achieve and why.

The rehearsal process was a collaborative, as well as instructive, affair as I explained to the actors my core starting points for the characters in terms of what they wanted and how they related to each other as individuals. My main focus as a director during this time was to steer

actors away from clearly bad choices, not to pinpoint the exact synchronization of the performance. Firstly, I don't know if such a "synchronization" exists, but, in any case, I wanted the actors' most refined and immediate work to come on set. For that reason, we rehearsed extensively, but not exhaustively. Rather, my chief priority was to establish our common, creative vocabulary and give the actors a solid foundation on which to build.

During the shooting of the *The Good Killing*, I encountered several challenges that tested my ability as a director, specifically as it pertains to the crafting of performance. Firstly, I had to contend with a significant, practical obstacle: namely, because the final scene's one shot was so expansive, it required a cleared set in which only actors and essential crew would be present to film the scene from start to finish. In other words, I was not available to view the performances in real time. This meant that after each take I and the director of photography had to hold production for roughly fifteen minutes so I could watch playback and judge performance. However, from the standpoint of performance, there were issues to consider as well. Most seriously, I noticed that Rebecca (playing Liz) had a tendency to play the early moments in the scene in an exceptionally glib manner, basically brushing off Dave's concerns as inconsequential as she pushed forward with solutions. I knew this would portray Liz in too harsh a light too early, so in collaboration with Rebecca we began molding the performance. As part of this process, I would approach Rebecca after a take and try to tactfully address what I thought the problem was and then suggest a solution in the form of an action-based instruction, usually saying something like this:

That was good. This time, though, let's try something different. On the last take, it really felt like you were dismissing Dave's concerns too brusquely. I think at this moment, you would be trying to comfort him, trying to encourage him, assuring him that he can beat the cancer again.

Ben (playing Dave) also demonstrated some problems with the early part of the scene; however, unlike Rebecca, who came on far too strong, his problem was not coming on strong enough. Too often, Ben chose the timid route in his interaction with Rebecca, opting to soothe rather than challenge. However, I felt in this instance that Dave would be very straightforward, even abrupt. After all, he is here to declare, unequivocally, his intention to kill himself with or without Liz's approval. To guide Ben toward this, I might suggest to him after a take, "I think you're coddling her too much. Remember, you're trying to confront her with something you know she is going to resist. When she does that, you have to demand to be heard."



Editing

One might think that the post-production process for *The Good Killing* was relatively simple, and this is partly true. Certainly, the fact that the vast majority of the film consisted of a single take reduced some of the editing responsibilities to a simple process of elimination. However, in other the ways, the editing was as complex as any film. The first factor to consider is that the opening prologue is a fully edited sequence that required a great deal of time to design—primarily because the sequence functions on a variety of levels. Firstly, the prologue is intended to give the audience critical exposition, specifically the fact that Dave is one year cancer free. Obviously, that required that the first part of the dialogue exchange had to be included. However, the prologue also had to portray our two main characters—Dave and Liz—behaving as a couple that is deeply in love. To accomplish this, I created a montage that runs over the dialogue occurring at the beginning of the scene. In it, we see more hand-held footage of Dave and Liz: Dave showing off Liz's engagement ring, the happy couple sharing a romantic

moment by a fountain, the two passionately making out. After this point, the original shot that included the opening dialogue continued for too long, so I executed a jump cut which fit the frenetic camera style. Finally, to conclude this sequence I wanted to quickly transition to the final scene, in essence preventing the audience from becoming too comfortable in this world. To this effect, I executed a hard cut from the characters walking down the street to a black title card reading, “One Year Later”. Over the title, we still hear Peter singing raucously, “We beat the cancer.” Then the film tersely cuts to an image of Dave, stark and grim as he sits at the dining table preparing to tell the woman he loves that he wants to kill himself.

The picture “editing” of the final scene involved nothing more than a careful selection process in which I evaluated the thirteen takes that captured the entirety of the scene. Of those thirteen, several could be discarded due to minor but noticeable camera inconsistencies—brief focus errors being the main one—while others were passed over due to performance or sound. Two takes remained that exhibited both exceptional performances and keen execution of the camera move. In this respect, the deciding factor was Ben Matheny’s performance. The take that was selected was one of the final ones shot. At that time, the actors were exhausted, so much so that whatever cognitive barriers existed between them and their characters had broken down. They were performing in a state of constant emotional exertion and rarely had an opportunity to drop character. In this particular take, Ben delivered his best, and certainly most vulnerable, performance of the shoot. The moment where he breaks down and cries, “It’s my fucking life Liz!” was simply too powerful to ignore.

Before *The Good Killing* premiered at the University of New Orleans Film Festival, it went through two weeks of post-sound editing. I took responsibility for the sound design myself, mixing the film with Nuendo in UNO’s post-sound facility. By far, the greatest challenge in this

regard was effectively managing the number of audio tracks associated with the final scene. As I discussed previously, we recorded the final scene with eight microphones, each of which had a distinct track in the Nuendo interface. Before anything could be done, I had to go through the final scene and isolate and mute the four tracks that corresponded to the hidden microphones—the sound they recorded was not usable. Then, the challenge became discerning which of the remaining tracks contained the cleanest audio. In this case, I was dealing with three lavalier tracks and a boom track. In order to produce a clean, consistent mix, I had to weave between these options depending on which provided the best sound. Finally, I performed the necessary sound maintenance required to smooth out the overall mix. This involved lifting distracting noises from the tracks and replacing them with matching room tone audio. In order to bridge whatever audio gaps remained, I applied an apartment environment sound effect that plays only subtly through the last scene.

In terms of *The Good Killing's* use of creative sound design elements, music plays an interesting role. To begin with, there is literally no music or score throughout nearly the entire film. Of course, this was a deliberate choice. On the most basic level, a lack of score is a typical generic marker of neo-realist films; however, it is far too glib to explain such a decision by simply saying, “That is what other neo-realist films do.” Indeed, if there is generic tendency in neo-realism to minimize score elements, it is for very specific reasons. In my case, I chose not to use score because I did not want to provide emotional cues for how the audience should respond to the events on screen. If one wanted to apply a post-modern interpretation to this, it might be truthful to say that score, in that it aids the audience in structuring their emotional viewing experience, is too comforting for a film like this. However, there is music at the very end of the film: “The Realest” by the band O. Children plays over the last moments of the scene as it

transitions to the credits. Despite the fact that I refused to use score earlier in the scene, I felt it was important to punctuate Liz's final decision. In that respect, I chose the the song "The Realist" because it highlighted the tragic futility of the situation without pointing to any clear solution.

Chapter 3

Personal Analysis

I assume the first, and perhaps only, contribution of personal analysis that is valuable here is whether I judge my film a success. In this regard, it is useful to reevaluate the standards I set forth in this paper:

... with my thesis film, I intended to craft a small-scale, improvisational, performance-driven drama in the style most reminiscent of contemporary neo-realist cinema for which the most obvious reverence points are *Blue Valentine* (2010, dir. Derek Cianfrance) and *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* (2007, dir. Cristian Mungiu).

Before I analyze specific elements of my thesis film, it is proper to ask if it at least fulfills this limited criteria. I believe it does. Broadly speaking, I made the *type of film* I wanted to make in the style I wanted to make it. However, if this was the only measure of success, then any film that merely satisfied some base level of generic and stylistic consistency would be a “success”. Subjecting my thesis film to such a forgiving standard would be the equivalent of intellectual malpractice. Rather, it is important to ask hard questions about the quality of my film and the quality of my performance as a filmmaker.

One such question might be, “Is this a truly performance driven film, and, if so, was it driven by good performances?” To both questions, I would answer yes, with certain caveats. On the first question, I do not think any reasonable person could argue that the performances of each character are anything but central to the success of this film; that being, if you do not like the performances, I can not see how you would like the film, even with its singular stylistic eccentricity. For my own part, I think the performances are excellent. The actors acquitted themselves splendidly, displaying a commitment to emotional honesty and a bare-faced, go-for-broke vulnerability that I have not seen in any other film I directed. However, I must admit that the improvisational style displayed by these actors showed some limitations. On one hand, when

the style was working, it produced moments that were stunning in their emotional clarity. On the other hand, when it was not working, it tended to produce lulls in the action and excessive repetition of dialogue.

The most important questions that might be asked of this film is, “Did it need to be one shot, and, if so, was it successful?” By executing the film in this fashion, I was essentially disavowing key elements of film’s aesthetic potential to create associations and visceral emotional responses through the juxtapositions of editing. Of course, this is only one piece of cinema’s aesthetic puzzle. With *The Good Killing*, it was more important to expose the human frailty at the heart of this drama with a stylistic approach that placed viewers uncompromisingly, and yet somehow impartially, at the center of the action. For this purpose, *it was essential* that the film was one shot, and I think my crew executed that shot to the best of their abilities. If I were to critique anyone’s performance in regard to this shot, it would be mine. Specifically, I might argue the shot could have been even more effective. There are simply moments in this film when the action slows and characters stay in place, and the shot itself displays a certain inertia that fails to heighten the events as actively as it could.

Citations

Filmography

4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 days (2007, dir. Cristian Mungiu)

Blue Valentine (2010, dir. Derek Cianfrance)

Man Push Cart (2005, dir. Ramin Bahrani)

A Separation (2011, Asghar Farhadi)

Works Cited

- Aaron, Alex. "Statement of Purpose." University of New Orleans, 2010.
- . "Thesis Prospectus." University of New Orleans, 2010.
- Fabe, Marilyn. *Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film Technique*. Berkeley: University of California, 2004.
- Larimore, Rachel. "You Didn't Build That" Isn't Going Away. 30 August 2012. 1 September 2013. <http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2012/08/_you_didn_t_build_that_it_doesn_t_matter_what_obama_meant_to_say_but_what_people_heard_.html>.
- Nasta, Dominique. "Continuity, Change, and Renewal in Romanian Auteur Films: from *Reconstruction* (1969) to *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle* (2010)." *Film International* (2012): 34-56.
- Ricciardi, Alessia. "The Italian Redemption of Cinema: Neorealism from Bazin to Godard." *The Romanic Review* 97. 3/4 (2006): 483-500.
- Tutui, Marian. "Surfing on the Romanian New Wave." *Film International* (2012): 23-32.
- Uricaru, Ioana. "4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days: A Corruption of Intimacy." *Film Quarterly* 61. 4 (2008): 12-17.

Appendix A: Script Drafts

Script Version 1

THE GOOD KILLING

By Alex Aaron

2012, Alex Aaron

FADE IN:

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

A cheap-looking Sedan drives into the parking lot and pulls into a space. PETER TELLIS, 20s, a serious type, gets out from the driver's side door.

Peter walks over to the passenger seat. He opens the door, reaches in, and helps DAVE VINTON, 20s, get out of the car. Bone-white and gaunt, Dave feebly gets to his feet and latches onto Peter's shoulder.

Peter reaches back into the car, pulls out a BLACK DUFFEL BAG and slings it over his arm. Peter grabs hold of Dave and starts leading him toward the motel.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Peter guides Dave into the room. It's dark with only a few streaks of light coming from the curtained windows.

Peter moves with Dave to the interior of the room and lays Dave on one of the double beds. Dave sprawls out, but he looks anything but comfortable.

Peter walks back to the door and turns the lights on. It's your basic two bedroom. Quaint would be the polite term.

Peter walks back into the interior of the room and sits on the bed opposite Dave. He takes out his cellphone and dials.

PETER

(into cellphone)

Yeah... We're here. Room 238. When?

Ok. I said I get it.

Peter hangs up the phone, grimacing. He looks over to Dave.

DAVE

When did doctor K say?

PETER Twelve

o'clock.

DAVE

Noon, huh? That's a good time to kill yourself.

Peter looks down, hiding his face from Dave.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Peter and Dave sit on the floor, their backs to each other's beds. In front of them are TAKE-OUT BOXES full of CHICKEN WINGS and cups of ranch dressing.

Peter and Dave eat the wings, licking their fingers as they go. Dave finishes off a leg and leans back against the bed, exhausted. Then:

Dave starts COUGHING violently.

Peter SNAPS to attention. He puts his food down and starts to move toward Dave, but Dave PUTS HIS HAND UP to stop him.

DAVE
(retching)
It's ok. It's not the cancer. What
flavor are these wings?

PETER
Bacon avocado... Sorry, they were new.

Dave settles down, his face still straining from the taste of the wings.

DAVE It's ok.

Dave grabs another bacon avocado wing. He holds it in front of his mouth, hesitant to eat it. After a moment, he bites into the wing.

INT. BATHROOM, MOTEL - NIGHT

The bathroom is littered with LIQUOR BOTTLES, SQUEEZED LIMES, and EMPTY BEER CANS.

Peter is perched atop the sink, while Dave is sitting on the toilet, his head in his hands. He looks positively wasted.

Dave looks up, inebriated and thoroughly defiant.

DAVE
Let's do another.

Peter groans. He's more than a little buzzed himself.

PETER
No. You've already drunk too much.
You're liver is about to rebel.

DAVE

Good. The rest of my body has.

Dave holds out his shot glass, expectant.

PETER Ok.

One more.

Peter takes Dave's shot glass and sets near the sink next to his shot glass. Peter opens a bottle of WHISKEY and fills up the glasses. He hands Dave his glass back.

DAVE

One... two... THREE.

On Dave's count, Peter and Dave take their shot glasses and knock back the whiskey. They share a collective wince as it goes through their system at the same time.

Peter and Dave lean back, taking deep, tired breaths.

DAVE (CONT'D) You
talked to Lizzy?

Peter nods, but he looks away defensively.

DAVE (CONT'D) She's not
coming?

Peter looks at Dave for a long moment and then shakes his head. Dave purses his lips, trying not to let this upset him.

DAVE (CONT'D) You
remember Lizzy's graduation party?

PETER
Which one? I recall that party have two
very distinct acts.

DAVE The
first one.

PETER
You mean when you, me, and Lizzy decided it
would be a great idea to start drinking six
hours before the party even started.

Peter and Dave laugh.

DAVE

The way you got drunk that night was one
of the funniest things I've ever seen.

PETER

(coy)

I don't know what you're talking.

DAVE

I remember... We were all sitting around in that room that just had meditation mats on it because Lizzy wanted to be Zen Buddhist for a about a day. And we were talking... Then I looked at you, and you were completely quiet, and your eyes were focusing as hard as they could. And as your eyes kept focusing I knew that you were getting more and more fucked up and trying to keep it cool. Then, you politely stood up, walked over to the front door, and said to us, "I'm very sorry, but I have to throw up right now. When I get back, I'll give you my sincere opinions on whatever it is you just said." After that, you walked out and vomited six hours worth of booze onto Lizzy's front porch.

Peter chuckles, slightly embarrassed.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I had never seen so much purging in my life.

PETER

I remember. I went back into that room and didn't do or say anything for about an hour - it was probably the best meditation ever done in that room. And you cleaned up the porch. Didn't make me do any of it.

DAVE

That's what you do for a friend when there in that kind of shape I guess.

Peter nods, lets Dave's words sink in. Dave gets up.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Peter, I'm sorry for what I'm about to do in front of you.

Dave lifts up the toilet seat, bends his head down toward the bowl and starts VOMITING with intense force. Peter gets off the sink and steps toward Dave, ready to help.

The vomiting continues. Dave expels massive amounts of the partially digested alcohol and chicken wings from his system. Finally, the vomiting STOPS and Dave hovers over the bowl, breathless.

Peter waits next to Dave, letting him move at his own pace. Dave starts turning to the water faucet and Peter helps him along. Dave turns on the faucet and starts furiously scooping handfuls of water into his mouth and then spitting it out.

Dave turns off the faucet and moves to leave the bathroom. Peter guides out him into the...

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

... and lets him fall onto the bed, ready to pass out.

Peter sits on the edge of the bed and runs his hands through his hair. Long day. He peers back into the BATHROOM and sees:

FLECKS OF VOMIT cover the toilet and some of the floor.

Peter gets back and walks back into the bathroom. He starts unspooling the roll of toilet paper next to the toilet.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

It's morning. Panels of bluish, early light shine though the windows. Peter and Dave are asleep in their separate beds. The room is messy but peaceful. Then:

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

Peter stirs, his eyes opening wearily. He looks over and sees Dave is awake too.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

DAVE

That's not him, is it?

Peter sits up, grabs his cellphone from the night table. He looks at -- The time reads 11:41. Not Twelve yet.

PETER

It shouldn't be.

Peter gets out of bed - he's still dressed from the night before - and he walks to the front door.

Peter looks through the peephole. He steps back, openmouthed with surprise. He pauses a moment, then opens the door to see: LIZZY ALLENWOOD, 20s

standing outside the hotel room, her arms folded in a posture that lets you know she's ready for battle.

PETER (CONT'D) Liz?

Liz looks at Peter, her lips pursed.

LIZ Is
Dave here?

Peter doesn't say anything for a moment. He moves to let Liz enter the hotel room.

Liz walks in, studying everything as she sees it. As she reaches the interior of the room, she sees Dave lying on the bed, hung over but very much alive. Her eyes start welling up with tears.

LIZ (CONT'D) Dave...

Liz rushes to Dave's bed side and the two embrace.

DAVE
I'm glad you're here.

Peter walks over to Dave's bed and sees Dave and Liz embracing. He watches them, but keeps his distance. He walks back to the door and leaves the motel room.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Peter leans against the railing outside the hotel room.

The DOOR OPENS and Liz steps out. Her eyes are red with tears. Peter turns to her.

LIZ
I'm begging you... don't let him do this.

PETER
Is that the only thing you came here to say?

LIZ
One of our friends is about to kill himself, and you are helping him do it. Please, tell me! What the fuck else am I supposed to say?

PETER

This is Dave's decision, and at some point you have to stop blaming me for that.

LIZ

But you made a choice, too. You chose to help him give up!

PETER

What choice? I've known Dave since I was eight years old. Ok? This isn't something I can walk away from. I can't just say no.

Liz sighs, defeated.

LIZ

How can we call ourselves his friends and let him go through with this?

PETER

I don't think I could call myself his friend if I didn't.

Liz looks at Peter, considers this. Then:

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.) Excuse me.

Peter and Liz turn around and see a well-dressed MAN carrying a BLACK LEATHER BAG. This is DR. SPITZER.

DR. SPITZER

(to Peter)

Is this your room?

Peter looks at Dr. Spitzer, taken aback. He pulls out his cellphone. The clock reads 12:01. Peter looks back to Dr. Spitzer and nods.

Peter opens the door and lets Dr. Spitzer in. Liz looks on, dumbfounded.

LIZ

Jesus Christ, is that--

PETER Yeah.

Liz starts CRYING.

PETER (CONT'D)

Look, I know this is fucked up, but it might make Dave happy if you were there when...

Liz's face floods with tears. She backs away from Peter in disbelief. She turns and walks away. Peter stands in the doorway, glassy-eyed.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Dr. Spitzer sits on the edge of Dave's bed where Dave is sitting up against the headboard. Peter stands at the front of the room.

Dr. Spitzer opens his black leather bag on the bed. Inside are TWO SYRINGES and TWO VIALS. Dr. Spitzer takes out the first syringe and vial.

DR. SPITZER

First, I'll give you this. It's basically a powerful sleep inducer. It'll put you into a deep, restful sleep...

Dr. Spitzer pulls out the other syringe and vial.

DR. SPITZER (CONT'D)

Then I'll administer this solution. It'll go directly to your heart, and... stop it. All in all, the process should be very quick, and painless.

Dave nods. He looks over to Peter. Peter has his arms crossed and he's struggling to maintain his composure, but he's about ready to fall apart.

DAVE

How long will it take for me to fall asleep.

DR. SPITZER Just a minute or two.

DAVE

Ok. Doctor, could you give us a minute?

Dr. Spitzer furrows, a little peeved. He gets up and steps out of the motel room.

DAVE (CONT'D) Peter, get over here.

Peter walks over, sits on the bed across from Dave. Dave sits up and faces Peter.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Look... when the Doctor comes back, I think you should leave.

Peter's eyes go wide.

PETER

What are you talking about?

DAVE

You're my best friend, Pete... And I needed you to be with every step of the way.

Dave starts to CRY.

DAVE (CONT'D) But not

now. This part I don't want you to see.

Peter's face cracks with tears. He can't hold back the sadness anymore.

PETER

What am I going to do after your gone, man?

DAVE

You're going to be fine. Talk to Liz. I know she's angry now, but that's just because she doesn't know what else to do.

Peter buries his face in his hands. Dave grabs him and pulls him up.

DAVE (CONT'D) Listen to

me... You are my best friend.

Peter looks at Dave. The two embrace each other fiercely, because it is the last time they will ever embrace.

Peter finally lets go of Dave. He stands up and wipes the tears from his face. He starts toward the door. Then STOPS. Peter looks back at Dave. Dave looks at him and NODS. Peter nods back and leaves the motel room.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Peter steps out of the room. Dr. Spitzer is waiting just outside the door. Peter motions for him to go in. Dr. Spitzer enters the hotel room.

Peter walks away from the room toward the staircase leading to the parking lot. As he nears the stairs, he sees:

LIZZY sitting on the top stair.

Peter approaches her. She looks up at him, sees the fresh tears.

Peter studies Lizzy, unsure of what to do. Lizzy stands up and walks over to him. He looks away, sheepishly. She grabs his hand. He jerks, almost instinctively, but she takes it delicately. He lets her.

Lizzy brings Peter's hand to her mouth and KISSES it.

LIZZY I'm
sorry.

Peter locks eyes with Lizzy. The same pain he feels is in her eyes as well. He breaks down all over again. She embraces him.

Peter grabs onto her and holds on for dear life.

FADE OUT:

THE END

Script Version 2

THE GOOD KILLING

By Alex Aaron

Draft 2

December 4, 2012

FADE IN:

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

A cheap-looking Sedan drives into the parking lot and pulls into a space. PETER TELLIS, 20s, a serious type, gets out from the driver's side door.

Peter walks over to the passenger seat. He opens the door, reaches in, and helps DAVE VINTON, 20s, get out of the car. Bone-white and gaunt, Dave feebly gets to his feet and latches onto Peter's shoulder.

Peter reaches back into the car, pulls out a BLACK DUFFEL BAG and slings it over his arm. Peter grabs hold of Dave and starts leading him toward the motel.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Peter guides Dave into the room. It's dark with only a few streaks of light coming from the curtained windows.

Peter moves with Dave to the interior of the room and lays Dave on one of the double beds. Dave sprawls out, but he looks anything but comfortable.

Peter walks back to the door and turns the lights on. It's your basic two bedroom. Quaint would be the polite term.

Peter walks back into the interior of the room and sits on the bed opposite Dave. He takes out his cellphone and dials.

PETER
(into cellphone)
Yeah... We're here. Room 238. When?
Ok. I said I'd get it.

Peter hangs up the phone, grimacing. He looks over to Dave.

DAVE
When did doctor K say?

PETER Twelve
o'clock.

DAVE
Noon, huh? That's a good time to kill
yourself.

Peter looks down, hiding his face from Dave.

INT. BATHROOM, MOTEL - NIGHT

The bathroom is littered with LIQUOR BOTTLES, SQUEEZED LIMES, and EMPTY BEER CANS.

Peter is perched atop the sink, while Dave is sitting on the toilet, his head in his hands. He looks positively wasted.

Dave looks up, inebriated and thoroughly defiant.

DAVE
Let's do another.

Peter groans. He's more than a little buzzed himself.

PETER
No. You've already drunk too much. You're liver is about to rebel.

DAVE
Good. The rest of my body has.

Dave holds out his shot glass, expectant.

PETER Ok.
One more.

Peter takes Dave's shot glass and sets near the sink next to his shot glass. Peter opens a bottle of WHISKEY and fills up the glasses. He hands Dave his glass back.

DAVE One...
two... THREE.

On Dave's count, Peter and Dave take their shot glasses and knock back the whiskey. They share a collective wince as it goes through their system at the same time.

Peter and Dave lean back, taking deep, tired breaths.

PETER
What did you tell, Liz?

DAVE
I told her you were taking me to your parents place in Marino. For the fresh air.

Peter considers this.

DAVE (CONT'D) You
remember me and Liz's
engagement party?

PETER

Which one? I recall that party having two very distinct acts.

DAVE The first one.

PETER
You mean when you, me, and Lizzy decided it would be a great idea to start drinking six hours before the party even started.

Peter and Dave laugh.

DAVE
The way you got drunk that night was one of the funniest things I've ever seen.

PETER
(coy)
I don't know what you're talking.

DAVE
I remember... We were all sitting around in that room that just had meditation mats on it because Lizzy wanted to be Zen Buddhist for a about a day. And we were talking... Then I looked at you, and you were completely quiet, and your eyes were focusing as hard as they could. And as your eyes kept focusing I knew that you were getting more and more fucked up and trying to keep it cool. Then, you politely stood up, walked over to the front door, and said to us, "I'm very sorry, but I have to throw up right now. When I get back, I'll give you my sincere opinions on whatever it is you just said." After that, you walked out and vomited six hours worth of booze onto our front porch.

Peter chuckles, slightly embarrassed.

DAVE (CONT'D) I had never seen so much purging in my life.

PETER
I remember. I went back into that room and didn't do or say anything for about an hour - it was probably the best meditation ever done in that room. And

you cleaned up the porch. Didn't make me do any of it.

DAVE

That's what you do for a friend when there in that kind of shape I guess.

Peter nods, lets Dave's words sink in.

PETER

Dave... You didn't tell Liz anything else, right?

DAVE

Of course not.

Dave looks down, his eyes filling with tears.

DAVE (CONT'D) I told her once... That this is what I wanted to do. I don't know if she thought I was serious or not, but I could she would never let that happen.

PETER

She's selfish, Dave--

DAVE No,

it's not!

Dave shoots a look at Peter that stops him in his tracks. Then:

Dave turns around and VOMITS into the toilet bowl. Peter steps away from the sink, ready to help.

Dave expels heaps of shallow, boozy vomit. He hangs his head over the toilet, breathless. Dave reaches to Peter, grabbing onto him. Peter leads him to the faucet where Dave furiously starts scooping water into his mouth.

Dave turns off the faucet and moves to leave the bathroom. Peter guides out him into the...

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

... and lets him fall onto the bed, ready to pass out.

Peter sits on the edge of the bed and runs his hands through his hair. Long day. He peers back into the BATHROOM and sees:

FLECKS OF VOMIT cover the toilet and some of the floor.

Peter gets back and walks back into the bathroom. He starts unspooling the roll of toilet paper next to the toilet.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

It's morning. Panels of bluish, early light shine though the windows. Peter and Dave are asleep in their separate beds. The room is messy but peaceful. Then:

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

Peter stirs, his eyes opening wearily. He looks over and sees Dave is awake too.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

DAVE Who is
that?

PETER
I don't know. The doctor's not supposed to
be here yet.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.) Dave!
Are you in there? Peter's face falls.

PETER
Jesus Christ! It's Liz! How does she
know we're here?

DAVE I
don't know.

Peter gets up, speedily puts on his clothes. He bends over the night table, collecting his thoughts. Amid the scattered liquor bottles Peter spots a CREDIT CARD. He picks it up and turns to Dave.

PETER
Did you pay for the room with your credit
card?

Dave looks away, guilty. Then -- KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

LIZ (O.S.)
I know you're in there. Don't make me
call the police.

Peter buries his face in his hands. This is a mess. He buttons his shirt and walks to the door. He opens it up to reveal

LIZZY ALLENWOOD, 20s

standing outside the hotel room, her arms folded in a posture that lets you know she's ready for battle.

PETER Liz?

Liz looks at Peter, her lips pursed.

LIZ Is
Dave here?

Liz charges past Peter into the hotel room.

Liz walks in, studying everything as she sees it. As she reaches the interior of the room, she sees Dave lying on the bed, hung over but very much alive. Her eyes start welling up with tears.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Dave... What the hell are you doing here? I thought you were going to a fucking camp or something?

PETER
What were you doing looking at his credit card statements--

LIZ
They're our credit card statements. I can look at them whenever I want, Peter! What is going on?

Dave looks Liz, at a loss for words.

PETER
What does it look like? We came here, we got drunk and that's it.

Liz looks to Dave for confirmation. He nods.

LIZ
You came here and got drunk? Dave, I can't begin to tell you how irresponsible that is considering your condition.

DAVE Really? Because I think, considering my actions, it makes a lot of sense.

LIZ What?

DAVE
Liz... I'm not getting better. It doesn't matter if I start mainlining

heroin. It's not going to make a difference.

LIZ
I don't want to hear that! You're talking like it's already over, but it's possible you can still get better--

PETER
Dave knows better than you what his condition is--
-

Liz snaps toward Peter, her eyes red with anger.

LIZ
You don't have any say in this, Peter!

PETER Does
Dave?

LIZ
What the hell is that supposed to mean?

Peter opens his mouth to respond, but before he can:

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

Liz looks to Peter and Dave.

LIZ (CONT'D) Who is
that?

Peter and Dave stare at her, tight-lipped.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!

Peter RUSHES to the door. He OPENS it, revealing:

A well-dressed man carrying a BLACK LEATHER BAG. This is DR. SPITZER.

DR. SPITZER Am I
early?

PETER
Just give me the stuff.

Spitzer furrows his brow. This isn't how he works.

Liz walks to the front door, scrutinizes Dr. Spitzer from over Peter's shoulder.

LIZ

Who are you, sir?

DR. SPITZER Excuse me?

LIZ

What are you doing here?

Dr. Spitzer looks to Peter, perplexed.

DR. SPITZER

What's going on, Mr. Tellis? Is this
some kind of a set-up?

LIZ

Why would this be a set-up? What does
that mean? What's in your bag.

Liz tries to pass Peter and reach Dr. Spitzer. Peter uses his
body to hold her at bay. He flashes to Spitzer.

PETER

Give me the stuff right now, or I call the
AMA!

Liz is taken aback when she hears this. Dr. Spitzer hands Peter
the BLACK LEATHER BAG and hurries off.

Peter SLAMS the door and retreats back into the hotel room. Liz
follows him.

LIZ

If you and Dave were just here to get
drunk then what was that?

Peter looks to Dave -- What do we say?

DAVE

Liz... It's drugs.

Liz stops in her tracks -- Drugs? She looks at Peter, confused.
Peter goes into the leather bag and pulls out a SYRINGE.

Liz sits on one of the hotel beds. Her eyes focus, processing
information.

LIZ

Peter, why did you say you would call the
AMA?

PETER

Why do you think? He's a doctor.

LIZ

You didn't pay him anything. Not one dime. You're telling me a doctor came here to give you drugs... Free?

Peter doesn't say anything. Liz stands up, confident.

LIZ (CONT'D)

If he's still here, I'm going to find out what is actually going on.

Liz walks out of the hotel room. As soon as the door closes, Peter hands Dave the bag and sits on the other bed.

DAVE What do

we do?

Peter buries his hands in his face. He has no idea.

DAVE (CONT'D)

If she finds out what I'm actually here to do... Then it's over. Look at her... She'll have me committed before she lets me out of her sight again.

PETER

I'm sorry, man. This has just gotten too fucked up.

DAVE

Maybe not. I could do it right now?

Peter's eyes shoot up. He can't be serious.

PETER

What are you talking about? The doctor's gone. You told me the doctor was supposed to do this.

DAVE

I can do it. I looked it up.

PETER

Jesus Christ. No. No. Not without a doctor.

Dave looks at Peter, his face hanging. Helpless. Then:

Liz storms back into the hotel room. She steps over to Peter and Dave. Her eyes are swelling with tears. Fighting tears.

LIZ

I just had a very interesting conversation with doctor Kevorkian.

DAVE
Liz, I'm sorry--

LIZ
Sorry? You were going to kill yourself, and
you told me you were FUCKING going camping!

DAVE
Look, I wanted this to be different. I
wanted you to help, but I knew you never
would.

LIZ
That's right. You knew I'd never allow
something like this to happen. And I
never will.

Liz bends down to Dave and takes his hand.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Honey... You're depressed. Ok? That's
the only reason you want to do this.
Come home and we can... I can help you.

Dave looks to Peter. He does need someone's help, but not Liz.

DAVE
(to Peter) Please.

Peter shakes his head. Dave starts crying. His chance is
slipping away. Peter wrings his hands through his hair. Can he
really do this. Then:

PETER GRABS LIZ AND DRAGS HER TOWARD THE BATHROOM.

Dave jumps to the black leather bag and starts emptying it out.

Peter pushes himself and Liz into the...

INT. BATHROOM, MOTEL - DAY

Peter shuts the door and LOCKS it. He tries to desperately to
hold Liz down, but she is writhing with manic intensity.

She BREAKS OUT OF HIS HOLD and SHOOTs FOR THE BATHROOM DOOR, but:

Peter GRABS HER HAIR, pulling her back. He wraps his arms around
her and CUPS ONE OF HIS HANDS OVER HER MOUTH to her muffle her
SCREAMS.

She squirms and fights but she can't get out. Finally, she gets
her mouth free and BITES PETER'S HAND.

Peter recoils in pain. Liz unlocks the bathroom door and rushes into the hotel room.

Peter goes to the faucet and runs water over his hand.

LIZ (O.S.)

No! Jesus Christ, no!

Liz HOWLS. The sound of tears mingled with screams and the essence of pure grief.

Peter sits down on the toilet, looking into the hotel room. No tears for him.

FADE OUT:

THE END

Script Version 3

THE GOOD KILLING

By Alex Aaron

Draft 6

February 11, 2013

2013, Alex Aaron

FADE IN:

OVER BLACK, we hear:

PETER (O.S.)
I'm just saying -- You're studying to be
a lawyer. Right? I mean... You do
realize how terrible of a decision it is
to get married, just statistically...

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

A shaky HAND-HELD CAMERA PERSPECTIVE. Someone is filming this -
-

The CAMERA FOCUSES on DAVE VINTON, 20s. Well-dressed.
Handsome. Special. Dave sits on the edge of his bed, a
sheepish grin on his face.

DAVE
I'm well aware of your thoughts on
marriage and Liz. Let's just
concentrate on the task at hand.

The CAMERA SWINGS around to reveal PETER TELLIS, 20s, slightly
unkempt, like his life. He is holding the camera and addressing
it head on:

PETER
That's fine but I want this on the
record -- I, Peter Tellis, will never
ever get married. My best friend, Dave
Vinton, is my witness.

Peter SPINS THE CAMERA back to Dave.

PETER (CONT'D) Dave, you're
my lawyer... Is there any way I can
notarize this video so I can that
statement official?

DAVE
No more jokes. I need to know if I can
count on you tonight? Me and Liz will
be back at eight, and you need to be
there with the camera--

VIDEO CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The CAMERA ZOOMS in on the FRONT DOOR. It OPENS, revealing:

Dave entering with LIZ ALLENWOOD, 20s, pretty but serious. Hard to impress. But not tonight. Liz stands, mouth agape at a huge BANNER reading, "LIZ, WILL YOU MARRY ME!"

Liz turns to Dave, speechless. They embrace each other and seem to have no intention of letting go. It's true love.

Peter CLOSES IN on Dave and Liz, invading their moment.

PETER

It's like I'm filming the beginning of a
really boring sex tape--

VIDEO CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dave and Liz lean against the counter, drinks in hand, their bodies still clinging to one another.

Peter SWIRLS THE CAMERA around them.

PETER

(singing)

This is how we do it!

Dave and Liz crack smiles and turn to Peter. Liz raises her hand to the camera, showing off --

AN ENGAGEMENT RING

LIZ

This is how we do it!

PETER

Come on, guys! Let's go out and
celebrate this properly. Get some shots
in our system.

LIZ

You do realize there are methods of
celebration that don't involve alcohol?

PETER

Good point. We should go to a strip
club too.

Liz turns to Dave, agog.

LIZ

You have anything to say about getting drunk and going to a strip club?

DAVE

In law school, they teach us not to take cases we can't win. So you're on your own.

PETER

Look, Liz -- The next time we're celebrating, we'll do something you enjoy. Like a Top Chef immunity challenge.

Dave stumbles back a little, his face turning white. He grabs a TOWEL from the night stand and COUGHS into it, his whole body convulsing into the rag. Liz and Peter are too busy to notice.

LIZ

Or maybe the next time we're celebrating, you'll have your own place.

DAVE Guys!

Liz and Peter stop in their tracks and turn to Dave. He's staring at the towel, eyes frozen with fear. Dave turns the rag over and shows them -- It's covered in BLOOD and MUCOUS.

LIZ

What happened

DAVE

I don't know. I've had some trouble breathing, but I didn't think it was serious--

Dave gulps as his eyes roll back into his head. Suddenly: DAVE

COLLAPSES

on the floor. He starts retching violently. Liz and Peter rush to his side.

CUT TO:

BLACK.

PETER (O.S.)

I don't get it. I thought this was all over with years ago. I mean... You were sick, but you got better.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Peter, Dave, and Liz sit across from each other at a table. They all look wired like no one has slept in days.

DAVE

It's cancer, Peter. It came back. It's a more aggressive tumor than I had the last time. And it's more advanced.

PETER

What exactly does advanced mean?

Dave leans back, his eyes turning serious.

DAVE

The doctor said that if I went through all the treatments, it would buy me about a year... Give or take a one percent chance that I might be able to recover.

Peter's eyes dart from Liz to Dave. This is real.

Liz tries to steel herself, but her eyes are already welling with tears.

PETER

Ok. So what do we do next?

LIZ

Obviously, we go through with the treatment plan and see where we are from there. We take it one step at a time.

Dave looks at Liz, unconvinced.

DAVE

I'm already in debt because of school. How am I going to afford treatment?

LIZ

I don't know... I'll borrow money from my parents. I'll work. We'll figure something out. But we're going to do something. I mean, is that even a question?

DAVE

I'm not asking you this to upset you, but even if you got the money what's the point? This treatment plan is not a solution, it's a delaying tactic. Ok? I'd be asking you to throw money away at a dead man--

LIZ
That's not true. I was in the room too,
and the doctor did not say for sure that
you were dying.

Dave looks away, exasperated.

DAVE One
percent.

LIZ
One percent is still something. It's
still a chance.

Peter leans forward, his eyes strained with confusion.

PETER
I don't understand. What is this, Dave?
What's going on?

Dave takes a moment as he studies Liz and Peter's faces.
Whatever he's about to say, he wants to make sure they're ready
for it.

DAVE
The last time I was sick, I asked people
about certain alternatives in case I
didn't recover. I was told about
someone I could contact, and he would
give you something. Supposedly, it's
very peaceful.

Peter and Liz stare back at Dave, frozen. Is he serious?

LIZ
You can't start thinking like that,
Dave.

(MORE)

LIZ (CONT'D)
We're not nearly at that point yet. You
haven't even really started showing
symptoms--

DAVE
I know and I don't want to get to that
point.

Peter takes a breath. He can't believe this is happening.

PETER
So what you're saying is you just want
to kill yourself?

DAVE

That's exactly what I'm saying. I don't want to do chemotherapy again. I don't want to do radiation again. I don't want a dozen surgeries that aren't going to do any good. Honestly, I just want end it on my terms. And I want you both to be there.

Liz stands up, ready to fight.

LIZ

This is what you wanted to talk about? Dave, one doctor said you had a one percent chance. One doctor! Maybe another one will say five percent, or even ten! We don't know. Can we at least find that out before we start considering any of this? Peter help me out here. You agree, right?

Peter perks up, unsure of how to respond.

PETER

If Dave wants a second opinion, then sure--

LIZ

If Dave wants one--

DAVE

No. We can not talk about anything else until we discuss THIS.

Dave POUNDS HIS HANDS on the table, struggling to be heard. He stands up and faces Liz.

DAVE (CONT'D) Not second opinions, not third opinions. We're having this conversation right now.

LIZ

Fine. Let's talk about it. Ok? Let's talk about the fact that what you're discussing is illegal... and incredibly dangerous.

Dave rolls his eyes in frustration.

LIZ (CONT'D) This man that you're talking about going to to help your end life... You have no idea who

he is. If he's a board certified physician who's doing this because of conscience, or if he's a cop waiting to bust someone for assisted suicide.

Dave crosses his arms. He's not budging.

DAVE

He's not a cop. I know people who have vouched for him.

LIZ

Do you? So you know for a fact that when you go to him, he's not just going to give you rat poison and watch you spend your last moments in horrible pain. Because he's a criminal.

DAVE

Jesus Christ--

LIZ

It doesn't have to be poison, Dave. He could just make a mistake. He could make a simple mistake, and you'll fighting for your life--

DAVE

I'm already fighting for my life, Liz!

Liz stops, shutters at Dave's words.

DAVE (CONT'D)

What are you saying could happen? That it might hurt? I know it could. Full body radiation hurts. Pumping chemicals into your blood to attack your body hurts. What makes one more preferable than the other?

Liz doesn't say anything. What can she say?

DAVE (CONT'D)

What makes one more preferable than the other, Liz?

Liz locks eyes with Dave. She's not giving up either.

LIZ

Because one of them still gives you a chance to live. Come on, Peter... You're supposed to be his best friend. Say SOMETHING.

Dave and Liz look to Peter waiting for him to respond. Peter shifts in his seat, nervous.

PETER

I don't know, Liz. He's the one who's going to have to go through this. Not us.

LIZ

That's poetic, Pete. That is fucking poetry. He's the one who's going to have to go through it. I didn't know that.

DAVE

Let's just leave him out of it, alright?

Liz puts her hands on the table and leans in close to Peter.

LIZ

You know, Peter... If you were telling Dave the truth, you'd say, "Please, don't do this. Because if do, I'm fucked. Completely fucked." And you know that's true.

Dave tries to interject, putting his hand on Liz's shoulder, but she SWATS it away.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Without Dave, you wouldn't have a place to say, you wouldn't have someone to bail you out of all your shit. You wouldn't have anyone! And that's all you have to say?

Liz is bearing down on Pete. Dave grabs her shoulder and pulls her away.

Peter looks up at Liz, a fire in his eyes for the first time.

PETER

You weren't here the last time Dave got sick. You don't know how hard it was. It nearly killed him. So he if wants to avoid all of that pain, what am I supposed to say?

Liz stands up next to Dave. All of their attention is focused on Peter.

PETER (CONT'D) Am I

supposed to say, "Don't do it,"

because... I don't know what I'm
going to do when he's gone.

Peter turns to Dave.

PETER (CONT'D) It's
Dave's choice, and it's as simple
as that.

Dave studies Peter. His words are sinking in. Liz sees this
and GRABS Dave's face, her hands cupping his cheeks.

LIZ
Dave... Do you love me?

DAVE
You know I do. I asked you to marry me
because I do. But that doesn't make
this a negotiation.

LIZ
I am never going to let anything happen
to you that you don't want.

Liz presses her body against Dave. Their faces are nearly
touching.

LIZ (CONT'D)
But you're not thinking correctly right
now. You're depressed.
(MORE)

LIZ (CONT'D)
Of course you don't want to deal with
any of this. You don't think you can.
That's why I'm here.

Liz begins SLIDING HER HAND down Dave's shirt.

DAVE
It's not about depression, Liz...

Liz's hand continues downward past Dave's belt buckle. It stops
-- She grabs hold of his CROTCH.

Dave flinches from the force, but it's not unpleasant.

DAVE (CONT'D) What are
you doing?

Liz caresses the bulge in Dave's pants.

LIZ

Changing your attitude.

Liz starts STROKING. Dave leans his head back. A rush of pleasure. He looks back at her, regaining his composure.

DAVE Stop.

Liz keeps stroking. Faster.

LIZ

It's ok. You just need a stress
release.

Dave runs his hands through his hair and looks at Liz. This has gone to far. He throws up his arms and pushes Liz away.

Liz stumbles back and looks at Dave, stunned.

DAVE

I told you -- This is not about
depression, or stress, or anything other
the fact that I'm dying. And I'd like
to exert some measure of control over
that while I can. Can't you understand
that, Liz? Even if you don't agree with
it, do you at least understand it?

Dave stares at Liz. Through Liz. Her eyes are filling with tears. She leans against the table, the weight of the world on her shoulders.

LIZ

I understand everything you just said.

Liz pulls a CELLPHONE from her pocket.

LIZ (CONT'D)

But what you don't understand is that
I'm fighting for you. Not against you.

Liz dials a number and she puts the phone to her ear. Dave and Peter study her, dumfounded.

PETER

Who are you calling, Liz.

Liz doesn't respond. She waits for a few moments. Then:

LIZ

Yes, can I speak to doctor Stewart? I
need to talk to him about his patient,
Dave Vinton.

Dave's eyes flash. He races toward Liz.

Dave reaches her and tries to SWIPE THE CELLPHONE, but she turns her back on him, guarding the phone with her body.

Dave grabs hold of Liz from behind and reaches over her shoulders for the phone -- HE CAN'T GET AT IT. He looks to Peter.

DAVE Here! Get
the phone!

Peter looks over the scene, hesitant.

DAVE (CONT'D) Now!

Peter jumps out of his seat and rushes over to Liz. She's keeping the phone at bay from Dave, but Peter comes at her from the front.

Peter tries to pry the cellphone from fingers, but she's holding on for dear life.

LIZ
(into cellphone)
Dr. Stewart, Dave wants to--

Dave COVERS LIZ'S MOUTH with his hands before she can continue.

Peter has both hands on the cellphone. In one swift motion, Peter RIPS THE PHONE away from Liz.

Dave releases Liz and she falls to the ground, sobbing. Dave and Peter stare at her. Frozen. They can't believe what they have just done.

Liz continues to wail, the tears coming out like Niagara Falls.

FADE OUT:

THE END

Script Version 4

THE GOOD KILLING

By Alex Aaron

Draft 10

March 3, 2013

2013, Alex Aaron

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A shaky HAND-HELD CAMERA PERSPECTIVE. Someone is filming this -
-

The CAMERA FOCUSES on DAVE VINTON, 20s. Well-dressed. Handsome. Special. Dave leans against the counter, drink in hand. He is locked in an embrace with --

LIZ ALLENWOOD, 20s

Liz is undeniably pretty, but there's a seriousness to her that makes her hard to like

But right now, Liz is happy. She holds Dave close and seems to have no intention of letting go. It's love.

The CAMERA SWINGS AROUND to reveal PETER TELLIS, 20s, slightly unkempt. Like his life. He is holding the camera and addressing it head-on.

PETER

It's like I'm filming the the beginning
of a really boring sex tape.

Peter turns the camera and CLOSES IN on Dave and Liz.

PETER (CONT'D)

(singing)

This is how we do it!

Dave and Liz crack smiles and turn to Peter. Liz raises her hand to the camera, showing off --

AN ENGAGEMENT RING

LIZ

This is how we do it!

PETER

Come on, guys! Let's go out and
celebrate this engagement properly.
Get some shots in our system.

LIZ

You do realize there are methods of
celebration that don't involve alcohol?

PETER

Good point. We should go to a strip club too.

Liz turns to Dave, agog.

LIZ

You have anything to say about getting drunk and going to a strip club?

DAVE

In law school, they teach us not to take cases we can't win. So you're on your own.

PETER

Look, Liz -- The next time we're celebrating, we'll do something you enjoy. Like a Top Chef immunity challenge.

Dave stumbles back a little, his face turning white. He grabs a TOWEL from the night stand and COUGHS into it, his whole body convulsing into the rag. Liz and Peter are too busy to notice.

LIZ

Or maybe the next time we're celebrating, you'll have your own place.

DAVE Guys!

Liz and Peter stop in their tracks and turn to Dave. He's staring at the towel, eyes frozen with fear. Dave turns the rag over and shows them -- It's covered in BLOOD and MUCOUS.

LIZ

What happened

DAVE

I don't know. I've had some trouble breathing, but I didn't think it was serious--

Dave gulps as his eyes roll back into his head. Suddenly:

DAVE COLLAPSES

on the floor. He starts retching violently. Liz and Peter rush to his side.

CUT TO:

MICROSCOPIC IMAGES

Of CANCER CELLS DEVOURING HEALTHY CELLS... Multiplying.

PETER (O.S.)

I don't get it. I thought this was all over with years ago. I mean... You were sick, but you got better.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Peter, Dave, and Liz sit across from each other at a table. They all look wired, like no one has slept in days.

DAVE

It's cancer, Peter. It came back. It's a more aggressive tumor than I had the last time. And it's more advanced.

PETER

What exactly does advanced mean?

Dave leans back, his eyes turning serious.

DAVE

The doctor said that if I went through all the treatments, it would buy me about a year... Give or take a one percent chance that I might be able to recover.

Peter's eyes dart from Liz to Dave. This is real.

Liz tries to steel herself, but her eyes are already welling with tears.

PETER

Ok. So what do we do next?

LIZ

Obviously, we go through with the treatment plan and see where we are from there. We take it one step at a time.

Dave looks at Liz, unconvinced.

DAVE

I'm already in debt because of school. How am I going to afford treatment?

LIZ

I don't know... I'll borrow money from my parents. I'll work. We'll figure something out. But we're going to do something. I mean, is that even a question?

DAVE

I'm not asking you this to upset you, but even if you got the money what's the point? This treatment plan is not a solution, it's a delaying tactic. Ok? I'd be asking you to throw money away at a dead man--

LIZ

That's not true. I was in the room too, and the doctor did not say for sure that you were dying.

Dave looks away, exasperated.

DAVE One

percent.

LIZ

One percent is still something. It's still a chance.

Peter leans forward, his eyes strained with confusion.

PETER

I don't understand. What is this, Dave? What's going on?

Dave takes a moment as he studies Liz and Peter's faces. Whatever he's about to say, he wants to make sure they're ready for it.

Dave reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small plastic bag. He puts it on the table for them to see --

The bag has TWO PILLS in it.

DAVE

The last time I was sick, I asked people about certain alternatives in case I didn't recover.

(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)

I was told there was someone you could contact, and he would give you

something. Supposedly, it's very peaceful. Well, I contacted him.

Peter and Liz stare back at Dave, frozen. Is he serious?

LIZ

We haven't even gotten a second opinion yet, and you're showing us this? You thought it was appropriate... To show us this?

DAVE

I'm not trying to upset you--

LIZ

What did you think was going to happen?

DAVE

This is something we need to discuss.

LIZ

Dave -- One doctor said you had a one percent. One doctor! Maybe another will say five percent, or even ten. Can we please figure that out before you decide to swallow a cyanide capsule?

DAVE

We can figure that out, but we need to talk about this now.

Liz stands up and starts toward the kitchen.

LIZ

Well, I'm not going to participate in this conversation. Not before you've had any medical treatment.

Liz marches out of the room. Dave leaps from his seat and goes after her. He follows her into the --

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Liz pulls a glass from the kitchen cabinet and fills it with water. She starts drinking.

DAVE

No. No Liz. We're not waiting on a second opinion, or a third opinion. We're going to have this conversation.

Liz puts the glass down.

LIZ

That's completely unproductive at this stage. You're not even showing symptoms.

Liz takes her glass of water and walks back to the living room.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Maybe at some point down the road we'll have this conversation. If the treatment's not working.

DAVE

I don't want to get to that point.

Liz turns to Dave. He's serious.

PETER

What are you saying? You just want to kill yourself?

DAVE

That's exactly what I'm saying.

Liz folds her arms, tries to maintain her composure.

DAVE (CONT'D) I don't want to do chemotherapy again. I don't want to do radiation again. I don't want a dozen surgeries that aren't going to do any good. Honestly, I just want end it on my terms. And I want you both to be there.

Liz walks up to Dave, puts her hands on his shoulders.

LIZ

You're not thinking clearly, right now. Just, give this some thought. You don't know anything about the man who gave you this. It could just be drugs, or poison... I mean, he's a criminal. Maybe that's how he gets off.

(MORE)

LIZ (CONT'D)

It could just be a poorly made pharmaceutical that crashes your system, and you spend your last moments in gut-wrenching pain. Fighting for you life--

DAVE

I'm already fighting for my life, Liz!

Liz stands up and joins Dave. She grabs his hands, trying to calm him down..

DAVE (CONT'D)

What are you saying could happen? That it might hurt? I know it could. Full body radiation hurts. Pumping chemicals into your blood to attack your body hurts. What makes one more preferable than the other?

Liz doesn't say anything. What can she say?

DAVE (CONT'D)

What makes one more preferable than the other, Liz?

Liz locks eyes with Dave. She's not giving up either.

LIZ

Because one of them still gives you a chance to live. Come on, Peter... You're supposed to be his best friend. Say SOMETHING.

Peter perks up, unsure of how to respond.

PETER

I agree with Liz.

Dave sighs. He has no allies in this room.

PETER (CONT'D)

We've been friends since we were kids. I just... I can't imagine... I don't know what I'll do if you're gone. And I'm sorry. I know it's just me asking you to do one more thing to help me that you shouldn't have to do to help me, like I always do. But come on, man?

Dave studies Peter. His words are sinking in. He approaches Peter.

DAVE

Peter, I love you man. You ARE my best friend.

Liz GRABS Dave's face, her hands cupping his cheeks.

LIZ
Dave... Do you love me?

DAVE
You know I do. I asked you to marry me
because I do. But that doesn't make
this a negotiation.

LIZ
I am never going to let anything happen
to you that you don't want.

Liz presses her body against Dave. Their faces are nearly touching.

LIZ (CONT'D)
But right now, you're depressed. I
understand that. Of course you don't
want to deal with any of this. You
don't think you can. That's why I'm
here. I'm going to help you. I'm
going to help you every day.

DAVE
It's not about depression, Liz--

LIZ
You're right, it's not about depression.
It's about hope. It's about fighting
even when logic tells you that's
pointless. You will never get well, if
you've already given up.

DAVE
I don't want to do it. I can't do it
anymore.

LIZ
Yes, you can. You're strong.
You're the strongest person I know.
And if anyone can beat this it's you.

DAVE No, I
can't.

LIZ
Why not? You did it before, Dave--

Dave throws up his arms and pushes Liz away.

DAVE
Because I'm tired of being strong! I'm
tired of putting a brave face for

everyone while my body wastes away and hair falls out! I can't do it! I don't have the will for that anymore.

LIZ

You're not the first person to be in this position, Dave. Doctors are wrong all the time.

DAVE

Don't you get it, Liz. I don't care! I can't do it again. You don't what it's like. You hurt every day. When you go to sleep you don't know if you're going to wake up. And this time, there's no light at the end of the tunnel. There's nothing.

Dave brings his hands to his face. The tears are flowing like Niagara Falls.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I'm scared. I'm so fucking scared. I'm so fucking scared. This is the only thing I can control. It's all I have. Can't you understand that, Liz.

Liz studies Dave, tears filling in her own eyes. She understands even if she won't admit it.

LIZ

I'm sorry, Dave. I love you. I can't let you do this.

Dave nods. That's it. He pulls his cellphone out of his pocket and puts it on the table in front of Liz.

DAVE

Ok. If you don't want me to do this. You're going to have to call the police.

Liz's eyes widen. Is he serious? She grabs the cellphone and dials 9-1-1. She puts the phone to her ear. A moment passes. Then:

911 OPERATOR This is 911.
Please state your emergency.

Liz keeps the phone to her ear but doesn't say anything. She looks at Dave. He's watching every move she makes.

911 OPERATOR (CONT'D) Hello?
State your emergency if you're on the
line.

Liz waits...

Waits...

CUT TO BLACK:

THE END

Shooting Script

QUALITY OF LIFE

by
Alex Aaron

DRAFT
March 11, 2013

Alex Aaron
4422 South Carrollton Avenue
New Orleans, LA, 70119 (225) 803-554

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A shaky HAND-HELD CAMERA PERSPECTIVE. Someone is filming this -
-

The CAMERA FOCUSES on DAVE VINTON, 20s. Well-dressed. Handsome. Special. Dave leans against the counter, drink in hand. He is locked in an embrace with --

LIZ ALLENWOOD, 20s

Liz is undeniably pretty, but there's a seriousness to her that makes her hard to like

But right now, Liz is happy. She holds Dave close and seems to have no intention of letting go. It's love.

The CAMERA SWINGS AROUND to reveal PETER TELLIS, 20s, slightly unkempt. Like his life. He is holding the camera and addressing it head-on.

PETER

It's like I'm filming the beginning of
a really boring sex tape.

Peter turns the camera and CLOSES IN on Dave and Liz.

PETER (CONT'D) So, did you

guys not have sex during the entire
time he was sick? Was that like a
motivational tool? Beat cancer -- Get
sex?

Dave and Liz turn to Peter. Liz looks about ready to kill him.

LATER

Dave CHUGS a beer down. Liz leans on his shoulder, watching him with concern.

DAVE

So, what are your plans now that you're in
remission.

Dave puts his arm around Liz and looks into the camera.

DAVE (CONT'D) Step one --

Pass the bar. Step two...

(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)

Me and Liz are going on a honeymoon for about five years. I'm thinking Hawaii, Everest, Africa...

PETER

Just every exotic temperature-scape you can think of?

LATER -- SERIES OF IMAGES

Dave, Liz, and Peter through the entire night. Drinking. Dancing. Living. The future is all possibility. Then:

DR. SPITZER (V.O.) Dave, we need to meet as soon as possible. It's about your most recent test results.

Dave and Liz cuddle on the couch. Nothing can disturb their world.

DAVE (V.O.) What about it?

DR. SPITZER (V.O.) This is a conversation we really should have in person.

Peter hands off the camera to Liz. He wraps Dave up in a bear hug.

DAVE (V.O.) If there's something you need to tell me, I want to know right now.

Dave plays with his CAT.

INSERT -- Dave bends his head over a toilet. VOMITING. Then BLOOD.

DR. SPITZER (V.O.) This is an aggressive tumor. And it's very advanced.

INSERT -- MICROSCOPIC IMAGES of CANCER CELLS devouring healthy cells. Multiplying.

DAVE (V.O.) Are you saying that I'm dying

DR. SPITZER (V.O.) I'm saying that we need to start you off

on a course of treatment
immediately.

Dave puts his head to Liz's. Closes his eyes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dave stands, facing Peter and Liz at a table. Death is written on his face.

LIZ
What exactly does more advanced mean?

DAVE
It means I could go through every possible treatment, and the best it would do is buy me a year. Give or take a one percent chance that a miracle happens and I recover.

Liz is about to say something, then stops. She realizes how serious this is.

Peter sits down across from Liz and Peter. Liz grabs Dave's hands, trembling.

LIZ
I don't care what any doctor says. From now on, everything we do is to get you well. And I promise you, we're going to do that.

Dave looks into Liz's eyes -- She believes every word she just said.

DAVE
That's just not... We have to acknowledge the reality facing us right now. And the reality is that treatment is not going to do any good--

LIZ
I'll take you to Lourdes and wash in holy water if I have to, but we will get you well--

DAVE
No, I won't Liz. I'm sorry, but that's truth. You are not going to cure me through sheer will. No one is. I'm dying. And I want to talk about options other than treatment.

LIZ

What's the option other than treatment?

Dave studies Liz's face. Whatever he's about to say, he wants to make sure she's ready for it.

DAVE

The last time I was sick, I asked people about certain alternatives in case I didn't get better.

LIZ

If you were interested in alternative treatments, why didn't you tell me? I would have done whatever I could.

DAVE

Not treatments.

Dave looks to Peter -- It's time. Peter gives a nod and reaches into his pocket. He pulls out:

A PLASTIC BAG with TWO PILLS inside.

Peter puts the bag on the table in front of Liz.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Supposedly, this a peaceful way.

Liz's stares at the bag, mouth agape. Speechless.

LIZ

What is this? A joke?

DAVE

No, it's an alternative.

LIZ

I'm sorry, but I'm not going to have this conversation before you've had ANY medical treatment whatsoever.

Liz stands up and marches out of the room.

Dave leaps from his chair and goes after her. He follows her into --

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Liz walks in and pulls a glass from the cabinet. She grabs a nearby VODKA BOTTLE and pours it into the glass.

Liz DOWNS the vodka. Straight.

Dave catches up to Liz. He sees her pouring more vodka into her glass and SNATCHES the bottle from her hands.

DAVE

You can't do that. You can't just decide that this is off the table. We're going to talk about it.

LIZ

Talk about what? You killing yourself? You're not even showing symptoms yet.

DAVE

I don't want to get to that point.

Liz stops, studies Dave's face.

LIZ You're

serious?

DAVE

I don't want to do chemotherapy again. I don't want to do radiation again. I don't want a dozen surgeries that aren't going to do any good. Honestly, I just want end it on my terms.

Liz takes a moment, gulping. She can't believe what she's just heard.

LIZ

You're in no position to make a decision like this yet.

DAVE

I'm the only one who's in a position to make this choice--

LIZ

I can't believe Peter got you those fucking pills!

DAVE

This doesn't have anything to do with him--

Liz STOMPS out of the kitchen. Dave hurries behind her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Liz walks in, her eyes red with anger. She makes her way to Peter. Dave enters behind her.

LIZ
What were you thinking?

Peter looks up, startled.

LIZ (CONT'D)
Your friend just he was dying and you thought it was a good idea to score drugs for him. So he could kill himself? Who are you? Why would do that?

PETER
He asked me to help him. And I did. What was I supposed to do.

LIZ
Say no! Don't enable his depression by buying cyanide capsules! Help him! That's what a friend would do. But you're a coward and you're a shitty friend--

Peter STANDS UP. Ready to fight.

PETER
I'm not a shitty friend. I'm his BEST friend. And I'm love him enough to do what he wants, even if that's hell to think about. He's the one who has to go through this. Not us!

LIZ
That is fucking poetic, Pete. I didn't know that. Remind me never to come to you for help when I'm depressed.

PETER
Dave didn't come to me because he was depressed. I know what depression is, Liz. What it looks like. My mother killed herself because of it.

Liz stops in her tracks, stunned.

PETER (CONT'D) SHE was depressed. I remember weeks when she wouldn't get out of bed for days. And she cried all the time. She couldn't talk she cried so much. One day, I found her in the kitchen, standing over the stove. The burners were red hot. And I looked at her hands -- She had been burning them on purpose. When she

saw, she opened up her arms. She just wanted to hug me. She wanted someone to help her deal with the pain. But I didn't. I ran to my room. She killed herself that night. That's depression.

Liz sighs. A part of her understands even if she won't admit it.

LIZ Get
out.

Dave steps up, gets in between Liz and Peter.

DAVE
Look, Peter... Can you just give us a minute?

Peter looks down, trying to hide tears. He NODS to Dave. He takes a moment to collect himself and then leaves.

Dave turns back to Liz.

DAVE (CONT'D) Can you
sit down?

Liz takes a moment, then sits. Dave sits across from her.

DAVE (CONT'D)
This isn't Peter's fault. He was just doing what I asked him to do. That's what you don't get. THIS is what I want. I'm sorry. It's... It's too much. I can't go through that pain again. I'm not strong enough.

Liz covers her face as tears begin to fill her eyes.

LIZ
We'll do it together. I know how you feel.

DAVE
No, you don't--

LIZ
When you hurt -- I hurt.

DAVE
It's not the same thing. I'm sorry-

LIZ

You don't think I felt something every time you were on the floor, puking your guts out, seeing your hair fall out.

DAVE
Liz, stop--

LIZ
This is our cancer--

DAVE NO,
IT'S NOT!

Dave SLAMS his hands against the table, furious. He tries to compose himself.

DAVE (CONT'D) I'm sorry, but it is not our cancer. It's not our pain. It's just not. I love you, Liz. But that doesn't make this a negotiation.

Liz starts crying. What else can she do?

DAVE (CONT'D)
I'm doing my best right now, Liz. You have no idea how hard this is.

LIZ
You're right I don't. Because If I were in your position... I would do anything I could to stay with the person I loved. Even if I had to put my body through of a year of hell, that would still be one year I had with you.

Liz buries her face in her hands. The tears are flowing like Niagara Falls. Dave watches her, crying just as hard.

LIZ (CONT'D) And I'm not saying that's what you're supposed to do. I'm just saying that's why it's hard.

Dave gets up and walks over to Liz. He puts his arms around her.

LIZ (CONT'D)
If you're gone Dave, I have nothing else. Nothing else. Nothing else. Fucking nothing.

DAVE

Liz, I love you more than anything. But this is something I have to do.

LIZ

I'm not saying you can't do it.
I'm not saying you shouldn't do it.
I'm just asking you not to do it. For me.
Please.

Dave looks Liz over. They're both on the brink.

DAVE

Liz... I can't. Not again. I'm sorry.

Liz looks at Dave -- This is painful for him, but he's nod budging. Dave tries to wipe the tears from Liz's face. This seems to calm her.

DAVE (CONT'D) Look -- I'm not going anywhere tonight. Ok. Before we do anything else, maybe I should get some Kleenex for us. What do you think?

The thinnest of smiles creeps over Liz's face. Maybe they're through the worst.

DAVE (CONT'D)

And maybe some drinks? What do you want?

LIZ Just

water.

DAVE

Ok. When I get back, we're going to talk about everything. Ok? I love you.

Liz nods. Dave stands and leaves for the kitchen.

Liz turns back toward the table. She runs her hands over her face, exasperated. She has no more fight left in her.

Liz stares off for a moment, vacant. She STOPS. Something has caught her eye. She looks down at the --

PLASTIC BAG with the pills.

DAVE (O.S.) (CONT'D) Do you want ice?

Liz reaches across the table and pulls the bag over.

DAVE (O.S.) (CONT'D) Liz?

LIZ Yeah.

Ice.

Liz opens the bag and drops the pills in her hands. She studies them. Then:

The SOUND of FOOTSTEPS from the kitchen. Dave is coming back.

LIZ SWALLOWS THE PILLS and puts the back in her pocket.

Dave walks up behind her and hands her a glass of water. She smiles and takes it. Dave sits across from her with his own drink.

Liz SIPS from the glass. GULPS.

CUT TO BLACK:

THE END

Appendix B: Reports



The University of New Orleans
 Film, Theater, and Communication Arts
 2000 Lakeshore Drive - PAC 307
 New Orleans, Louisiana 70148
 Office: 504-280-6317 - Fax: 504-280-6318

COURSE NAME AND NUMBER: <i>Thesis</i>	
PROD. #:	PRODUCTION TITLE: <i>THE GOOD KILLING</i>
PRODUCER: <i>Ben Matheny</i>	DIRECTOR: <i>Alex Aaron</i>

CAMERA DEPARTMENT SHOOTING LOG

DATE: March 16, 2013

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Mark Williams

CAMERA OPERATOR: --

FIRST ASSISTANT: Joel Salda

SECOND ASSISTANT:

SCENE	TAKE	LENS	STOP	SPEED	Filter	TIMECODE	REMARKS
<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; Cam Op noise in b.g.
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; Light on Ben too hot.
<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short; Boom shadow.
<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short; Boom shadow.
<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; Ben's make-up needs touch.
<i>1</i>	<i>6</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short; Audio problem.
<i>1</i>	<i>7</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; Audio recorder visible in b.g.
<i>1</i>	<i>8</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; CUTS OFF at very end.
<i>1</i>	<i>9</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; CUTS OFF at very end!!
<i>1</i>	<i>10</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short; Camera shadow.



The University of New Orleans
 Film, Theater, and Communication Arts
 2000 Lakeshore Drive - PAC 307
 New Orleans, Louisiana 70148
 Office: 504-280-6317 - Fax: 504-280-6318

COURSE NAME AND NUMBER: <i>Thesis</i>	
PROD. #:	PRODUCTION TITLE: <i>THE GOOD KILLING</i>
PRODUCER: <i>Ben Matheny</i>	DIRECTOR: <i>Alex Aaron</i>

CAMERA DEPARTMENT SHOOTING LOG

DATE: *March 17, 2013*

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: *Mark Williams*

CAMERA OPERATOR: *--*

FIRST ASSISTANT: *Joel Salda*

SECOND ASSISTANT:

SCENE	TAKE	LENS	STOP	SPEED	Filter	TIMECODE	REMARKS
<i>1</i>	<i>11</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short; Light on ben too hot, again!
<i>1</i>	<i>12</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; Could be tighter.
<i>1</i>	<i>13</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; Pretty good.
<i>1</i>	<i>14</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short; Rebecca ran into lens.
<i>1</i>	<i>15</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; Rebecca hit lens, barely...
<i>1</i>	<i>16</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take: Pretty good.
<i>1</i>	<i>17</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; Pretty good.
<i>1</i>	<i>18</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short; Cam Op shadow.
<i>1</i>	<i>19</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short: Cam Op shadow!!
<i>1</i>	<i>20</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; GOOD!!
<i>1</i>	<i>21</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Cut short; Cam Op shadow!!!
<i>1</i>	<i>22</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Full take; GOOD!!
<i>1A</i>	<i>1</i>		<i>2.8</i>				Insert; GOOD.



The University of New Orleans
 Film, Theater, and Communication Arts
 2000 Lakeshore Drive - PAC 307
 New Orleans, Louisiana 70148
 Office: 504-280-6317 - Fax: 504-280-6318

COURSE NAME AND NUMBER: <i>Thesis</i>	
PROD. #:	PRODUCTION TITLE: <i>THE GOOD KILLING</i>
PRODUCER: <i>Ben Matheny</i>	DIRECTOR: <i>Alex Aaron</i>

SOUND REPORT

DATE: <i>March 16, 2013</i>	SHEET NO: <i>1</i>
SOUND MIXER: <i>Jeff Bruno</i>	ROLL NO:
BOOM OPERATOR: <i>Travis Waguespack</i>	
LOCATION: <i>INT. DINING ROOM - DAY</i>	SAMPLING FREQUENCY:
TIME CODE: FR/S	HEAD TONE: dBm

SCENE #	TAKE	ID#	NOTES	SMPTE Start
<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	Okay.	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	Cars in b.g.	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	Cut short	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>1</i>	Cut short	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>1</i>	Cars in b.g.	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>1</i>	Cut short	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>1</i>	Pedestrians in b.g.??	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1</i>	Pretty good.	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>1</i>	Music from car in b.g??	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>10</i>		Cut short	: : :



The University of New Orleans
 Film, Theater, and Communication Arts
 2000 Lakeshore Drive - PAC 307
 New Orleans, Louisiana 70148
 Office: 504-280-6317 - Fax: 504-280-6318

COURSE NAME AND NUMBER: <i>Thesis</i>	
PROD. #:	PRODUCTION TITLE: <i>THE GOOD KILLING</i>
PRODUCER: <i>Ben Matheny</i>	DIRECTOR: <i>Alex Aaron</i>

SOUND REPORT

DATE: <i>March 17, 2013</i>	SHEET NO: 2
SOUND MIXER: <i>Jeff Bruno</i>	ROLL NO:
BOOM OPERATOR: <i>Travis Waguespack</i>	
LOCATION: <i>INT. DINING ROOM - DAY</i>	SAMPLING FREQUENCY:
TIME CODE: FR/S	HEAD TONE: dBm

SCENE #	TAKE	ID#	NOTES	SMPTE Start
<i>1</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>1</i>	Cut short	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>1</i>	Cars in bg	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1</i>	People talking outside house!	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>1</i>	Cut short	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>1</i>	Cars in bg	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>1</i>	Cars in bg, just barely	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>1</i>	Rustling on lav	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>1</i>	Cut short	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>1</i>	Cut short	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>1</i>	Good.	: : :
<i>1</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>1</i>	Cut short	: : :

<i>I</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>I</i>	Good.	: : :
<i>IA</i>	<i>A</i>	1	Good.	: : :

Appendix D: Thesis Prospectus

Thesis Prospectus
Alex Aaron

Table of Contents

I.	Basic Overview	pg. 1
II.	Scope and Purpose	pg. 1-2
III.	Initial Assessment	pg. 2-3
IV.	Conceptual Framework	pg. 3-4
	A. Screenwriting	
	B. Production Design	
	C. Directing	
	D. Cinematography	
	E. Editing	
	F. Sound Technology	
V.	Analysis	pg. 5
VI.	Treatment	pg. 5-6
	A. Protagonist	
	B. Antagonist	
	C. Additional Characters	
	D. Setting	
	E. Conflict	
	F. Throughline	
	G. Breakdown	
VII.	Timeline/Resources	pg. 6

I. Basic Overview

Tentative Title: **The Good Killing**

Genre: **Drama**

Length: **13 pages**

Characters: **4**

Logline: **Peter Tellis tries to help his cancer-ridden best friend, Dave, kill himself, but he must endure the objections of Dave's girlfriend, Liz.**

II. Scope and Purpose

As a graduate student at the University of New Orleans, I have attempted, with varying levels of success, to craft gritty, immediate dramas that often exhibit a level of political consciousness. This project follows in that vein but differs in important ways. To explain this, we first need to consider my last UNO effort: *Extremist*. *Extremist* followed a young man escorting his friend to an abortion clinic only to encounter a wildly radical pro-life protester. As he tries to help to his friend get an abortion, the situation escalates to a near violent climax. As a both a thematic and

stylistic exercise, *Extremist* is a mixed bag. It is filmed with a visceral, hand-held style that heightens the events, but the quality of the cinematography is suspect. In addition, the production design does not do enough to convince us that we are in an actual abortion clinic. Secondly, in terms of theme, the point is a bit muddled. Initially, I wanted to make a film that portrayed a clash of reason and extremism and the resulting ease with which extremism trumps reason. The second objective is largely successful, but the attempt to show a battle between reason and extremism falls short. Finally, I think *Extremist* lacks an element of personal connection. In short, we are presented world with few likable characters. I mention my experience with *Extremist* to demonstrate the ways I hope to improve as a storyteller.

Whereas conflict is the name of the game in *Extremist*, my first priority in *The Good Killing* is connection. I am trying to present complex characters committed to actions we may not agree with, but at least understand. This is intentional on my part, as I wanted to develop a story that had a much different emotional tone than what I've done in the past. In other words, in this story, as opposed to others I've done, characters are driven to do drastic things for people they love, rather than commit extreme acts against people they hate.

Secondly, with *The Good Killing*, I am deliberately trying to execute a non-traditional narrative. By that I mean that the conventional story rules are not rigidly applied—although in general, this is still a very forward-moving narrative. Specifically, this film will attempt to capture an experience. We follow our main character, Peter, doing a variety of things to help his friend prepare to kill himself. This includes eating chicken wings with him and getting drunk. There is not a normal goal-obstacle structure here.

III. *Initial Assessment*

In terms of my initial assessment, the first thing to consider is that, in all likelihood, I will not be able to contribute a large budget to this project. This problem is mitigated by a few factors. The action takes place in only a few, easily manageable locations—a motel room and the area outside a motel room—and there are only four actors. In addition, with such a small cast and, hopefully, a small number of shooting days, I may be able to find talented actors in the area that will work for free. If that is possible, it will provide substantial budgetary relief.

Mitigating factors aside, there are crucial questions about where what money this project has will go. The first thing that comes to mind is location. In this story, we are primarily inside a motel room, but how will that be accomplished from a production standpoint? Can an actual motel room be procured for a reasonable amount of money for the time that we need it, or must some kind of set be built?

Finally, in terms of crew, I intend to utilize a small but adept group. I believe a project like this can be executed with roughly ten crew members. To fill out this

crew, I will turn to fellow graduate colleagues and other filmmakers in the area that I have worked with and trust.

IV. Conceptual Framework

A. Screenwriting

As I have said, this story is not a mouse trap of narrative convention. That is not to say that the traditional guideposts of goal and conflict are not included. It could be said that our main character's goal is to comfort his friend as the moment of his suicide approaches. There is not a concrete antagonist, although the clearest obstacle to Peter's goal is Lizzy, a friend who does not want Peter to help Dave kill himself. Her antagonism is limited to an impassioned plea, but that is the kind of emotional context that is inherent in this story.

Embedded in the text of this script is the question of what one will do for a friend, and that, more than the construction of artificial conflict, is most paramount. However, there is conflict and rising stakes. The conflict between Lizzy and Peter is critical in heightening the emotion of the impending suicide. And finally, there is conflict at the end when Dave forces Peter to leave the room when it is time for him to kill himself.

B. Production Design

There are few locations in this project which makes the concept behind the production design all the more important. In particular, the presentation of the motel room is a major concern. Firstly, on a superficial level, the hotel room must appear cheap and basic: two double beds, a bathroom, a shitty television, etc. Secondly, on a subtextual level, this motel room must be able to fix audiences in the center of an emotionally compromised, morally ambiguous universe. This may be accomplished with starker, more aggressive color schemes in how we decorate the room, and assembling objects in the room in a manner that keeps the characters enclosed.

C. Directing

In this section, I will only address directing as it relates to the instruction of the actors (visual style will be addressed in cinematography). Although how one instructs an actor is largely contingent on that actor's training, I will in general utilize a directing style that attempts to convey emotion through actions. In other words, instead of telling actors how to feel, we will collaborate on the actions result in communicating such a feeling. In addition, I will try to assist the actors by providing in-depth explanations for the characters' objectives and the larger through-line of the project. Finally, while shooting, I will implement a system in which I administer directions to the actors privately on set.

Secondly, as director I must consider how to engender an off-screen connection between the actors that can translate on-screen, particularly for the characters of Peter, Dave, and Lizzy, who are supposed to be best friends. In order to achieve this, I will encourage free-ranging improvisations of scenes between these characters that do not appear in the movie, but rather establish a narrative to their friendship.

D. Cinematography

For this project, I will utilize a hand-held visual style to reflect the morally unsettled nature of the universe these characters inhabit. In addition, I believe such a style would appropriately heighten the immediacy and emotional tone of the story.

The use of light will play a key role in adding shape to the emotionally wrought, morally conflicted landscape of the story. This will come into play primarily how the motel room is lit. In this case, there should always be little to no actual sunlight coming through the curtained windows, as that would hint at a more and expansive world. Secondly, the lighting of the motel room should come from dim, individual sources throughout the room, creating pockets of shadows that underlie the darkness of the narrative.

E. Editing

This is not a conventionally structured narrative, and, therefore, it may not be conventionally edited. Specifically, takes will often be allowed to play out in long masters that focus all the attention on the actors' performances. In addition, brief, impressionistic flashbacks may be spliced in, almost subliminally, to provide an insight into the character's world before they came to this motel.

F. Sound

This story is attempting to take audiences, step-by-step, through an unconventional journey: Peter takes his friend to a motel room and spends some time with him before he kills himself and then leaves, devastated. The use of score must be subtle, but evocative, something like Labradford's delicate, guitar-driven post-rock, or Low-style slowcore. Also, these uses of score must be sparing, maybe even only during the most emotional moments, to intensify their effect on the audience.

G. Technology

I intend to use the Canon 7D to film this project. It is a versatile device that will accomplish the visual goals I have set forth and I know a number of cinematographers who are must comfortable using this camera.

V. *Analysis*

As I have said earlier in this document, I intend to take audiences on an emotional journey, in which they are forced to ask themselves, “How far would you go for a friend?” The use of a hand-held camera and longer takes will be two-fold: 1) first, so the audience can become lost in something that feels like a real life experience; 2) and secondly, when the emotional climax arrives, this style will create a hyper-realized environment that will intensify the emotion.

VI. *Treatment*

A. *Protagonist*

The protagonist of this story is Peter Tellis, 20s. A computer technician by trade, Peter has never really lived up to his potential. He may have once dreamed of being a video game designer, but dreams like those have been dragged down by a battle with depression.

Peter’s best friend is Dave Vinton, who has always comforted Peter when he was at his most depressed. Now, Peter is determined to help Dave in any way he can. Peter’s other friend is Liz, whom Peter has never really been able to tell he loves.

Peter’s goal in this story is to comfort his friend Dave as he waits to kill himself. He does that by buying Dave his favorite meal—chicken wings—and getting drunk with him the night before the suicide.

B. *Antagonist*

The antagonist of this story is Liz Allenwood, 20s, a law student. Together, Liz, Peter, and Dave were best friends before Dave became sick. When Liz became aware of Dave’s plans to “die with dignity” she cut off contact with Dave and Peter. She would never do something as drastic as call the police to stop Dave’s suicide, but she doesn’t want Dave to go through with it.

Liz takes out her anger on Peter, who all along has been Dave’s willing accomplice. As a law student, she tries to ground understanding of the morality of this event in the laws of man, but even that argument is entirely convincing to her.

C. *Additional Characters*

1. **Dave Vinton:** A 20-something lawyer, Dave had seemingly limitless potential before he was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Now, his body is deteriorating and he’s made the decision to end his life on his own terms. Unlike his friend, Peter, Dave has always been the happy one, the successful, and the glue of

any relationship he's had. He's stood by his friend through intense bouts of depression and now he relies on Peter to help him through his suicide.

2. **Dr. Spitzer:** The doctor that Dave secretly goes to "die with dignity".

D. Setting

A cheap motel.

E. Conflict

Peter must stand his ground against Liz, who wants him to stop Dave from killing himself, and he must accept Dave's decision to die alone.

F. Throughline

How one helps you deal with pain reveals if they are truly a friend.

G. Breakdown

Act I

1. Hand-held camera scene. Peter collapses.
2. Peter and Dave arrive at the motel.
3. Peter and Dave enter the motel room. Peter calls the doctor and arranges for him to meet them at noon the next day.

Act II

4. Peter and Dave get drunk together. Dave vomits and then passes out.
5. Liz visits Dave at the motel.
6. Liz begs Peter to stop Dave from killing himself. Peter refuses.

Act III

7. Dr. Spitzer explains how he's going to end Dave's life. Dave asks Peter to leave when Dr. Spitzer begins the process. Dave and Peter say their goodbyes.
8. Peter walks out of the motel room and finds Liz waiting on the staircase. They embrace.

VII. Timeline/Resources

I intend to shoot at this beginning of the 2013 Spring Semester and anticipate no more than two separate weekends to complete. From there, I hope to have a finished product ready by May for my thesis defense.

I don't anticipate this film requiring special equipment or the grip truck for that matter.

Vita

Born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Alex Aaron received his Bachelor's in Film Production from the University of New Orleans in 2010. In the same year, Alex was accepted into the University of New Orleans's Graduate Film Program where he has pursued a Masters of Fine Arts in Film Production.