

RESERVATION ROAD

By

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Based on the novel by

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TITLES ROLL ON A BLACK SCREEN...

The sound of HUMMING...a boy's.

Fade in on...

EXT. TANGLEWOOD - DAY

Late afternoon on a beautiful summer's day in the Berkshires.

Close on JOSH LEARNER, 10, thin with dark curly hair. Humming. He's surprisingly good, musical -- it's the theme from the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
It's Schiller's "Ode to Joy."

Josh stops humming. He looks across a lush field filled with picnicking families, to a stage under a yellow tent: an orchestra and full chorus are tuning up.

The boy and his father sit on a blanket, surrounded by the remnants of a picnic.

ETHAN LEARNER, 38, could be an adult carbon-copy of his son - dark, handsome, thoughtful. An English professor, with wire-rimmed glasses. Watching his son with a hungry, loving curiosity.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
That part you're humming. When they get to the last movement and the chorus comes in - Beethoven set it to the words from Schiller's "Ode to Joy."

Josh watches a violinist in the front row practice the same notes he was just humming.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
One day that'll be you up there.

Josh reaches into his pocket and pulls out a pointed, putty-colored stone. Starts to rub it, never taking his eyes off the stage.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
What's that you got there?

JOSH
Arrowhead.

ETHAN
Can I see it?

Josh holds out his hand and Ethan takes the ARROWHEAD.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Nice one. Where'd you get it?

JOSH
Found it.

ETHAN
You should take it into science
class when school starts.

JOSH
Can I have it back now?

ETHAN
(secretly hurt)
Sure.

He hands the arrowhead back. Josh starts rubbing it again,
already turned to the stage.

Ethan looks away:

Nearby, a lovely woman and her pretty blond daughter approach
the Learner's blanket - GRACE LEARNER, 35, and EMMA, 8.

Relieved to have company, Ethan calls out to them.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Anything interesting?

Sitting down:

EMMA
This really fat lady.

GRACE
Emma.

EMMA
She was.

JOSH
Shhh! It's starting.

Quiet, a couple of coughs. They all turn to the stage - all
except Ethan, who keeps looking at his son out of the corner
of his eye, loving him helplessly.

The conductor taps the air with his baton... Then the
explosion of the first bars of MUSIC.

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony fills the air.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FENWAY PARK - SAME TIME

The MUSIC overwhelmed by the growing, pulsing ROAR of 30,000 fans.

It's not just another baseball game - it's Red Sox-Yankees. Fenway's a madhouse. The scoreboard shows the game tied 4-4 in the top of the 10th.

Close in on a man and boy sitting in box seats on the third base line. The boy is SAM ARNO, 10, standing with his chin just above the railing and his hands clenched into fists, YELLING himself hoarse.

SAM

Come on, Pedro! Strike him out!
Strike him out!

Pedro Martinez winds up and throws a blazing fastball right past a flailing Bernie Williams. The crowd erupts. Pedro pumps his fist and starts jogging toward the dugout.

SAM (CONT'D)

Yeah! Dad, didya see that? Didya,
Dad? Pedro struck him out! He
struck him out!

DWIGHT ARNO, 40, broad-shouldered with a palpable, brooding presence, is looking at his watch. He gives his son a smile.

DWIGHT

I saw it, Sam. What a game. That
guy can flat out pitch.

SAM

Now we can win it with a home run.

Dwight shifts uneasily in his seat.

DWIGHT

All I know is somebody better win
it. I'm gonna get you back two
hours late like it is.

SAM

Yeah, but Dad, this is one of the
best games ever, right?

Dwight's smile is full of love but also resigned: he knows he's already in a heap of trouble. And trouble, for Dwight, is nothing new. He ruffles Sam's hair.

DWIGHT

Yeah, Sam. Yeah, it is.

EXT. TANGLEWOOD - DUSK

The sound of choral SINGING, symphonic MUSIC. The final movement.

From OVERHEAD: the sun just beginning to dip behind the trees. The green field covered with blankets, sloping down to a golden yellow tent. Just one person STANDING, a boy.

It's Josh.

CLOSE on Ethan, listening to the music while secretly watching his son.

CLOSE on Josh, his eyes closed. Listening and HUMMING under his breath. The music like an inner voice. The sun sets directly behind him, giving him a fiery halo, making him radiant.

EXT. - FENWAY PARK - SAME TIME

In the middle of the screaming, cheering crowd, Dwight stares glumly at the scoreboard. He's fucked. The game is still tied, now in the bottom of the 12TH inning.

Sam is still standing, too excited to sit down.

SAM

First and second, Dad!

Big, burly David Ortiz, Boston's clean-up hitter, strolls to the plate.

SAM (CONT'D)

And Papi's comin' up. Maybe he'll hit one out!

But Dwight, with his own spotty track record, has long since stopped believing in fairy-tale endings.

DWIGHT

That'd be great, Sam.

The pitch... CRACK of the bat... The crowd rises as one to its feet... And the ball DISAPPEARS over the huge green wall in left field.

Even Dwight jumps to his feet CHEERING, problems forgotten. He picks up his laughing, yelling son and places him on his shoulders as if he were still five years old.

EXT. TANGLEWOOD - DUSK

The last bars of MUSIC. Chorus and orchestra finish as one. Huge applause, shouts of "Bravo!" throughout the audience.

Ethan looks over at Josh, who's clapping wildly. Josh looks at him and beams. Ethan beams back. They clap and cheer together.

	JOSH	ETHAN
Bravo!		Bravo!

INT. DWIGHT'S CAR - DUSK

Dwight drives. Sam SLEEPS, his right cheek pressed up against the door. The last of the sun angles low through Sam's window, lighting his hair.

Dwight's gaze lingers on a faint SCAR that runs the length of the left side of Sam's jaw, faded to a thin white line.

Not the first time he's seen it, but it hurts the same every time. He looks away. Now the sky is almost dark. He switches on the headlights.

Only one beam comes on.

DWIGHT
(under his breath)
Damn.

He checks the dashboard clock: 8:10.

And gives the car more gas.

EXT. MASS PIKE TOLLBOOTH - NIGHT

Dwight's dark blue 1999 FORD EXPLORER with just the LEFT headlight working pulls up to a tollbooth.

EXT. ROUTE 7 - NIGHT

An old VOLVO station wagon passes a small SIGN marking the Connecticut state line.

We hear Josh softly HUMMING Beethoven in the backseat.

Ahead, there's an even smaller SIGN for RESERVATION ROAD.

The Volvo slows, signals left and turns onto Reservation Road.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The road narrow and unlit, flanked by woods. The sky above like an enormous bruise. A faint, strange BUZZING in the air, rising in pitch until it drowns out all other sounds:

Headlights illuminate a swirling cloud over the dark road. The Volvo punches through it.

INT. VOLVO - CONTINUOUS

The windshield is suddenly splattered with dead insects.

ETHAN
What the...?

GRACE
What was that?

In the backseat Josh leans forward excitedly.

JOSH
Bugs. A swarm.

Ethan switches on the wipers, but they only streak the windshield. He tries for wiper fluid, but there isn't any.

ETHAN
Goddamnit.

EMMA
Don't curse, Dad.

JOSH
Damn isn't a curse.

ETHAN
Thanks, Josh.

Ethan tries to find Josh in the rearview mirror, but it's angled up for nighttime driving and all he sees is smoky blackness.

Nobody speaks. The dashboard clock reads 8:25.

EMMA
I have to pee.

GRACE
(turning around)
We're almost home.

EMMA
I can't hold it.

Grace sighs.

GRACE
(to Ethan)
There's that little gas station up
ahead, isn't there?

EXT. ROUTE 7 - SAME TIME

A single headlight BEAM tracks the otherwise dark road.

INT. FORD EXPLORER - CONTINUOUS

In the gloom of the car, Dwight takes a drag on a cigarette.
He rolls down his window and blows the smoke out.

He checks on SAM: still asleep, with his cheek pressed up
against the door.

He checks the dashboard clock: 8:40

DWIGHT
(under his breath)
Fuck.

The headlight beam passes quickly over the SIGN marking the
Connecticut state line.

Then: up ahead, in the lone beam of light, we see the small
green SIGN for RESERVATION ROAD.

On an impulse, Dwight takes the turn. Tires SQUEAL lightly.

He checks on Sam again: still sleeping.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The road narrow and dark, running through woods.

Dwight gives the car more gas.

EXT. TOD'S GAS AND AUTO BODY - SAME TIME

A decrepit, poorly lit GAS STATION sitting in a break in the
woods on the far side of a deep curve. The red neon sign is
down to three working letters.

A wrecked car lies among the weeds to one side. Out front are two old-fashioned gas pumps.

The Volvo pulls in and STOPS.

EXT. TOD'S GAS STATION - A MINUTE LATER

The Volvo empty, all four doors open. Ethan wipes the windshield with a dry rag, just streaking the glass more.

Behind him, the sound of little BELLS. He turns to look.

Emma and Grace enter the OFFICE. A young STATION ATTENDANT hands over a key to the bathroom, and Grace leads Emma out, the bells trilling again. They walk around the side of the building and disappear into the shadows.

JOSH

Dad?

Ethan turns and sees Josh standing by the side of the dark road. Wearing a navy windbreaker, unfaded jeans, and black sneakers, he's hard to see.

ETHAN

Move away from the road, Josh.

Josh stuffs his hands in his pockets.

JOSH

I'm not a baby.

Ethan softens his tone.

ETHAN

We're out of wiper fluid. How about we go see if they have any?

Josh shakes his head. Ethan hesitates, checking up and down the road. All's quiet except for the CRICKETS.

He won't risk hurting Josh's feelings a second time.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Okay... Hold the fort till I get back.

He walks toward the lighted office.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - SAME TIME

Dwight's car with the single headlight SPEEDS through the darkness. The orange tip of his cigarette GLOWS behind the windshield.

INT. TOD'S GAS STATION - SAME TIME

Ethan looks out the office window:

JOSH has moved away from the road, is standing now by the Volvo, rubbing the bug-covered windshield with his sleeve.

Ethan smiles to himself, as the station attendant returns with a jug of wiper fluid.

EXT. TOD'S GAS STATION - SAME TIME

We see Josh stop rubbing the windshield and look toward the road.

Behind him, in the lighted office, ETHAN is pulling out his wallet.

Now, starting softly, we hear the MUSIC from the concert, the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth with full CHORUS...

INT. FORD EXPLORER - SAME TIME

The CHORUS continues...

Dwight's faintly sweaty face silhouetted behind the orange tip of his lit cigarette.

He checks the dashboard clock again: 8:47.

And gives the car more gas.

INT. TOD'S GAS STATION - SAME TIME

Ethan slips his change back into his wallet, picks up the jug of wiper fluid.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - SAME TIME

Dark as shadow. The CHORUS continues, growing louder - this is where it's coming from.

Pull back to reveal Josh's black sneakered feet on the edge of the road...

His face, pale and luminous, almost glowing, eyes closed: the SINGING inside him, like God speaking to his angels. The sound everywhere, filling us as it fills him.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - SAME TIME

The CHORUS as Dwight's car comes barrelling around a dark, tree-packed turn, SHIMMYING across the yellow line.

INT. FORD EXPLORER - CONTINUOUS

Dwight cuts the wheel hard to the right. The front tires are already on the near shoulder of the next turn when he jerks the wheel sharply to the left. He cuts the wheel again and the car STRAIGHTENS.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - SAME TIME

Josh by the road, eyes closed, the CHORUS rising to a sublime crescendo...

CUT TO:

EXT. TOD'S GAS STATION - SAME TIME

Little BELLS break through the chorus: Ethan leaves the office carrying the jug of wiper fluid.

CUT TO:

INT. FORD EXPLORER - SAME TIME

Dwight just getting the car under control as he comes out of the second turn. Thinks he's made it - when suddenly the woods open and the gas station appears on the right.

In front of the brightly lit office stands a dark-haired MAN with wire-rimmed glasses. For a surreal moment, the two men look at each other.

EXT. TOD'S GAS STATION - SAME TIME

Ethan stares at the car that has appeared out of nowhere: the driver's shadowed face, glowing orange tip of cigarette.

Then he follows the single BEAM of headlight and sees...

INT. FORD EXPLORER - SAME TIME

And now Dwight sees the boy too, right in front.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - SAME TIME

Josh in the road, eyes closed, the CHORUS otherworldly in his head.

Behind him, Ethan. RUNNING now. SCREAMING. The jug of wiper fluid falls to the ground.

ETHAN

JOSH!!

Abruptly the music CUTS out. Josh's head jerks up. His eyes snap open and now he sees the LIGHT coming at him. His eyes grow wide and his mouth drops open.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

NO!!

INT. FORD EXPLORER - SAME TIME

The car strikes the boy in the chest. A sound like ice CRACKING. The body flies into the darkness.

The car shudders from impact and Dwight's foot comes off the gas.

DWIGHT

Oh Jesus. Oh Jesus.

The car SLOWS sharply, coasting. In the mirror Dwight sees the dark-haired man sprinting up the road after him, his face contorted in anguish.

Dwight's foot starts for the brake - but never gets there.

Suddenly SAM is awake and in pain, holding the side of his face that was against the door.

SAM

Ow! It hurts! It hurts!

Dwight panics, reaching for his son.

DWIGHT

Sam!

Sam cries out again. And we see Dwight make the decision: He hits the gas instead of the brake, and the car ACCELERATES.

In the mirror: the dark-haired man veers off the road and drops to his knees in the tall grass. Where his son lies dead.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The car picks up speed. Then it's gone from the clearing, swallowed up by the trees.

CUT TO BLACK

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - LATER

Sounds first: CRICKETS; RADIO squawk and static.

RADIO VOICE (O.S.)
Anything?

RADIO VOICE (O.S.)
Negative.

An ambulance's warping red light plays over the dark road in front of Tod's gas station.

Grace visible in the backseat of a police car, face tear-stained, lifeless. Emma curled on her lap like a baby.

The car, with a YOUNG STATE TROOPER driving, pulls out.

Ethan watches them go. He looks dead, crushed.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Sir?

SERGEANT KEN BURKE, 40-ish, square-jawed and clean-cut, stands with hat in hand.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)
I'm afraid I need to ask you some questions about what occurred here.

Ethan just stares at him. Underwater. Behind Burke, another TROOPER can be seen questioning the station attendant, who is shaking his head.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)
Let's start with you telling me exactly what you saw.

The sound of a large plastic bag being ZIPPED distracts Ethan.

Two PARAMEDICS zip Josh's body - already sealed in a white plastic bag - into a red plastic bag. They lift the red bag onto a stretcher and cover it with a sheet. They lift the stretcher into the back of the ambulance and close the doors.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)
Mr. Learner...

ETHAN
Excuse me.

He walks to the edge of the asphalt and vomits. Wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

ETHAN

Sorry.

SERGEANT BURKE

This is hard.

ETHAN

Yes.

(beat)

Josh was - he was by the road. I was inside.

Burke pulls a notebook and pen from his back pocket.

SERGEANT BURKE

Can you tell what time this would've been?

ETHAN

Time? I don't - it must have been close to nine. Maybe a quarter to.

SERGEANT BURKE

Did you see your son while you were inside the office?

A moment as the full realization hits Ethan. He leans on a gas pump to steady himself.

ETHAN

I stopped watching him.

SERGEANT BURKE

The vehicle came from the left?

Ethan manages a nod.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)

Could you describe it for me?

ETHAN

There was a man driving.

SERGEANT BURKE

Anyone with him?

ETHAN

No. He - he turned and looked at me. He looked right at me before he...

He can't finish. The ambulance pulls out. Ethan watches it go.

SERGEANT BURKE
Could you describe the driver?

Ethan: frozen by his own uncertainty.

ETHAN
He was... smoking.

Burke waits for more.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Oh Christ...

SERGEANT BURKE
Let's go back to the vehicle. Any details you can remember?

ETHAN
Let me think... One of the headlights was broken.

SERGEANT BURKE
Which side?

ETHAN
Left - no. Right.

Burke studies him.

SERGEANT BURKE
The right headlight was broken?

ETHAN
Yes.

A moment. Burke writes this down.

SERGEANT BURKE
Okay. Type of vehicle.

ETHAN
Truck... SUV.

SERGEANT BURKE
Make?

ETHAN
I don't know much about cars.

SERGEANT BURKE
Four-door or two-door?

ETHAN
It was dark... Four doors. It was
a four-door.

Burke studies him.

SERGEANT BURKE
Color?

ETHAN
Dark.

SERGEANT BURKE
Could you be more specific?

ETHAN
It could've been black. Or dark
blue, dark green. Christ, I don't
know. It was going fast...
(beat)
I don't know. I don't know.

SERGEANT BURKE
Okay, let's move on. License
plate?

Ethan shakes his head helplessly.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)
Any other distinguishing marks on
the vehicle you might've noticed -
bumper stickers, decals?

ETHAN
No. I don't know.

A long silence.

Burke's disappointment is starting to show. He slips the
notebook into his back pocket and clips the pen to his shirt.

SERGEANT BURKE
Anything else you can tell me, Mr.
Learner?

But Ethan's no longer listening. Lost in the nightmare of
his own helplessness.

The light in the office goes out. Interview over.

SERGEANT BURKE

My partner and I will take you home
now. We can talk some more in the
A.M.

Ethan remains motionless, staring blindly up the road.

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE - SAME TIME

A two-story house with a front porch, more suburban than
country. A couple of lights on inside.

The Explorer turns into the driveway and stops with the
single headlight beam shining over the porch.

INT. FORD EXPLORER - CONTINUOUS

Dwight sits motionless, hands on the wheel, staring out at
the headlight beam. Sam next to him, his right eye SWOLLEN
and discolored.

Dwight takes a breath, tries to ready himself.

DWIGHT

Sam?

Sam looks at him.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)

We hit something back there on the
road. You know what we hit?

No answer.

DWIGHT

Do you?

SAM

No.

Dwight breathes out. Bittersweet relief.

DWIGHT

We hit a dog.

Sam takes this in. We see him believe it.

SAM

Was it big?

DWIGHT

Yeah.

SAM
Did we kill it?

DWIGHT
I'm afraid so.

SAM
How d'you know if we didn't stop?

DWIGHT
I know.

SAM
It could still be alive.

DWIGHT
No, Sam. I'm telling you. I saw
it happen. You were asleep.

SAM
But...

DWIGHT
Believe me, Sam. Okay?

SAM
I believe you, Dad.

Dwight looks numb. He switches off the headlight.

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE - SAME TIME

The porch light clicks on. The front door opens and a pretty WOMAN in a gingham dress hurries out, flashlight in hand. The beam dragging over the ground like a rogue spotlight.

RUTH WHELDON, 35, Dwight's ex.

RUTH
(over her shoulder)
Norris!

NORRIS WHELDON, 42, a lanky madras-wearing insurance salesman, comes out of the house, hurrying after his wife. No question who wears the pants in this family, and it isn't Norris. He's in every way the opposite of Dwight.

INT. FORD EXPLORER - SAME TIME

Sam's door is yanked open from outside.

Ruth shines the flashlight beam into Dwight's face while reaching for Sam.

RUTH
Baby, come here.

SAM
Hey, Mom.

DWIGHT
Ruth, how about getting that light
out of my eyes?

RUTH
He'd better be okay. If he
isn't...

DWIGHT
Ruth, turn that light off.

Ruth pulls Sam out of the car. Dwight gets out on his side.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
Norris.

NORRIS
Hey there, Dwight.

DWIGHT
Sorry we're late. The game went
twelve innings.

NORRIS
Twelve? No kidding. Who won?

DWIGHT
Sox. Papi hit a walk-off to win
it.

Norris WHISTLES softly.

RUTH
Norris, go call the police.

Ruth has the light trained on Sam's black eye.

DWIGHT
Hold on a second there, Norris.

RUTH
You take my son to a ballgame and
bring him back looking like he's
been mugged. But he hasn't been
mugged - no, he's just been out
with good old dad. Go call the
police, Norris.

DWIGHT
Norris, I wouldn't do that if I was
you.

SAM
Mom, it was a dog.

Everyone stares at him.

SAM (CONT'D)
We hit a dog. We killed it. It
was terrible.

Ruth winces at this news, briefly moved to compassion.

RUTH
That still doesn't explain your
eye.

SAM
I got hit.

DWIGHT
(jumping in)
He means he was sleeping against
the door and got thrown into it
when we hit the dog.

RUTH
Where was the dog?

A beat. Dwight thinks fast.

DWIGHT
Cantwell Road.

RUTH
What were you doing over on
Cantwell?

DWIGHT
Taking a new shortcut. Driving
like hell in fact because, like I
just told Norris here, the game
went extra innings.

RUTH
I'll bet it did.

SAM
It did, Mom. It was the best game
ever.

Suddenly Ruth flicks the flashlight BEAM onto the front of the Explorer, about ten feet away.

RUTH
Your headlight's broken.

CLOSE on Dwight, frozen like stone. He's only a couple of feet from the front of his car and he can see:

A tiny fragment of dark CLOTH caught on the rim of the crushed right headlight.

A moment.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(moved)
Poor creature.

She switches off the light.

DWIGHT
It was black. Good-sized. It ran right in front. There was nothing I could do.

Ruth reaches out and gently touches the area around Sam's black eye. He pulls away.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
It was a good day when it started, Ruth. I just got a couple of steps behind, that's all.

RUTH
(softly, shaking her head)
Old Dwight.
(beat)
Well, you're a free man, I guess.

DWIGHT
Till next Sunday.

RUTH
That's the rules.

DWIGHT
(to Sam)
What'll we do next weekend, Sport?

Sam shrugs. Tired.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
We'll sleep on it. Okay?

SAM
Okay, Dad.

DWIGHT
I love you.

Dwight gets in the car without waiting to see if Sam will say it back. He starts the car and switches on the headlight.

NORRIS
(through the open window)
You should get that light fixed,
Dwight. It's against the law, you
know.

DWIGHT
Thanks for the tip, Norris. I
intend to.

Ruth already has Sam on the front porch. Norris hurries after them. They're just about to go inside when Sam turns and waves goodbye to Dwight.

TEARS spring to Dwight's eyes. He sticks his head out the window, voice breaking.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
Don't forget to ice that eye!

Sam stands alone in the doorway of the house. A last look back at his dad.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

A handsome old New England house, tastefully though not richly furnished.

Emma stands in a doorway, dressed in T-shirt and underpants. Looking at something. Her face shows broken sleep and something more haunted. Behind her we can see stairs rising to the second floor.

A DOG appears - Sallie, the Learners' shepherd-collie mix - and sniffs Emma tenderly. Emma, still looking away, doesn't seem to notice.

Now the angle REVERSES and we see that she's looking at GRACE. And Grace is looking back at her.

A garden designer's studio: beautiful plants; a faded Kilim rug; a canted architect's table and stool; a stuffed chair covered in worn green velvet.

Grace sits on the chair, hugging her knees. Red-rimmed eyes. Someone who's been here for years, might never get up.

Finally she forces herself to speak, be a mother. Her voice a husk.

GRACE
Sweetie, you can't sleep?

EMMA
I was having bad dreams.

GRACE
Come here and tell me about it.

Emma goes to her, climbs up on her lap.

EMMA
You were crying.

Grace nods.

EMMA (CONT'D)
I couldn't.

Grace hugs her tightly. A life raft. Loses herself in that hug until...

EMMA (CONT'D)
Mom, was Josh in pain?

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The dark road. The sound of RUNNING FOOTSTEPS - her own. Up the road, Ethan staggers toward her, Josh's body in his arms.

Grace runs toward him, SCREAMING.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - GRACE'S STUDIO - PRESENT

Grace, Emma on her lap.

GRACE
(quietly shattered)
No, Em. He wasn't in pain.

EMMA
Is he dead?

GRACE
(beat)
Yes.

EMMA
Mom, I'm scared.

GRACE
I know.

EMMA
Josh was in my dream. It woke me
up...

Emma starts to cry.

GRACE
My baby...

Grace rises and carries her out of the room and up the stairs.

INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Light from the hall spills through the half open door.
Emma's finally asleep. Grace sits on the side of the bed.

She rises and goes to the window, looks out at the night.

EXT. PINE CREEK ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A police car pulls up in front of the Learner house and stops. A rear door opens and Ethan gets out, moving like an old man. The car drives off.

Ethan in front of his own house: split rail fence, old trees, garden, barn-like garage. No longer any kind of sanctuary.

Feeling something, he looks up.

On the second floor, just visible in the darkened room, Grace stands at the window.

They stare at each other.

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE/GARAGE - SAME TIME

A two-bedroom ranch-style with a separate two-car garage. A place devoid of personality, a holding pen.

The left side of the GARAGE starts to open. Dwight eases the Explorer inside.

INT. DWIGHT'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

He stays behind the wheel, engine running, the garage visibly filling with EXHAUST.

He switches the engine off, gets out, walks outside.

EXT. DWIGHT'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Stands in the driveway, staring at the car, the light from the open garage door shining over him. Then the light goes out.

He can't seem to walk away.

INT. DWIGHT'S GARAGE

He starts the car up again...

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - SAME TIME

Ethan walks slowly up the flagstone path to the front door.

Grace opens the door and waits for him.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS

He sinks to his knees at her feet, burying himself against her legs. Holding on for dear life.

Grace in shock herself. Can't bring herself to console him.

They remain like that, together yet separate, as we PULL BACK, out into the dark night, never losing sight of them in the brightly lit hall of their house.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - DEN - EARLY MORNING

Sunlight on Dwight's face. It would wake him - except he's already awake, sprawled on the sofa, eyeing the room as if it belonged to somebody else. The TV screen shows fuzzy gray static.

Clutched in his lap is a bundle of LETTERS held together with a rubber band. They're all addressed to him in the same childlike scrawl, and all have the same return address: "saM aRNo."

Dwight looks out through the window, across the lawn: The Explorer sits in the driveway, its busted headlight pointing at the road, saying Punish Me.

But no one's come, no one's punished him. He gets up.

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE/GARAGE - A MINUTE LATER

Dew still on the grass, BIRDSONG: the morning calm and peaceful and completely unreal, under the circumstances.

He gets in the car and starts the engine, backs it into the left side of the garage. Gets out and pushes a button on the wall and ducks under the door as it starts to close.

The evidence sealed up, he starts back across the lawn to his house.

EXT. CANAAN STATE POLICE BARRACKS - MORNING

Sunlight. The barracks small and drab.

INT. POLICE BARRACKS

Ethan sits facing a bulletin board of WANTED fliers of rapists and killers, complete with grainy mug shots. A wall of shame and suffering and loss. Ethan reads them all.

The sound of muted LAUGHTER: In the dispatch room, behind the Plexiglas window, three TROOPERS listen to the punchline of a story being told by a fourth.

MALE TROOPER
... And just when the son of a
bitch opened the door, I was
pulling the biscuits out of the
oven!

Another burst of LAUGHTER.

A steel door marked AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY opens and Burke stands there in uniform.

SERGEANT BURKE
Mr. Learner?

INT. STATE POLICE OFFICE

Burke leads Ethan through the fluorescent-lit room to his desk.

SERGEANT BURKE
Have a seat. Want some coffee?

ETHAN
Okay. Thank you.

SERGEANT BURKE
Milk? Sugar?

Ethan shakes his head, sits down. Burke walks off to get the coffee.

On the desk there's a photo of Burke's wife and daughters. And something else - a small TOD'S GAS AND AUTO BODY calendar.

Ethan can't help himself: he reaches out and crumples the calendar and stuffs it into the wastebasket under the desk. When he looks up, Burke is approaching with the coffee.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)
Can't vouch for the taste, but at
least it's hot.

Burke puts the Styrofoam cup on the desk in front of Ethan and settles himself on his chair.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)
Now, Mr. Learner...

ETHAN
He shouted something.

SERGEANT BURKE
Who did?

ETHAN
The man in the car. The driver.
It came back to me in the middle of
the night. I was running after him
and I heard it. It sounded like
Sam.

SERGEANT BURKE
(doubtful)
Sam?

Deliberately, Burke folds back the cover of his notebook and clicks out the point of his pen and writes down the name.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)
Are you sure the suspect was alone
in the vehicle?

ETHAN
I told you last night. I didn't
see anyone else. But it was dark,
and it happened so fast.

SERGEANT BURKE
Is there anything else you
remembered?

ETHAN
No.

A pause. Somewhere behind Ethan a phone starts to RING. Rings and rings.

Across the room another MAN sits hunched and broken over a desk, talking to a trooper. Like a mirror image.

Ethan looks away.

He finds Burke staring at the place where the calendar was.

Burke leans forward.

SERGEANT BURKE

Mr. Learner, we've sent out the information we have so far to every barracks in the state. And we already have checks established on the main roads.

Burke takes a sip of coffee, wincing at the taste.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)

Meantime we've got glass samples already in the lab, and cloth from your son's jacket. The autopsy should be done by this afternoon. A fast-moving vehicle almost always leaves some kind of trace behind on the victim. I'm sorry to have to say it like that.

ETHAN

What are the odds of finding him?

SERGEANT BURKE

I don't give odds, Mr. Learner. I'd have to be crazy to do that, and I'm not crazy.

ETHAN

I'm asking for your professional opinion.

A moment. Burke decides to level with him.

SERGEANT BURKE

Mr. Learner, I'll be straight. Hit and run is among the toughest of all crimes to prosecute. Problem is, at the end of the day, it's not just about evidence.

Burke folds his notebook closed.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)

Let's say we identify the perpetrator, find him and bring him in. It's still our job to prove in court that he was aware of hitting your son, that he left the scene with full knowledge of having fatally hit someone - not an animal or an object but a living, breathing human being. How do we prove that? That's hard. I'll be straight with you, sometimes it's impossible. And without that proof there's not a lot we can do to the guy. Even with it, we're pretty much hamstrung when it comes to sentencing.

ETHAN

(in disbelief)

What are you saying?

SERGEANT BURKE

I'm saying even if we convict him, it's unlikely he'd serve much time.

ETHAN

How long?

Burke looks down at the pen in his hands.

SERGEANT BURKE

Look, I'm probably more cynical about it than most...

Ethan SLAMS his fist on the desk, SPILLING the cup of coffee onto the floor. Then he's on his feet, the room suddenly gone quiet.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)

Easy now.

ETHAN

You fucking tell me, Burke. How long would he get?

SERGEANT BURKE

Maybe a year.

ETHAN

No.

SERGEANT BURKE
Maybe six months. You've got to understand-

ETHAN
(interrupting)
No. Jesus Christ, no.

SERGEANT BURKE
Mr. Learner, you're in a tough place. A hard place. I know that.

ETHAN
No, you don't.

SERGEANT BURKE
Vehicular homicide is a terrible crime. And I promise you...

But Ethan is halfway out of the room.

SERGEANT BURKE
Mr. Learner!

Ethan keeps going. Past the other victim, the man like himself, hunched over and broken and spilling his guts out as if it could possibly help. Away under the cold white light.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - KITCHEN - AN HOUR LATER

Sunlight. Grace at the sink, doing nothing. The sink filled with dirty dishes.

Ethan enters. She's been waiting for him.

GRACE
You talked to them?

ETHAN
They don't have anything.

She takes the blow. Sits down at the table. Then he does.

GRACE
Did you...

ETHAN
Did I what?

GRACE
Remember anything. See anything more.

ETHAN
More than what, Grace?

GRACE
I don't know, Ethan. You were
there.

He's silent.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I'm not accusing you.

ETHAN
Maybe you should be.

GRACE
I'm not.

He puts his head in his hands.

ETHAN
He was standing by the road. I
left him there and went inside.
(beat)
I saw the car. Saw him get hit.
But I don't seem to know anything.
And because of me, the police don't
know anything either.

Grace looks at him, but does not move to comfort him.

EXT. CUTTER & ASSOCIATES LAW OFFICES - SAME TIME

A Victorian house just outside the center of town. Clipped
hedges out front and a small parking lot behind, with a field
behind that.

Dwight, driving a brand-new white Chevy CORSICA, pulls into
the lot.

INT. CORSICA

The car comes to a stop, the radio tuned to a news bulletin.
Dwight listens intently.

RADIO (O.S.)
... Sergeant Ken Burke of the
Canaan state police had this to say
about the crime: "We will find the
person who ran this boy down and
bring him to justice. I have no
further comment at this time."

Dwight switches off the radio.

INT. CUTTER AND TROPE

DONNA, 34, sits behind a reception desk, talking on the phone. Dwight enters as she's hanging up. He's stiff, uneasy - too much lying to do.

DWIGHT
Morning, Donna.

Donna plucks an emery board from a Garfield pencil mug on her desk and starts filing her pinky nail with expert strokes.

DONNA
It's eleven-thirty, Dwight.
Catching up on your sleep?

DWIGHT
My transmission's shot. The
mechanic says I might as well scrap
the whole car. So I'm leasing.

Sweating a little. He takes off his sportcoat and loosens his tie. Looks out the window - just as a POLICE CAR cruises by.

He looks back and finds Donna studying him.

DONNA
You okay?

DWIGHT
Guess I had one too many last
night.

DONNA
That'll do it.

The phone rings and Donna picks up.

DONNA
Cutter & Associates...

Dwight looks down the hall to a nice office. A brass PLAQUE says JACK CUTTER. Through the open door we see a florid, middle-aged man in suspenders talking on the phone.

INT. DWIGHT'S OFFICE - LATER

Dwight sits behind his desk, staring at two framed PHOTOS of Sam - one about age four, the other recent.

The old one: a small, smiling sandy-haired boy. Not a mark on him, not a care.

Dwight's eyes move to the recent picture: the Sam we've met. Older. Too much knowledge in his eyes for a ten-year-old. That faint white SCAR running down the left side of his jaw.

Dwight covers the scar with his finger.

EXT. TOD'S GAS STATION - AFTERNOON

Ethan's Volvo parked off to the side. He stands by the gas pumps, staring up the road. Trying to force himself to see clues he missed.

But nothing new comes to him.

STATION ATTENDANT (O.S.)
Can I help you?

Ethan turns, still lost in the horror.

It's the same young man who was working the night of the accident.

A moment. Recognizing Ethan:

STATION ATTENDANT
Mr. Learner?

ETHAN
He's going to get away with it.

The attendant looks away as if embarrassed.

A CAR pulls into the station. With an apologetic shrug at Ethan, the attendant walks over to serve the customer.

Ethan turns back to the road.

EXT. GREAT BARRINGTON, MA - DAY

Ethan's Volvo passes a sign: SMITHFIELD COLLEGE, FOUNDED 1902.

The small, bucolic New England college where Ethan teaches. The campus emptied out for summer.

EXT. COLLEGE - MUSIC BUILDING - DAY

The Volvo parked outside a building that looks almost like a small church.

INT. MUSIC BUILDING

Ethan stands in the doorway, looking at a small stage, rows of folding chairs, a stained-glass window that throws colored light over the high-ceilinged room.

INT. SMITHFIELD MUSIC BUILDING - FLASHBACK

The way it used to be. The same room, the stage. Sunlight pours through the stained-glass window onto JOSH, practicing the violin.

We hear his scales, notes, MUSIC, over and over.

REVERSE ANGLE: now we see the back of the room.

ETHAN grades papers on a folding chair in the last row. Watching his son play.

INT. MUSIC BUILDING - PRESENT

Ethan still in the doorway. Still hearing Josh's MUSIC.

He walks through the rows of chairs to the back, takes his old seat. Reliving the days when his son practiced, and he listened.

Grief overwhelms him.

Josh's MUSIC continues intermittently over the next three scenes:

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - MORNING

Bright sunshine. Birds singing. Dew sparkles on the lawn.

The sound of a CAR approaching. A pickup truck slows in front of Dwight's place; an arm tosses a rolled-up NEWSPAPER out the window. It lands on Dwight's driveway, next to the Corsica, in front of the closed garage doors.

We can make out the headline on the front page: LOCAL BOY KILLED IN HIT-AND-RUN - DRIVER UNKNOWN.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Dwight on his back in bed, naked and half-covered by a sheet. We can see what a powerfully built man he is, his muscles not worked over in a gym, but naturally strong. He lies in bed as if crucified there.

Slowly his hand comes up to his chest. Between the dense muscle, his thumb finds the spot where his car hit the boy.

And he presses down, hard.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - KITCHEN

The same NEWSPAPER lies unrolled on the table. The same headline.

Ethan stands staring out the window. Dressed for a funeral.

Grace - dressed in black too - appears in the doorway. Sees the newspaper.

GRACE
We should go.

Ethan nods, but doesn't move.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Two dozen or so MOURNERS gathered around an open grave. Ethan and Grace at the front. GRACE'S MOTHER holds Emma's hand.

Behind them, a group of teachers and students from Josh's school. SAM is one of them. RUTH WHELDON is with him.

A boy-size COFFIN is lowered into the ground. A MINISTER stands nearby. As the coffin goes down, we hear a part of his eulogy:

MINISTER (V.O.)
He was just a boy. A talented,
beautiful boy. Who was too briefly
on this earth. May God hold him
now for we cannot. May He know His
reasons now for we cannot.

Close on Ethan. Frozen with anger as much as grief.

The coffin touches earth. Suddenly Grace CRIES OUT. Ethan holds her tightly. As over her shoulder he sees:

Dwight's white CORSICA driving away beyond the cemetery wall.

And now we PULL SKYWARD to show the cemetery and the coffin in the ground and the mourners growing smaller and the white car driving away. As the minister concludes his eulogy:

MINISTER (V.O.)
May He hold in His heart of hearts
the love that we are now too broken
to bear. May He dispense that love
where it is needed most.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - FRONT HALL - LATER

The house littered with dirty plates and glasses.

Ethan stands at the front door, saying goodbye to the last of the GUESTS.

Alone, he notices a brown paper BAG on the front hall table. He hesitates, half drawn and half repelled. Then he opens the bag, pulls out:

Josh's sneakers, identified by a police evidence tag; and Josh's ARROWHEAD, in a clear plastic evidence baggie.

He slips the arrowhead out of the bag and onto his palm.

EXT. CUTTER & ASSOCIATES - MORNING

Dwight's Corsica pulls into the lot. Out back, two boys are tossing a football on the field.

INT. CUTTER & ASSOCIATES - RECEPTION AREA

Donna's chair is empty - a note says BACK IN 5. At the end of the hall the door is half open. JACK CUTTER sits on the edge of his desk, talking to somebody we can't see.

JACK

I appreciate your situation, Professor. I really do. And I sympathize. I'm a father myself. I can only imagine your pain. But I'm afraid that doesn't change the fundamental situation, which is that the police have their job and we lawyers have ours.

ETHAN (O.S.)

You're saying you won't help me.

JACK

I'm saying it's only been a couple of days. Give them some time.

ETHAN (O.S.)

Five. It's been five days.

JACK

That's still not a lot of time in this sort of case. You've got to let the police do their work.

ETHAN (O.S.)
They're not doing it.

JACK
Look, I know Ken Burke personally.
Believe me, he and his men are
doing their all for you and your
family. And when they catch the
son of a bitch who did this, then -
and I give you my word on this -
then we will go to the mat for you,
and make sure we nail that bastard
to the fucking wall.

Jack catches sight of Dwight listening in from the reception
area.

JACK (CONT'D)
Professor, I'd like you to meet my
trusted associate, Dwight Arno.

Jack pushes the door open the rest of the way, revealing
ETHAN.

JACK (CONT'D)
Come on in, Dwight.

A pause. Reluctantly Dwight walks into Jack's office.

JACK (CONT'D)
I was just telling Professor
Learner here that when the time
comes we'll be on his side like
gangbusters.

Dwight addresses Ethan - disappointed in some way that Ethan
hasn't identified him.

DWIGHT
Jack's right, Mr. Learner.

ETHAN
I'd like to hire a private
investigator.

JACK
(amused but sympathetic)
A private eye? In the Northwest
Corner?

DWIGHT
Not a lot of business for those
types around here.

Ethan stands up.

ETHAN
(angry)
Thanks for your time.

JACK
You have my word, Mr. Learner.

DWIGHT
Mine too.

Ethan turns and looks Dwight full in the face for the first time.

Ethan goes out.

Jack sticks a pencil into the electric sharpener on his desk.

JACK
Christ, I feel for that guy. I
really do.

He blows sawdust off the pencil tip.

EXT. SHERMAN R. LEWIS SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Emma and Ruth Wheldon sit on the school's front steps. Ruth dressed in an improbable array of brightly colored clothes.

Grace's car pulls into the nearly empty parking lot. She jumps out looking guilty and flustered.

EMMA
(accusing)
You're late.

GRACE
I'm so sorry. I lost track of the
time.

RUTH
Emma and I had some extra
practicing to do anyway.

EMMA
Bye, Mrs. Wheldon.

RUTH
Good work today, Emma.

Emma walks to the car, gets in and fastens her seatbelt. She glares out at her mother.

Ruth gives Grace a sympathetic smile.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Do you think Emma still wants to
participate in the concert next
week?

A moment; Grace had forgotten all about the concert.

GRACE
I'll have to ask her.

The two women make eye contact.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Sorry again for being late.

She walks to the car.

Ruth watches her.

EXT. LEARNER DRIVEWAY - A LITTLE LATER

Grace pulls in and parks, but no one gets out.

INT. GRACE'S SUBARU - CONTINUOUS

Grace turns to Emma.

GRACE
Mrs. Wheldon was wondering if you
still want to play in the concert
next week.

Emma looks out the window, doesn't answer.

GRACE (CONT'D)
You don't have to do anything you
don't want to do.

EMMA
Can you hear music if you're dead?

Grace stares at her.

GRACE
Yes.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - ETHAN'S STUDY - LATER

A professor's room: desk, small sofa, reading chair,
overflowing bookshelves. The ground-level window looks out
the front of the house.

Ethan tries to read, but can't concentrate. The fingers of his right hand keep RUBBING something over and over. Finally he closes the book and opens his hand: Josh's ARROWHEAD. He slips it in his pocket just as Emma enters.

ETHAN
Hey there, Pumpkin.

EMMA
What're you doing?

He drops the book on the floor and puts his arm around her waist.

ETHAN
Waiting for you.

EMMA
I've decided I'm going to play in the concert.

ETHAN
What are you going to play?

EMMA
Something extraordinary.

ETHAN
(kissing her)
That sounds like a good idea.

EMMA
For Josh.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - ATTIC - LATER

Ethan enters, switches on the bare bulb. From downstairs we hear the sound of Emma practicing the PIANO.

He carries Josh's VIOLIN CASE, looking for a place to leave it.

Puts it down on an old rocking chair. The weight of the case sets the chair rocking until he stops it with his hand.

He stands looking at a padlocked, battered metal trunk marked with faded black letters: U.S. ARMY - PROPERTY CAPT. SAMUEL LEARNER. His father's.

He switches off the light.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - MORNING

The house an emblem of New England serenity.

Sallie trots across the lawn with a freshly delivered newspaper in her mouth.

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE - LATER THAT MORNING

Dwight pulls into the Wheldons' driveway...

INT. CORSICA

Sits looking at his old house...

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE

Walks up the porch steps, lets himself in without knocking...

INT. WHELDON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Passes through rooms, everything he looks at a reminder...

INT. WHELDON HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Enters the kitchen. Norris, dressed for golf, sits at the table with newspaper and coffee.

NORRIS

(startled)

How'd you get inside, Dwight?

DWIGHT

You really oughtta lock that door,
Norris. Sam here? How about Ruth?

NORRIS

She's getting herself ready to
teach camp today. Got that big
concert coming up. Coffee?

Norris lays the newspaper on the table and goes to pour
Dwight a mugful.

Dwight catches a glimpse of the headline Norris was just
reading: CT POLICE STILL HUNT HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER...

He flinches when Norris sticks a mug of coffee under his
nose.

NORRIS (CONT'D)

You seem kinda jumpy today, Dwight.

DWIGHT
Late night.

NORRIS
You get that headlight fixed yet?

Dwight looks at him.

DWIGHT
Matter of fact, Norris, it wasn't
just the headlight. Transmission's
totally shot, too. Had to do a
trade-in on a lease deal.

Norris WHISTLES softly.

NORRIS
That was one expensive dog you hit,
huh?

DWIGHT
I got a good deal on the lease.
Zero money down.

NORRIS
What road were you on again?

Dwight looks at him again, blows on his coffee.

DWIGHT
Cantwell.

NORRIS
Cantwell... Isn't that way over in
the other direction? Well, never
mind. Any way you slice it,
hitting a dog's bad luck. I
oughtta know - being in the
insurance business. And a *black*
dog? Whoo boy. Sure glad it
wasn't me.

DWIGHT
It was an accident.

NORRIS
Not according to the police. You
hit a dog and don't report it,
they'll nail you. One way or
another, they get you.

Dwight stares hard at him to see what he might be getting at.

DWIGHT
I reported it next day.

NORRIS
(skeptical)
Well, lawyers know best, I guess.

Hearing FOOTSTEPS in the hallway, Dwight's guarded expression opens up.

SAM stops at the edge of the kitchen. The area around his EYE still blue and purple in places but already turning yellow. The eye itself bright red from broken blood vessels.

Dwight winces at the sight of it.

DWIGHT
Hey, Sport.

SAM
Hey, Dad.

DWIGHT
Thought we'd just head over to my place today, see what we can kick up. Sound okay to you?

SAM
Yeah.

DWIGHT
Good.
(to Norris)
Tell Ruth I'll have him back at the usual.

NORRIS
Actually, Dwight, I think she wanted a word with you.

DWIGHT
Well, that's fine, Norris, as long as she shows up by the time Sam and I get out to the car.

Dwight turns and heads out of the kitchen. Sam follows. Norris hurries after them.

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dwight and Sam come out onto the porch, Norris right behind. Then Ruth emerges and everybody stops.

Her usual odd assortment of clothes - schoolmarm meets suburban beauty queen meets "Hee Haw" guest star. Today it's a denim vest over plaid cotton shorts and white bobby socks and Keds.

DWIGHT

Sam, why don't you and your stepdad go check out the new set of wheels while your mom and I get reacquainted.

Norris doesn't look happy about this arrangement, but he and Sam cross the grass to the Corsica.

Sam opens the driver's door and gets in behind the wheel, leaving Norris the passenger side: a driving lesson going nowhere.

Dwight leans close to Ruth.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)

Think those boys you teach are gonna learn any piano with your legs showin' like that?

RUTH

Oh, I imagine they know how to control themselves. At least better than some men I know.

DWIGHT

Seriously, Ruth, you look good. Your figure's as fine as it ever was.

RUTH

Pretty fresh talk from a man who sees me every week.

DWIGHT

(meaning it)

It was a really long week.

Ruth can't help herself - she smiles, a glimmer of the old attraction still alive. Encouraged, Dwight steps closer.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)

So what did you want to talk about?

RUTH

I took Sam to the doctor for his eye.

DWIGHT
(disappointed)
Just send me the bill.

RUTH
Thanks.

Their eyes meet and hold.

DWIGHT
Well, Sam and I better make tracks.
Clock's ticking.

Ruth puts a hand on his arm.

RUTH
Dwight, I saw Grace Learner the
other day.

Dwight freezes, then tries to compose himself.

DWIGHT
Don't think I know that name.

RUTH
Didn't you see the papers?

Dwight shakes his head.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Her son was killed last week in a
hit-and-run on Reservation Road.

A pause.

DWIGHT
They know who did it?

RUTH
They don't have a clue.

Relief washes imperceptibly over Dwight, rendering him
speechless.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Her son was in Sam's class, Dwight.
And I just can't stop thinking:
What if it'd been Sam? Could've
happened to anybody, but it
happened to them. I don't think I
could live through something like
that.

They're close together. Dwight reaches out now and takes her in his arms and holds her. He needs the hug just as much as she does.

Over her shoulder, he sees Norris glaring at him from the Corsica.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - JOSH'S ROOM - DAY

Grace - still in her bathrobe, hair unbrushed - sits on Josh's bed, running her hand over the covers. The bed made, everything in the room neat and put away.

Down below, the doorbell RINGS.

She keeps running her hand over the covers. The bell RINGS again. Her hand stops; she listens.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sergeant Burke walks back to his police car parked in the road.

Grace opens the front door.

GRACE
Is there news?

Burke takes in the sight of this beautiful disheveled woman in her bathrobe, finger-combing her hair.

SERGEANT BURKE
Sergeant Ken Burke, ma'am. I'm in charge of your son's case.

GRACE
Is there news?

Burke comes forward.

SERGEANT BURKE (CONT'D)
Nothing major, ma'am. I promised your husband I'd keep him posted on things.

GRACE
He's taking our daughter to music camp.

SERGEANT BURKE
Maybe I should come back another time...

GRACE
(beat)
No, it's all right.

She stands back from the door, and Burke enters.

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Dwight and Sam play catch on the front lawn. Sam in cutoff shorts and T-shirt, Dwight in Bermudas and a U Conn sweatshirt with the sleeves hacked off. A portable RADIO with the Red Sox game plays in the background.

Behind Sam we can see the GARAGE, both doors closed.

They toss the baseball back and forth a few times. Then Sam catches it with a SMACK right in the center of his glove. Grinning, they react at the same time.

Ouch! SAM DWIGHT Ouch!

Sam pulls his glove off and shakes his hand like it's on fire.

SAM
Why'd you say ouch, Dad? Wasn't
your hand.

DWIGHT
Empathy.

Sam puts his glove back on, throws the ball back.

SAM
What's em-pathy? Like psychic?

Dwight chuckles and throws the ball back.

DWIGHT
That's pretty good. Tell you what,
though. If I really was psychic
I'd have done a few things
differently in my life.

SAM
Like what?

Dwight just shakes his head.

DWIGHT
Toss me the ball, Sport.

Sam throws him the ball, and Dwight catches it.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Grace and Burke sit in oppressive silence.

GRACE
Would you like some more coffee,
Sergeant?

SERGEANT BURKE
No, ma'am, thank you.

A long pause.

GRACE
Ethan should be back soon.

SERGEANT BURKE
(helpfully)
Probably on his way home right this
minute.

GRACE
Is it Sunday?

SERGEANT BURKE
(embarrassed for her)
Yes, ma'am.

INT. KRAUSE'S GENERAL STORE - SAME TIME

At the back of the store Ethan loads up a box of Bisquick, a dozen eggs, a carton of milk, a bottle of maple syrup.

He makes his way to the front counter.

PAUL KRAUSE, 50 and decent, stands behind the counter. His manner with Ethan is gentle and a little awkward.

PAUL KRAUSE
Anything else for you today, Ethan?

ETHAN
Nothing I remember.

Krause starts to ring up Ethan's groceries.

PAUL KRAUSE
Becky and I sent a card. Don't
know if you folks got it.

ETHAN
We did. Thanks, Paul.

PAUL KRAUSE
I didn't know what to write - just
never been very good with words
myself - and there wasn't one of
those ready-made cards... Well, you
know.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - A MINUTE LATER

Ethan walks to his car carrying the bag of groceries.
Reaches for the door...

A dark BLUR catches his peripheral vision. His head snaps
toward the road.

It's there, passing right by him: DARK BLUE SUV. A MAN
driving.

Ethan drops the bag of groceries.

INT. VOLVO

He can't get the keys out fast enough - fumbles them, drops
them.

ETHAN
(to himself)
Come on, come on!

He gets the engine started. SLAMS the car into REVERSE, then
into DRIVE. FLOORS it.

In the rearview mirror, Paul Krause stands over the bag of
smashed groceries.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Ahead, the SUV makes a sharp turn and disappears.

Reaching the same turn, the Volvo fishtails and BANGS off the
guard rail, emerging onto a long narrow straightaway...

INT. VOLVO - CONTINUOUS

The SUV reappears up ahead. Ethan floors it again. The
speedometer climbs to sixty. Trees and stone walls whip by.
Ethan's hands white-knuckled on the wheel, sweat on his face.
The other car grows closer...

Suddenly the other DRIVER spots him and the SUV SWERVES onto the shoulder; the Volvo SURGES into the opening. The two vehicles are now speeding almost side by side, a foot apart... Up ahead the shoulder runs out, replaced by a gray STONE WALL.

The Volvo pulls even: Ethan's about to force the SUV into the WALL at high speed. Filled with hate, he looks at the other driver...

A YOUNG WOMAN with short dark hair looks back at him in terror and confusion.

Sickened by himself, drenched with sweat, he pulls his foot off the gas at the last second. The Volvo drops back. The other car regains the road, just missing the stone wall.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

The kitchen has "divorced dad" written all over it.

Dwight and Sam enter, tossing their gloves on the Formica counter next to an open cigar box containing keys and change and a GARAGE-DOOR OPENER.

DWIGHT

What do you want for lunch, Sport?
We got hot dogs and hot dogs.

SAM

Hot dogs.

Dwight ruffles Sam's hair.

DWIGHT

You're a smart kid, anybody ever
tell you that?

WHISTLING, Dwight goes to the refrigerator and pulls out a package of Ball Park franks. Then he slaps a FRYING PAN on the range and fires up the burner.

Sam's by the counter.

SAM

Thought we were gonna cook outside.

DWIGHT

Nope.

SAM

But they taste better outside. And
it's funner.

DWIGHT
More fun.

SAM
More fun. It is.

DWIGHT
Depends for who. It's more work
for me. I've gotta get the grill
out of the garage...

Wisps of black SMOKE are curling up behind Dwight's head.

SAM
Dad...

DWIGHT
What?

SAM
Look at the stove.

Dwight turns and sees the dry frying pan engulfed in thick
black smoke.

DWIGHT
Fuck!

He grabs the pan with a dish towel and chucks it into the
sink and turns on the water. The pan SIZZLES and smokes.

Sam's laughing.

SAM
(imitating Dwight)
Fuck!

Dwight shoots him a look.

DWIGHT
You think that's funny?

Dwight can't help himself - he breaks into a grin.

DWIGHT
You're right. It's pretty funny.

SAM
So we gonna cook outside?

DWIGHT
Looks like it.

SAM
I'll get the grill!

Sam GRABS the garage-door opener out of the cigar box and goes TEARING out of the kitchen.

Still at the sink, Dwight glances out the window and sees Sam come into view, running for the garage. Past him, he sees the GARAGE DOOR start to open, exposing the rear bumper of the Explorer inside.

DWIGHT
Sam, wait!

Dwight goes TEARING out of the kitchen after him.

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sam has about a twenty foot headstart on Dwight.

Dwight runs desperately after him.

DWIGHT
Sam, stop!

Sam glances over his shoulder, sees his dad chasing him. He LAUGHS and keeps running.

Another five yards and Sam will see the open garage door and the Explorer inside - Dwight goes into a desperate full-out SPRINT. At the last possible second he reaches out, grabs Sam around the waist and SWINGS him around.

SAM
(laughing)
Whoa!

EXT. VOLVO - SAME TIME

Ethan, on his way home, turns onto Dwight's road.

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Dwight swings Sam again - and again. Playful now. Sam shouts with delight. Dwight's laughing, too - with relief. With each swing the open garage door FLASHES by.

INT. VOLVO - SAME TIME

Ethan approaches Dwight's house - we can see the GARAGE ROOF.

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Dizzy and laughing, Dwight and Sam tumble onto the grass. The garage-door opener falls nearby.

Dwight grabs it and pushes the button. And past Sam's happy face, he watches the garage door slowly begins to close.

INT. VOLVO - SAME TIME

At that moment Ethan drives past Dwight's house.

He sees father and son on the lawn, happy and spent; and the GARAGE DOOR dropping the last few inches to the ground.

He and Dwight recognize each other from a distance, just as Sam CALLS out.

SAM
Do it again, Dad!

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

The Volvo and a police car parked out front.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Ethan enters. Grace and Sergeant Burke are on their feet waiting for him. Burke looks downright relieved to have another man in the room.

GRACE
Ethan, Sergeant Burke stopped-

ETHAN
(interrupting, to Burke)
What've you found out?

SERGEANT BURKE
It's a midnight blue Ford Explorer, somewhere between a '94 model and a 2000.

ETHAN
(hard)
That's a lot of cars.

SERGEANT BURKE
We're tracking down records of every dark blue Explorer sold in the state prior to 2000.

ETHAN

Then what?

SERGEANT BURKE

We put a suspect profile into our computers and try to link it up with the sold cars we've traced. We try to rule out vehicles that have left the state. There are many ways, Mr. Learner. We're pursuing them all.

ETHAN

What if the car wasn't bought in state? What if it's been scrapped or hidden? What if he was just passing through?

SERGEANT BURKE

Those are good questions and we'll tackle them one at a time.

Ethan walks to the window and stares out darkly.

ETHAN

He's going to get away with it.

He turns around. The look on his face is chilling.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Ethan still by the window. He rubs Josh's ARROWHEAD in his right hand without being aware of it.

In the background we hear the FRONT DOOR close.

Grace enters.

GRACE

What happened to you this morning?

A moment. Ethan closes his fist around the arrowhead.

ETHAN

I thought I saw the car.

GRACE

The car?

She understands, steps closer.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Why didn't you tell the sergeant?

ETHAN
Because I was wrong.

GRACE
What if you weren't wrong?

ETHAN
It was a woman, Grace.

GRACE
A woman?

Ethan won't look at her.

ETHAN
There was a stone wall... I was
going to drive her into it. And
then at the last second, she turned
and looked at me.
(beat)
Like I was a murderer.

A moment. Grace grabs his clenched fist and forces it open.
Takes the arrowhead and FLINGS it across the room.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
(angry)
Why'd you do that?

GRACE
Because I can't stand it. I can't
stand any of it.

ETHAN
I'm going to find him, Grace.

GRACE
(bitter)
You're going to find him. You're
going to *find* him. Which "him" are
you talking about, Ethan? Not our
son. How're you going to *find* him?

ETHAN
I want justice.

GRACE
Justice?
(beat)
Don't you understand? It's going
to take everything we have -
everything! - just to survive this.
(MORE)

GRACE (cont'd)

Either we make it as a family, or
our daughter becomes an orphan. We
don't have anything left over for
justice.

She leaves the room.

After a moment Ethan gets up. He finds Josh's arrowhead
where she threw it. Picks it up and starts to rub it again.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - DEN - THAT NIGHT

Dwight alone, a beer in his fist, watching the Red Sox on TV.
The GARAGE-DOOR OPENER and the remains of a sandwich are on
the coffee table.

On screen: a Manny Ramirez home run. CHEERING.

Dwight: unmoved. Those days are over.

He switches off the game. Picks the door-opener off the
table and holds it - like a grenade.

INT. TOMMY'S DINER - 3 DAYS LATER

A small town diner filled with the regular lunchtime mix of
locals. A couple of state troopers at the counter. In a
booth at the back Dwight and Jack sit over the remains of
lunch.

Jack works on his teeth with a toothpick

JACK

So how's old Sam doing these days?
You two getting along all right?

DWIGHT

Yeah, all right.

JACK (CONT'D)

Think he still chews over what
happened?

DWIGHT

I don't know, Jack. I know I do.

JACK

Not to be cold-blooded or anything,
but that's your own business, pal.
The law, fortunately or
unfortunately, doesn't give a rat's
hemorrhoid about your tender
feelings. It denies them. The law
deals in facts - and circumstance.

DWIGHT
(rueful)
Circumstance.

JACK
Yeah, circumstance.

Jack tosses the toothpick onto the floor.

JACK (CONT'D)
Take your case: too much to drink -
check. Wife tells you she's
ditching you for another guy -
insurance salesman, no less -
check. You lose your head and take
a swing at her - *check*. Your kid
runs right into the middle of it -
you never even see him till it's
too late. Double, triple check.
Like I said: circumstance.

CHERYL, the cute, tough-talking waitress, bangs two orders of
pie down on the table.

CHERYL
Who's got the coconut cream?

JACK
(leering)
The nut's mine, Cheryl honey. The
cream, too.

CHERYL
I don't get paid enough to be your
honey, Jack. Cream or no cream.

JACK
We can negotiate.

Cheryl walks off, Jack watching her ass all the way.

JACK (CONT'D)
Jesus, my fucking kingdom for a
waitress.

Dwight stares at a state TROOPER who's just entered the
diner.

BURKE scans the long room. Nods at the other troopers, looks
past them to Dwight's table.

Jack, eating his pie, hasn't noticed a thing.

JACK (CONT'D)
The main thing is you got him back
now, right? Full visitation
privileges. And things are good.
So if it ain't broke, don't fix it.
That's my philosophy - if you're
not my client.

Burke appears next to the table. Jack looks up, but Dwight
stares down at his hands.

JACK
Afternoon, Ken.

SERGEANT BURKE
Jack. How goes things?

JACK
Well, I'm not rich yet. Otherwise,
no complaints.

SERGEANT BURKE
Mr. Arno? I'm Sergeant Burke of
the Connecticut State Police.

DWIGHT
(tense)
What can I do for you, Sergeant?

SERGEANT BURKE
You the owner of a dark blue Ford
Explorer, bought at the Winsted
dealership in January '99?

JACK
What's this about, Ken?

SERGEANT BURKE
That boy run over on Reservation
Road - it was an Explorer, dark
blue. We're checking out all the
sales in the state since '94.

JACK
Ken, you're not suggesting my
partner here -

DWIGHT
(interrupting)
What day was that again, Sergeant?

SERGEANT BURKE
Week and a half ago. Sunday.

DWIGHT

Sunday... I took my son to Fenway.

JACK

Dwight's divorced.

DWIGHT

The game went twelve...

JACK

Ortiz popped a three-run dinger to win it.

BURKE

No shit. My brother-in-law was at that game. He said it was incredible.

DWIGHT

Incredible.

BURKE

Man, your kid must've loved it.

DWIGHT

He did. About the car...

BURKE

Forget it. It was just a routine check anyway. Jack here and I go way back - how many years, Jack?

JACK

I'll take the fifth on that one, Ken. Everybody knows I'm not a day over forty.

Burke laughs.

BURKE

Yeah, and my grandma's playing third base for the Sox. Nice meeting you, Dwight.

DWIGHT

You too, Sergeant.

JACK

Hey Ken, where do things stand with the case?

A moment. Dwight waits for the answer. But Burke just shakes his head.

JACK
Not gonna tell me, huh?

Smiling, Burke walks away.

Jack calls after him.

JACK
Don't forget, Ken, it's a relay
race and the lawyers always get to
be the heroes! You guys hand us
the stick and we win it on the last
leg. That's the law for you -
beautiful.

SERGEANT BURKE
Bye, Jack.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - THAT AFTERNOON

Ethan and Grace wait by the Volvo, the engine running.

Ethan calls back inside the house.

ETHAN
Come on, Emma! We'll be late for
the concert.

INT. VOLVO - A LITTLE LATER

The Learners heading to school for the concert. Emma wears a white dress.

INT. SHERMAN R. LEWIS SCHOOL - LOBBY - A LITTLE LATER

Parents and children mill around. Above a folding table with soft drinks and white wine, a SIGN on the wall reads: 7th ANNUAL STUDENT SUMMER RECITAL - 4:00 PM. ADMISSION FREE.

Ethan, Grace, and Emma enter. A brief HUSH falls over the crowd. A mother scolds her son for rough-housing. Grace takes Emma's hand.

CLOSE on Ethan, steeling himself.

INT. SHERMAN R. LEWIS SCHOOL - GYM - LATER

Harsh fluorescent lighting and rows of folding chairs. At the front a piano, piano stool, and music stand occupy a low makeshift stage. A good crowd - most of the community. In the third row, the Learners sit like statues.

Ruth Wheldon - looking pretty but over-the-top in a floor-length red dress with a powder-blue silk shawl - adjusts the height of the music stand. A BOY with a clarinet waits next to her.

INT. DWIGHT'S CORSICA

Dwight in his car in the crowded school parking lot. "When the Saints Go Marching In" - clarinet version - drifts out of the building. The dashboard clock reads 4:59.

When it turns to 5:00, he opens the glove box and pulls out a pint of Jack Daniels.

INT. GYM

The boy finishes playing the song. APPLAUSE.

From the back of the gym, the faint GROAN of hinges. A couple of heads turn to glare at the latecomer.

INT. GYM - CONTINUOUS

DWIGHT, a little drunk, eases the door closed. He meets the stares with hard looks of his own, and slips into an empty seat in the last row.

Ruth steps back up to the stage.

RUTH

The next performer will be Emma
Learner. Emma will play a prelude
by Bach.

APPLAUSE. In the third row Emma gets to her feet.

Dwight can't help himself - he stares.

Grace whispers something to Emma and kisses her on the cheek; Ethan, sitting on Emma's other side, leans down and kisses her on top of her head. Then Emma walks to the stage.

A moment later, feeling watched, Ethan turns his head and looks back into the crowd.

His gaze meets Dwight's. A long moment. It almost seems as if Dwight might stand up, speak, do something irrevocable. But then Emma starts to play, and Ethan turns back to watch her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GYM

The audience still APPLAUDING.

Emma, on the verge of tears, buries herself against Grace's shoulder.

ETHAN
You were wonderful, honey. We're
really proud of you.

Emma mumbles something. Grace looks stricken.

GRACE
(to Ethan)
She said she'll never be as good as
Josh.

Ruth is on stage again.

RUTH WHELDON
Our next performer will be Sam
Arno, on trumpet. Sam will play
"America the Beautiful."

Sam walks on stage holding a trumpet. People catch sight of his battered EYE and a MURMUR runs through the audience.

RUTH WHELDON (CONT'D)
(explaining)
Sam was out with his father last
week and they got in a little
accident...

She's interrupted by a GROAN of hinges from the back of the gym.

Ethan turns in time to see DWIGHT disappearing through the open Fire Exit door.

RUTH WHELDON (CONT'D)
It's nothing serious, really.
Actually, he's fine...

Ruth's voice trails off. She touches Sam's head and walks quickly off the stage.

SAM
(to the audience)
"America the Beautiful."

He begins to play.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - DUSK

A light on in Emma's room. Through an upstairs window we see Grace lying beside Emma on the bed, holding an open BOOK. (It's Susan Cooper's "The Dark Is Rising.")

We PAN over a couple of windows. Another light goes on.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Ethan enters, looking exhausted. He stands taking in the scene before him: dirty clothes on the floor, the unmade bed.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - BATHROOM

The sound of a SHOWER running, loud. Steam swirling, rising, trapped by ceiling and walls. Ethan stands under the pounding stream, the water as hot as he can stand it.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Lying naked on the bed, skin wet and heat-reddened, he listens to Grace READING to Emma in the other room:

GRACE (O.S.)
"He accepted everything that came
into his mind, without thought or
question, as if he were moving
through a dream. But a deeper part
of him knew that he was not
dreaming..."

Ethan drifts off to sleep.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Ethan GASPS awake. The room is dark. He sits up in bed, reality coming back to him like a nightmare.

Grace lies sleeping. He moves toward her, needing her. Half-asleep, she opens herself to him. They kiss, slowly at first, then with greater urgency.

They begin to make love, until... She turns her head away.

After a few moments, Ethan roughly pulls out.

GRACE
(near tears)
I'm sorry, I can't. I just can't.

ETHAN
(quietly angry)
Say it.

GRACE
I'm sorry.

He grabs her by the shoulders. Sticks his face in hers.

ETHAN
No, not sorry. Say it. He'd be
alive if it wasn't for me. Say it!

She slips out of his grasp and into the bathroom. The door closes.

Ethan HURLS the bedside clock against it.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Goddamn you, Grace! It's my fault!
Why won't you say it?!!

He turns and sees EMMA standing in the doorway in her T-shirt and pajama bottoms. She's crying.

EMMA
I don't want you and Mom to get
divorced.

Ethan grabs a robe and covers himself.

ETHAN
Pumpkin, wait...

Emma runs out of the room.

We hear the BATH begin to run.

INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM - LATER

She lies asleep in bed, Ethan sitting beside her.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Grace in the bath, all cried out.

INT. EMMA'S ROOM - LATER

Ethan at the window, looking down into the night. His face etched with despair.

A breeze picks up; the RUSTLING of leaves can be heard, faint but growing...

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Dwight at the window, the lights in the room turned off, looking out at the night. His face etched with despair.

A breeze picks up, the RUSTLING of leaves can be heard, faint but growing...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - DAY

The RUSTLING continues...

Autumn leaves swirl over Reservation Road...

And over a pair of FEET. Ethan stands in front of Tod's gas station. It's become his haunting ground.

From inside the office the STATION ATTENDANT keeps a wary eye on him.

INT. SMITHFIELD COLLEGE - ENGLISH BUILDING - DAY

A small lecture room, about half the seats filled with students. Written on the blackboard in chalk is the course title, HEROIC FICTION/FICTIVE HEROICS: WRITERS OF WARFARE. Ethan walks slowly back and forth, lost in himself, not looking at anyone.

ETHAN

Hemingway is much maligned now.
Mocked. But he knew something
about death. He knew what it
looked and felt like, how it
tasted. He saw it in Italy and he
saw it in Spain and he saw it in
Africa. He didn't try to pretty it
up or give it beautiful meaning.
He knew that real, actual death was
just as ugly and cold and
meaningless as it looked. It takes
away. Somebody's there and then
they're not. People get left
behind...

He comes out of it. The students are staring, impressed but also concerned and embarrassed for him.

INT. VOLVO - DAY

Ethan drives home from the college. He passes the POLICE BARRACKS. The cold look in his eyes tells us all we need to know about the state of Josh's case.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - ETHAN'S STUDY - LATE NIGHT

Ethan reads a book, a bathrobe over his clothes, Scotch nearby. Blankets and pillows cover the small sofa.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - SAME TIME

The rest of the house dark. Ethan hidden by the high back of the chair. From outside his study appears empty until...

An ARM reaches for the glass of Scotch. Pulls back again.

Then Ethan gets up.

Outside, DWIGHT watches in the darkness.

INT. ETHAN'S STUDY - SAME TIME

At the door Ethan raises his hand for the light switch, turns to stare at his own ghostly reflection in the windowpanes.

He turns out the light - pitch dark.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Sunlight. Grace blinks awake and finds Emma sitting on the edge of the bed.

GRACE

What's wrong?

EMMA

Dad's asleep downstairs again.

Grace sits up.

EMMA (CONT'D)

There's nothing good to eat
anywhere and I'm going to be late
for the bus.

Grace looks at her - a mother paying attention now. She musters a smile for her daughter and gets out of bed.

GRACE
That doesn't sound very good.
Let's go down together and see what
we can do.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - ETHAN'S STUDY - LATER THAT MORNING

Ethan at his desk, still in his bathrobe. He looks out the window:

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A school bus pulls up in front of the house. Grace kisses Emma, and Emma climbs on.

INT. ETHAN'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Ethan picks up the phone and punches in a number.

FEMALE TROOPER (O.S.)
State police, Canaan Barracks.

ETHAN
Sergeant Burke, please.

FEMALE TROOPER (O.S.)
I'm afraid Sergeant Burke's out on
patrol. Can I take a message?

Ethan hangs up.

INT. POLICE BARRACKS - WAITING ROOM

The WANTED flyers stare down at Ethan.

The steel door opens and Burke enters - almost runs right into Ethan.

SERGEANT BURKE
(taken by surprise)
Mr. Learner...

ETHAN
Thought you were out on patrol.

SERGEANT BURKE
I've been planning on calling you.

ETHAN
You've been ducking me for weeks.

SERGEANT BURKE
Why don't we sit down?

Ethan remains standing. Burke studies him warily.

SERGEANT BURKE

Mr. Learner, your son's case has been listed inactive.

ETHAN

What?

SERGEANT BURKE

After a certain period of time all unsolved cases get re-prioritized. I'm sorry.

ETHAN

You can't do that.

SERGEANT BURKE

Look, Mr. Learner, I know this is hard. But the fact is we've got a small force here - barely enough men to keep up with our duties week to week. If we didn't separate the old cases from the new ones, we'd be swamped.

ETHAN

(fierce)

Swamped?

Ethan slams his fist into the bulletin board of WANTED flyers, sending thumbtacks and papers raining onto the floor. Burke steps back, fully on alert.

SERGEANT BURKE

Take it easy now. There's no need -

ETHAN

Shame on you.

SERGEANT BURKE

I'm a police officer, Mr. Learner. I'm doing my job.

ETHAN

(in his face)

Shame!

Ethan storms out.

INT. SHERMAN R. LEWIS SCHOOL - SAME TIME

Dwight, dressed in sportcoat and tie, walks down a corridor.

INT. TEACHER'S OFFICE

A TEACHER sits behind his desk, Ruth and Sam across from him. Dwight enters.

DWIGHT
Sorry I'm late.

He takes an empty chair and winks at Sam, who tries not to smile.

Coming through the windows now, soft at first but growing louder, we hear the sound of CHILDREN playing...

EXT. SHERMAN R. LEWIS SCHOOL - SAME TIME

The same sound of CHILDREN playing, loud and immediate now: kids in the school playground. GRACE sits on the school steps, watching them. Feeling someone watching her, she turns.

Dwight stands a few feet away.

DWIGHT
Sorry...
(beat)
Waiting for somebody?

GRACE
My daughter. She's in third grade.

DWIGHT
My son's in fifth.

GRACE
My son would have been in fifth.

DWIGHT
I know.

His answer gets her attention; her focus on him sharpens.

GRACE
What's your son's name?

DWIGHT
Sam. Sam Arno.

GRACE
I know Sam.
(beat)
Then your wife must be Ruth Wheldon. She teaches Emma piano.

DWIGHT

Ex.

GRACE

What?

DWIGHT

She's my ex-wife.

GRACE

Oh.

A silence, starting to turn awkward.

DWIGHT

Well, I'd better be getting back to work. Nice meeting you.

She watches him walk too quickly to his car.

INT. CORSICA

Dwight drives out of the school parking lot.

INT. CUTTER AND TROPE - A LITTLE LATER

Donna's filing something behind her desk when Dwight enters.

DONNA

Mr. Learner's in your office.

Dwight stops short.

DWIGHT

What?

DONNA

He showed up about twenty minutes ago. Jack had a one o'clock with the dentist and said you'd know what to do.

INT. DWIGHT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ethan leans over the desk, looking at the pictures of Sam.

Dwight enters.

DWIGHT

Mr. Learner. What can I do for you?

ETHAN
They've given up.

Dwight takes this in. For some reason it doesn't make him feel better.

DWIGHT
Your son's case?

ETHAN
Re-prioritized.

DWIGHT
I'm sorry.

ETHAN
That's exactly what Burke said.

DWIGHT
He didn't mean it as much as I do.

ETHAN
Your colleague talked about help on the other end, after the police did their job. Well now they're not going to do their job.
(beat)
I'm asking you for help.

DWIGHT
Look, Mr. Learner. You want the truth? I'm a two-bit, blue-collar attorney who couldn't cut it in the big city. You're a professor with a nice house and a beautiful wife and daughter. Go back to your family. Live your life.

ETHAN
You're from this area. You know people. Talk to them. Help me find the man who killed my son.

A long moment. The two men look at each other. The tension in the room thick and strange, but only Dwight really knows why.

DWIGHT
All right. I'll see what I can do.
But don't expect much.

ETHAN
Thank you.

Ethan leaves. Dwight shuts the door and stands by the window.

In a few moments he sees Ethan get into his car and drive away.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - DEN - LATE NIGHT

Surrounded by empty beer cans, Dwight watches ESPN with the sound muted. He can't sleep.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - ETHAN'S STUDY - SAME TIME

Ethan lies on the sofa, unable to sleep. Finally, he gets up.

INT. VOLVO - LATER

Ethan's face lit by the dashboard lights.

EXT. SALISBURY - NIGHT

The Volvo passes through town, everything shuttered and dark.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

A road SIGN points the way to MOUNT RIGA.

The Volvo turns onto a narrow road that winds up through forest.

EXT. MOUNT RIGA - NIGHT

A dirt road now, ending at a drawn wooden GATE. The Volvo's headlights the only illumination.

We're in a summer colony, boarded up for the winter.

Ethan parks, gets out, his breath steaming the cold night. He switches on a flashlight and walks around the gate, onto a dirt path.

A shuttered-up wooden CABIN, behind it the gleaming black surface of a LAKE. Then two more cabins, shuttered like the first.

Ethan walks around to the lake side of the fourth cabin, opens a rusted beach chair on the back porch and sits down, switching off the flashlight. In the darkness his breath steams.

Out in the middle of the lake sits a white DIVING FLOAT.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAYBREAK

Gray light. Ethan undresses and slips into bed next to Grace.

Her eyes are open; she's been waiting for him.

GRACE
You're freezing.

She slides closer to him and lays her head on his chest. He holds her tightly.

They lie without speaking for a while.

ETHAN
I'm losing him, Grace.

She tightens her grip on him, as if to bring him back.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I went up to the lake.

She isn't surprised; somehow she knew this.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
The cabin was locked. The lake was so black... The white float in the middle...

He pauses, seeing it all again.

ETHAN
All those dives he used to make. Remember? Whole days on that float. Just diving, climbing out, diving again. He couldn't get enough.
(beat)
I can see his shoulders... The way the sunlight looked on his wet skin... My God, he was beautiful. Full of hope. He thought the rest of life was there just to get the dive right.

Silence. Grace lifts her head, looks down at Ethan, kisses him on the mouth. He kisses her back. They make love with a tenderness we've never seen between them.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - DEN - SAME TIME

Dwight sleeps fitfully on the sofa, twitching with bad dreams.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Ethan pulls on a sweater, pauses to watch Grace sleeping.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The Volvo passes a sign for "Live Turkeys."

INT. VOLVO

Sallie's head rests on Emma's lap. Emma strokes the soft muzzle. Ethan, driving, watches them in the rearview mirror.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A green MAILBOX with ducks painted on it. The car turns into the driveway and parks.

INT. VOLVO

Ethan hands her her music books.

ETHAN

I'll be here when you're done.

EMMA

Dad?

ETHAN

What?

EMMA

Is Mom sick?

ETHAN

No. She's not sick.

EMMA

But she's not okay.

ETHAN

She's better.

EMMA

Are you better?

ETHAN

I'm working on it. How about you?

EMMA

I don't want to get better.

ETHAN

I know, Pumpkin. But I want you to anyway. For Josh. Okay?

EMMA

Okay.

(beat)

Sallie, stay.

She gets out. Ethan watches her stop and come back to his window.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You forgot to bring a book. For waiting.

Moved, he watches her go into the house. Then he gets out of the car.

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Coming out of the house in a yellow-and-green golf sweater, Norris Wheldon spots Ethan and waves.

NORRIS

Hi there!

The last thing Ethan wants. He opens the back door and Sallie trots over to the bushes where Norris is standing, and has a long pee.

NORRIS

He sure needed to go.

ETHAN

He's a she. Morning, Mr. Wheldon.

NORRIS

Norris. You're Ethan, right? Ruth thinks your little girl in there is something special. You must be darn glad to have her.

Wanting to escape, Ethan calls Sallie to his side.

NORRIS (CONT'D)

You're an English professor, Ethan? That's what Ruth told me. I'm in insurance myself.

Ethan opens the car door and calls his dog.

ETHAN
Here, Sallie!

Norris is undeterred.

NORRIS
Hold on there, Eth! Why don't you
come up and sit on the porch? I
won't bother you. I promised Ruth
I'd do a little lawn care before
golf.

Ethan looks at him. It's easier just to agree.

ETHAN
Thanks.

Ethan walks up to the porch and sits down on a rocking chair.
Sallie follows and lies near his feet. Norris shoots a
thumbs-up sign and picks up a rake.

CLOSE on Ethan in the rocking chair, eyelids starting to
droop.

The sound of RAKING...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE - HALF AN HOUR LATER

The RAKING joined now by Emma's PIANO-playing coming from
inside the house.

Ethan is still sitting on the porch, but asleep. Sallie
still at his feet.

Ethan opens his eyes. SAM stands a few feet away.

SAM
What's your dog's name?

ETHAN
(groggy)
Sallie.

Norris - leaning on the rake, face shining with sweat - calls
over cheerfully.

NORRIS
Took a little snooze, didya Ethan?

Ethan doesn't answer, and Norris takes up his rake again.

SAM
(low, to Ethan)
He's not my *real* dad.

ETHAN
Your parents are divorced?

Sam nods, watching Sallie, who sits up in anticipation.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Go ahead, you can pet her if you
want.

Sam approaches carefully. As he talks he strokes Sallie's head.

SAM
My dad drove over this dog during
the summer. It was an accident.

Ethan, still shrugging off his sleep, doesn't know what to say to this.

SAM (CONT'D)
It was August. Sunday. I remember
'cause we were coming back from
Fenway and Papi beat the Yanks with
a homer.

ETHAN
Was the dog killed?

SAM
Yeah, but I didn't see it 'cause I
was asleep. My dad told me about
it after.

A moment. Ethan's on the verge of making some mental connection, but he can't quite get there.

Sam stops petting Sallie, and looks up at him.

SAM
Are you Josh's dad?

His question distracts Ethan, breaks his train of thought.

ETHAN
Yes, Sam, I was.

SAM
Are you still sad?

ETHAN
I'll always be sad.

SAM
Till you die?

ETHAN
All my life.

The sound of a CAR turning into the driveway. Both Sam and Ethan look over. Norris stops raking and looks over too, frowning.

It's Dwight's CORSICA. Dwight gets out and waves to Sam.

DWIGHT
Hey Sam!

Suddenly seeing who's sitting on the porch with Sam, Dwight stops in his tracks.

SAM
(to Ethan)
My dad's here.

ETHAN
I know your dad.

Ethan follows Sam over to the Corsica. Dwight seems momentarily paralyzed.

SAM
Hey Dad, Mr. Learner says he knows you.

DWIGHT
What? Yeah, sure, we know each other a little.
(to Ethan)
Didn't expect to see you here.

ETHAN
Daughter's piano lesson.

DWIGHT
Afraid we're gonna have to hit the road. In the car, Sam.

Sam gets in the car. So does Dwight. Ethan speaks to him through the open window.

ETHAN
Have you had any chance...

DWIGHT
(interrupting)
Not yet. But I'll let you know.

Dwight starts the engine and pulls out smartly. Ethan watches them go.

Norris comes over.

NORRIS
You two friends?

ETHAN
No.

NORRIS
Enemies?

Ethan shakes his head.

NORRIS (CONT'D)
Dwight's got what we insurance
fellas would call a sketchy
relationship with the truth.

ETHAN
So? Why tell me?

NORRIS
Just letting you know.
(checks his watch)
Well, I've got a noon tee-off time
at the club. Nice meeting you,
Ethan. You take care now.

Norris winks at him and walks off toward the house.

INT. CORSICA - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Dwight drives, tense but trying to conceal it.

DWIGHT
So you know Mr. Learner?

SAM
Kinda.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
Yeah? What'd you guys talk about?

SAM

Dunno.

DWIGHT

Don't know, huh?

Sam shrugs.

SAM

Dogs.

DWIGHT

Dogs?

SAM

Can I have a dog like his dog?

Relieved, Dwight switches on the radio.

DWIGHT

One day.

EXT. CHATHAM FAIR - THAT AFTERNOON

Games and booths and rides and food, people milling around. The sky's turned gray and cold.

Dwight comes back from a food stand carrying two corn dogs slathered with mustard. He hands one to Sam.

DWIGHT

One corn dog heavy mustard for the man who knows what he likes. You want some onion rings with that?

Sam takes a bite, shakes his head.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)

What would your mother say if she saw you chowing down like this?

Sam takes another bite, mouth crammed full.

SAM

Mom says hot dogs aren't even really meat.

DWIGHT

Not really meat! That's a pretty serious allegation against an innocent foodstuff adored by millions.

(MORE)

DWIGHT (cont'd)
Well, all I can say is I hope she's
got the proof to back it up.

SAM
What's *allegation*?

DWIGHT
(serious)
It means don't ever become a
lawyer, Sam. Follow your heart.

Sam looks at him skeptically, lips covered with mustard.
Love wells up in Dwight and he can't help himself: he plants
a kiss on Sam's head and laughs.

EXT. CHATHAM FAIR - LATER

Dwight and Sam on the FERRIS WHEEL, Dwight's arm around Sam's
shoulders, Sam holding a stalk of cotton candy.

INT. CORSICA - DUSK

Driving back. The sky outside starting to look like winter.
Dwight switches on the RADIO, surfs through a couple of heavy
metal and hip-hop stations, then gives up.

DWIGHT
Used to be about ten good country
stations. Now you can't even find
one.

SAM
That's old country, Dad. Now
there's new country.

DWIGHT
New country?

Sam rolls his eyes. Out the window the SIGN marking the
Connecticut state line goes by. Ahead, the small green SIGN
for RESERVATION ROAD appears.

SAM
It's even worse than old country.

Dwight smiles, and takes the turn onto Reservation Road
without thinking.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - DUSK

The Corsica runs along the blacktop.

INT. CORSICA

Sam looks out the window at the woods going by, the dark road.

CLOSE on DWIGHT: suddenly aware of where he is and what he's just done - just as the car approaches the two turns leading to Tod's gas station.

He pulls his foot off the gas and the Corsica slows sharply entering the second turn. The car comes out almost coasting, the GAS STATION on the right.

Sam sits up.

SAM

This is where we hit that dog.

Dwight stares straight ahead.

SAM (CONT'D)

Right, Dad? The black dog. This is where we killed it.

DWIGHT

(sharp)

I killed it. Not you. Don't you forget that.

Dwight puts his foot to the gas and the car SPEEDS out of the clearing, leaving Tod's station behind.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - DUSK

The roadside: fallen leaves scatter as the Corsica speeds by.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - THAT NIGHT

Dwight stands at the counter, a glass and a half-empty bottle of Jack Daniels within reach.

He pours himself a shot - not his first of the evening - and throws it back.

He reaches for the garage-door opener, pushes the button: through the kitchen window he watches the garage light come on and the door going up.

A moment. Then he pushes the button again and watches the door close and the light go out.

He pours himself another shot and drinks it down. Picks up the phone and dials.

Someone answers. We hear the TV first. Then:

RUTH (O.S.)
Hello?

DWIGHT
Ruth, it's me.

INT. WHELDON HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ruth sitting at her kitchen table with a bowl of ice cream, watching a TV in the corner of the room. She picks up the remote and MUTES the show.

RUTH
Dwight?

DWIGHT (O.S.)
Least you remember my voice.

RUTH
I read in some magazine that hearing an old lover's voice is like having sex without the headache.

DWIGHT (O.S.)
I wasn't your lover, I was your husband. Where's Norris?

Ruth's eyes land on a PHOTOGRAPH of her and Norris and Sam.

RUTH
Can't say I appreciate your transitions. It's his bowling night, if you want to know.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dwight at the counter, silent.

RUTH (O.S.)
What's on your mind, Dwight?

DWIGHT
Nothing.

RUTH (O.S.)
You mean you're just calling me out of the blue because everything's hunky-dory over on your end?

Dwight pours himself another shot.

DWIGHT
Actually, yeah. Hunky-dory.

RUTH (O.S.)
Are you drinking?

He drinks it down.

DWIGHT
Not really.

RUTH (O.S.)
For God's sake, Dwight.

DWIGHT
Might as well just leave God out of it. My business never was his business. And vice-versa.

RUTH (O.S.)
Sometimes I don't know why I even bother... Good night, Dwight.

DWIGHT
I need to tell you something, Ruth.

RUTH (O.S.)
Why's my heart starting to sink all of a sudden?

DWIGHT
It's all backwards.

RUTH (O.S.)
What is?

DWIGHT
Things that should go good, go bad.
Things that should go bad, go good.
It's all backwards.

RUTH (O.S.)
What are you talking about, Dwight?

DWIGHT
(backing off)
I don't know. Forget it.

RUTH (O.S.)
You made a mistake and you paid for it in a whole lot of ways. You know it and I know it.

CLOSE on Dwight: he knows he hasn't paid anywhere near enough.

DWIGHT
I just wish I could do it all
differently. Go back in time
somehow, see it clear, get it right
the first time. Not hurt anybody.
(beat)
But I guess that's just wishful
thinking. Like I'm talking about
somebody else.

Silence...

INT. WHELDON HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

... Continues as Ruth thinks about what he's just said. Her eyes come to rest on the photograph of her and Norris and Sam.

RUTH
Good night, Dwight.

She hangs up the phone. Sits thinking.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Dwight at the counter, still holding the phone. He sets it down and pours himself another shot.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

A stiff, cold breeze blows leaves across Pine Creek Road and into the Learners' front yard.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - KITCHEN

Ethan sits alone at the table, rubbing the ARROWHEAD with his thumb. A mug of coffee in front of him.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - LATER THAT MORNING

Ethan and Emma wait for the school bus. A dark blue SUV driven by a gray-haired man passes the house. Ethan watches it go up the road and disappear around a bend. Where the SUV just was, a yellow school bus appears.

He hands Emma her backpack.

ETHAN
Here's the bus.

EMMA
(out of the blue)
Can I stop playing the piano?

A moment. He looks at her tenderly.

ETHAN
We'll talk about it later with your
mother. Okay?

EMMA
Okay.

The bus pulls to a stop in front of them. The doors open.

Ethan kisses her.

ETHAN
Love you.

EMMA
Love you, too.

She climbs on the bus and takes a seat. The BUS DRIVER nods at Ethan. The doors close and the bus starts to move.

Ethan sees him then, sitting at the back the bus: SAM ARNO, waving at him. Ethan waves back, CALLING OUT - but the bus has already pulled away.

ETHAN
Hey Sam!

Ethan stands there, hand half-raised, watching the bus until it disappears.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - FRONT HALL

Ethan enters, looking preoccupied. He hears Grace taking a shower upstairs.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - ETHAN'S STUDY

Still preoccupied, he stuffs his briefcase with papers and books. On a blank sheet of PAPER he writes "Grace," - then pauses to think. Scrawls "Class today. Back for dinner. Love, E." And goes out.

INT. VOLVO

Still preoccupied, Ethan drives.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Again we see SAM in the window of the departing school bus. Ethan waving and CALLING OUT.

ETHAN

Hey Sam!

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Again we see SAM on the porch, petting Sallie.

ETHAN

Was the dog killed?

SAM

Yeah, but I didn't see it 'cause I was asleep. My dad told me about it after.

Sam's head turns, and again we see DWIGHT, hand raised in greeting, standing in front of the Corsica in the driveway.

DWIGHT

Hey Sam!

INT. VOLVO - PRESENT

Ethan drives, VOICES merging in his head - his own and Dwight's:

ETHAN

Hey Sam!

DWIGHT

Hey Sam!

INT. VOLVO - PRESENT

Consumed, Ethan drives without thinking.

EXT. TOD'S GAS STATION - NIGHT - FLASHBACK.

The ACCIDENT unfolds again with horrible clarity:

The EXPLORER appears from nowhere. Dwight's half-shadowed FACE turns and looks out from behind the wheel of the speeding car. We follow the single headlight beam as it locks on JOSH. We see his head jerk up, his mouth soundlessly drop open...

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - PRESENT

The Volvo speeds down the road.

INT. VOLVO

The SQUEAL of tires snaps Ethan back to the present. He realizes where he is just as a clearing opens on the left and TOD'S gas station appears.

He cuts the wheel hard to the left.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Volvo SKIDS across the blacktop, just missing one of the gas pumps, and comes to a halt with the engine running. The door opens and Ethan stumbles from the car, looking as if he's going to be sick.

EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The Explorer coasting after the accident, seen from the back: Dwight's face in silhouette as he leans toward the passenger side, his VOICE escaping through the open window.

DWIGHT

SAM!

A moment later the car ACCELERATES. Then it's gone from the clearing, swallowed up by the trees.

EXT. TOD'S GAS STATION - PRESENT

Ethan with his hands on his knees, breathing hard. Staring up the road at the place where the Explorer disappeared.

He knows now; he knows. And the knowledge fills him with grim purpose.

Little BELLS. The STATION ATTENDANT steps out of the office.

STATION ATTENDANT

Hey Ethan, you okay?

Ethan doesn't seem to hear him.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EARLY THAT EVENING

The RADIO on. A beer open on the counter. Two HOT DOGS cooking in the frying pan.

Fork in hand, Dwight stands in front of the stove, staring at the window, on which his reflection floats like a ghost. As if he's having a premonition.

Suddenly he switches off the burner and grabs his coat.

EXT. WHELDON HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - A LITTLE LATER

A wintry night. Dwight's Corsica sits next to Ruth's minivan and two other cars in the Wheldons' driveway. Dwight can hear CONVERSATION and LAUGHTER coming from inside the house. He KNOCKS on the door.

Norris opens the door wearing a green blazer and a yellow button-down. His smile evaporates when he sees who it is.

NORRIS
Hey Dwight.

DWIGHT
Norris, listen. I'd like to talk to Ruth. Can you get her for me?

NORRIS
She's kinda busy just now.

DWIGHT
It's important. I wouldn't be here otherwise.

NORRIS
Actually, we're in the middle of a little shindig. Just a couple of my clients-

Norris stops talking and looks down. Dwight has two fistfuls of his jacket.

DWIGHT
Listen carefully to me, Norris. I want to talk to Ruth. Okay?

NORRIS
Okay, Dwight, I get your point.

Dwight releases him.

NORRIS (CONT'D)
But I think you should know that I don't appreciate this. I may hold it against you, in fact. A man shouldn't be threatened by another man in his own home.

DWIGHT
In principle I agree with you.

RUTH (O.S.)
(from inside the house)
Norris, who's that you're talking
to?

NORRIS
Nobody, honey!

In a moment we hear the sound of HEELS walking toward the door.

NORRIS
(low, to Dwight)
Now you've done it.

RUTH (O.S.)
Norris...

Ruth appears at the door beside Norris. She's wearing a bright blue dress, a purple shawl and high heels.

RUTH
Evening, Dwight.

DWIGHT
Ruth, can I talk to you for a
minute?

RUTH
We've got people over.

NORRIS
I told him.

DWIGHT
(sardonic)
Right. The shindig.

NORRIS
You can mock me all you want,
Dwight. But you still have a big
problem with the truth. And I know
it.

Dwight takes a step toward Norris.

DWIGHT
What'd you say?

Norris takes a quick side-step behind Ruth.

RUTH
(annoyed)
Grow up, both of you. Dwight, you
want to talk to me, you can talk on
Sunday like usual.

DWIGHT
I was thinking maybe Sam could stay
at my place tonight.

RUTH
Sorry.

DWIGHT
I really want to see him, Ruth. It
would mean a lot to me.

A moment. Ruth looks at him, touched by something honest and
tender in his voice.

RUTH
Norris, you better go back to our
guests.

Norris starts to object but she silences him with a peck on
the cheek.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Don't worry about me. He's not so
tough.

NORRIS
(not so sure about that)
All right...

He goes back inside, and Ruth steps out onto the porch. It's
cold and she rubs her arms.

DWIGHT
You want my coat?

She looks at him. Not the look he expected, but a long,
direct, knowing look that unsettles him. She reaches out and
touches his cheek.

RUTH
I hope one day you'll remember how
tonight I never asked you what kind
of trouble you're in.

DWIGHT
I'm not in any trouble.

She pins him with her skeptical look.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
(softly)
I'll remember.

She rubs her arms again. Dwight takes off his coat and slips it around her shoulders.

RUTH
Thanks.

DWIGHT
I miss you, Ruth. I miss my family.

She turns and stares out at the night. It's begun to SNOW.

RUTH
You know, I remember waking up every morning believing you were going to change.

DWIGHT
You know I'm sorry.

A moment. She hands him his coat back.

RUTH
Okay, Dwight. He can spend tonight at your place. Just make sure you get him to school on time in the morning.

She kisses him on the mouth. And then she goes inside, leaving him alone on the porch.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - LATER

Ethan stands alone outside Emma's room, thoughts and feelings barely in control. He takes a deep breath before entering.

INT. EMMA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Emma's in her pajamas under the covers. Ethan sits down on the edge of the bed.

ETHAN
Sleepy?

EMMA
Not yet.

ETHAN

Well, try. Close your eyes.

Her eyes remain open, looking at him.

EMMA

Will you tell me a goodnight story?

ETHAN

Not tonight.

EMMA

Please.

Ethan tries to think clearly, but tonight it's hard. He starts slowly.

ETHAN

Okay.

(beat)

Once upon a time there was a man...
He was silly... But he had a
beautiful daughter...

EMMA

(certain)

And she had a brother.

ETHAN

(taken aback)

Yes.

EMMA

And what happened?

ETHAN

Well, one day the man ran into a
goat on a bridge. The goat put a
spell on him. After that, he could
never go to sleep before his
daughter did. He had to stay up
till he was sure she was asleep.
That was the spell.

EMMA

Is that what made him silly?

ETHAN

Very silly.

EMMA

What else?

ETHAN
Nothing. That's the end.

EMMA
That's a really bad story.

ETHAN
You're right. Now it's time for
bed.

Ethan places his hands over Emma's hands. He looks on the
verge of tears.

EMMA
Dad, your hands are shaking.

ETHAN
I must be tired.

EMMA
Time for bed.

Ethan tries to smile.

ETHAN
Good night, Pumpkin. Don't ever
forget how much I love you.

EMMA
I love you too, Dad.

She closes her eyes. He kisses her and gets up and turns out
the light.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He leaves Emma's door open a few inches. Grace stands in the
hallway, dressed in her nightgown.

GRACE
Are you coming to bed?

ETHAN
A little later. I've got some work
to do. You probably shouldn't
bother waiting up.

She studies him for a long moment.

GRACE
Good night.

He goes to her, takes her face in his hands and kisses her passionately on the mouth. Surprising her.

ETHAN
Good night, Grace.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Dwight stands in the hallway outside the two bedrooms, looking into the bathroom. Sam, on a footstool in his pajamas, brushes his teeth at the sink.

A televised Bruins HOCKEY game plays in the background.

DWIGHT
That toothpaste okay for you?

Mouth full of toothpaste, Sam says something inaudible.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
What?

Sam grins at Dwight in the mirror, spits into the sink.

SAM
Tastes kinda like bananas.

DWIGHT
Bananas?

SAM
Bananas.

Dwight laughs, and Sam rinses his mouth.

After a moment Dwight turns and goes into the den. By himself he looks nervous but happy. He sits down on the sofa and stares at the figures skating back and forth on TV.

Snow falls thickly outside the window.

Sam enters the room. He stands looking at the TV. Then he sits down next to Dwight on the sofa, and leans back against him to watch the game.

A rare look of peacefulness comes over Dwight. He puts his arm around his son.

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - LATER

Snow in the air, on the ground. The house dark except for Ethan's STUDY.

Through the frosted windowpanes we see him back at his desk, rubbing Josh's ARROWHEAD.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - ATTIC - SAME TIME

The light of a bare bulb. Keys hanging on a nail high on the wall. Ethan finds the key he's looking for and unlocks his father's Army trunk. Opens it.

Inside a moth-eaten Army blanket; a mess kit; a cracked leather valet filled with tarnished medals. And another BOX, dented metal.

Ethan opens it.

INT. LEARNER HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - LATE THAT NIGHT

The room glows faintly from the snow falling outside. Grace sleeps. Ethan's side of the bed is empty.

Somewhere outside a CAR starts, and the engine warms. Grace's eyes blink open. She hears the car roll out of the driveway, the sound muffled by the snow.

She reaches the window in time to see the Volvo's taillights receding up the road.

EMMA (O.S.)
(frightened and sleepy)
Mom!

Emma's voice startles Grace. She turns.

INT. EMMA'S ROOM

The same oddly glowing darkness. Grace finds Emma sitting up in bed, startled and frightened.

GRACE
I'm here, darling.

She sits on the edge of the bed.

EMMA
I was having a bad dream.

Grace hugs her.

GRACE
It's over now.

Over Emma's shoulder Grace watches the snow falling outside the window. She can feel Ethan in trouble somehow, somewhere.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - DEN - DAYBREAK

Just before daylight, snow still falls outside the window.

Dwight wakes on the sofa, and sits up slowly.

ETHAN stands across the room, his father's old Army-issue GUN pointed at Dwight.

DWIGHT
Mr. Learner...

ETHAN
Be quiet.

Passing in front of a window, Ethan's glasses turn to silver dollars, then go gray again. He stops a few feet away, the pistol pointed at Dwight's chest. His movements are awkward, unpracticed, his voice comes out low and tense.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Get up.
(beat)
Slowly.

Dwight stands slowly, eyes never leaving the gun. He's bigger and stronger than Ethan - they both notice this.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Where's your coat?

DWIGHT
By the door.

ETHAN
Let's go get it.

Dwight's eyes dart to the back of the house: *Sam*. He's got to get Ethan away from the house. Carefully he moves past Ethan to the front door. Ethan's right behind him. On the coat hook are two winter coats, a man's and a boy's.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Put it on.

Dwight takes his parka off the coat hook and puts it on. With his left hand Ethan reaches out and awkwardly frisks Dwight's pockets.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Okay, outside.

Dwight puts his hand on the door knob...

As suddenly Sam CALLS OUT from the other end of the house.

SAM (O.S.)
Dad!

Both men FREEZE.

ETHAN
(panicked whisper)
Who's that?

Dwight doesn't answer. Ethan jams the gun hard into his back.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Who is it?

DWIGHT
(reluctantly)
My son. In his room.

ETHAN
Your son? Oh Christ.

DWIGHT
He's just a kid. He doesn't know anything.

A long beat. Ethan seems paralyzed, beads of sweat on his face.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
Let me go talk to him.

ETHAN
No.

SAM (O.S.)
Dad!

DWIGHT
Look, if I don't go in he'll come out.

ETHAN
All right.

Gun hard in Dwight's spine, Ethan marches him across the living room and into the hallway, stopping just short of Sam's bedroom. Dwight removes his parka before going in.

INT. SAM'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dwight enters. Behind him the doorway appears empty, but we know Ethan's there.

Sam - hair mussed, eyes still thick with sleep - sits in bed in his pajamas, the covers kicked off.

DWIGHT
(trying to sound normal)
Hey, Sport.

SAM
What time's it?

DWIGHT
Too early for you to be asking. Go
back to sleep.

SAM
I heard voices.

Dwight glances at the doorway. The front half of Ethan's right SHOE just visible.

DWIGHT
Must've been the TV.

Sam seems to accept this answer.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
Now scoot under those covers and go
back to sleep. Okay?

Sam nods, and Dwight lifts the covers from the bottom of the bed and tucks him in. Kisses him tenderly.

SAM
Dad?

DWIGHT
Yeah?

SAM
Can we go sledding later?

DWIGHT
Sure we can. Now get some sleep.

He gets up. At the door he stops.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
You're the best thing that ever
happened to me, Sam.

He steps out into the hallway and shuts the door behind him.

Ethan's there, holding the gun; looking more unsure than ever.

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - DAYBREAK

Snow falling. Dwight walks up the plowed road, Ethan right behind him with the gun.

They come to the Volvo. The walk seems to have braced Ethan a little, strengthened him. He opens both doors on the driver's side and steps back, gun pointed at Dwight.

ETHAN
Put your gloves on and get in
front.

A last glance back at the house, Dwight does as he's told. Checks for the keys, but they're not there. His door closes.

Ethan gets in back. The gun appears again at the back of Dwight's head; keys land in his lap.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Now drive.

Snow falls on the windshield, whiting out the picture.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EARLY MORNING

The Volvo's headlights push through the falling snow. The windshield wipers work back and forth.

INT. VOLVO

Windshield wipers. Dwight drives with the gun at the back of his head. Checks the rearview mirror: just Ethan's half-shadowed face, mist climbing the lenses of his glasses.

Dwight looks ahead again: a SNOWPLOW clearing the road. He slows down right behind it, but Ethan presses the gun against the back of his head and Dwight eases off the gas.

The truck pulls ahead, turning off to the right. Dwight can only watch it go.

EXT. SALISBURY

The town blanketed with snow, still asleep. The Volvo passes through alone.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD

The Volvo approaches the SIGN for Mount Riga.

INT. VOLVO

The SIGN seen through the windshield wipers.

ETHAN
Turn right up here.

EXT. MOUNT RIGA

The Volvo climbs the barely plowed road up the mountain.

EXT. MOUNT RIGA

And pulls up to the wooden gate and stops.

Ethan gets out. He opens the driver's door and levels the gun at Dwight.

ETHAN
Leave the keys.

Dwight gets out. Ethan points past him with the gun.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
That way.

They walk around the gate.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Stop.

Ethan hesitates, the path is whited-out with snow. He tries to orient himself. Dwight looks around too.

Snow covers the roof of the COTTAGE nearby and the tops of the trees. The LAKE is black, snowflakes dissolving into it. The white DIVING FLOAT sits on the water.

Ethan finds the path.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Move.

Two more cottages. They come to the fourth cottage, right on the lake, snow-covered like the rest.

Crudely carved above the front door is the name HYACINTH. For a long moment Ethan stands staring at it, a talisman from happier times in the past. It helps to decide him, give him the necessary courage.

He aims the gun at Dwight's chest.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Walk around the side of the cabin.

Dwight looks at him. He lowers his head and starts to walk.

Ethan follows right behind, staring at Dwight's back.

Just ahead a tree ROOT pokes out of the snow. Dwight sees it, but Ethan doesn't.

Halfway around the cabin, Ethan's foot CATCHES on the root. He STUMBLES forward.

For Dwight it's pure instinct: his elbow jumps back and SMASHES Ethan in the face.

Ethan crumples to the ground.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOUNT RIGA

Snow falls on the diving float in the black lake.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOUNT RIGA

Ethan on his knees in the snow, groaning softly, hands covering his bleeding, broken nose. His glasses on the ground in front of him.

The GUN lies in the snow three feet away. Dwight picks it up and slips it into his coat pocket. He steps around Ethan and starts walking back along the path.

Ten yards away he stops.

CLOSE on him listening, hearing it: a man WEEPING. Finally he turns around:

ETHAN is on his knees in the blood-splattered snow, his face buried in his hands. Weeping.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOUNT RIGA

CLOSE on Ethan, silent now, spent, still bent over. The sound of FOOTSTEPS approaching. They stop close by.

With great effort he raises his head. Dwight appears BLURRED to him, edged in white.

DWIGHT
Take these.

A gloved HAND comes near, breaking through the haze. Holding a pair of GLASSES.

Ethan takes them and puts them on, struggling to fit them over his broken nose. Sharp BREATHS through his mouth.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
I was going to leave you.

Dwight reaches into his pocket, pulls out the gun. Ethan just stares at it.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
But I already ran once. And that didn't solve anything.

Dwight lets the gun drop onto the snow between them. Ethan doesn't move.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
You know my son. Sam's ten years old, just like your boy was. It doesn't seem fair to you, and it's not.

The snow continues to fall and Dwight's breath ghosts in the cold.

DWIGHT (CONT'D)
And it's not fair that I've been a pretty lousy father to Sam, failed him a hundred different ways, while you were a good father to your son. I don't know you, but I know you were a good father to him. And I know it's not fair. It's not right.

ETHAN

You took his life like it was nothing. And then you went on with your own as if you had the right.

DWIGHT

I was afraid of losing Sam.

ETHAN

That's not good enough.

Ethan picks up the gun. Slowly he gets to his feet. He pulls back the hammer and levels the barrel at Dwight's chest, his finger braced against the trigger.

Dwight stands motionless. He seems almost resigned, waiting.

Suddenly a GUNSHOT shatters the quiet, echoing across the lake and through the snow-covered trees.

That sound is followed by a gut-wrenching SHOUT of inarticulate rage and pain. This, too, echoes over the lake and through the trees, and then dies.

And now we're with Ethan again, his chest heaving, his arm shaking, the gun pointed sharply away from Dwight.

Now on Dwight - alive, unharmed, realizing that Ethan has spared him.

A long silence. The snow falling, but the mood somehow different now - cathartic.

Ethan stares at the lake, the diving float, his mind travelling back to another time and place.

When he finally speaks, it's almost to himself.

ETHAN

His favorite color was dark green.

It takes Dwight a moment to understand what's been said to him. And then another to respond in kind - father to father.

DWIGHT

Sam's is light blue.

ETHAN

Josh loved turtles. How hard they try and how private they are. He loved the sound of woodpeckers...

(a small, sad smile)

(MORE)

ETHAN (cont'd)
He said they understood
counterpoint.

DWIGHT
For Sam it's salamanders.
Abandoned train tracks. The inside
of baseballs.

ETHAN
Tidal pools.

DWIGHT
(agreeing)
Yeah. Tidal pools.

Ethan turns and looks Dwight in the eye. A long moment.
He puts the gun in his pocket.

ETHAN
Go back to Sam. Go back to your
son.

Understanding washes over Dwight. And then something more...

DWIGHT
I'm sorry.

Ethan stands waiting for him to start walking back along the
path.

Finally Dwight does, and with a last look at the diving
float, Ethan follows him.

INT. VOLVO - A LITTLE LATER

The two men ride in silence.

EXT. VOLVO

Ethan pulls up in front of Dwight's house.

INT. VOLVO

Dwight gets out of the car. He leans both hands against the
closed door and looks through the snow-streaked window at
Ethan.

The two men hold each other's gaze: a moment of profound,
tragic recognition.

EXT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ethan watches Dwight walk to his house and let himself in.

INT. DWIGHT'S HOUSE - DEN

Dwight enters, still in his coat, his hair wet with snow.

Sam sits on the sofa in his pajamas, watching TV.

SAM
Where were you?

Seeing his son, Dwight is speechless. Overcome. He gets down on his knees in front of the sofa, buries his face against Sam, and starts to SOB uncontrollably. The dam has finally broken, and the feelings just come pouring out of him as if they might never stop.

SAM (CONT'D)
(alarmed)
What's the matter, Dad? Dad,
what's the matter?

EXT. LEARNER HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The Volvo in the driveway, engine still running.

INT. VOLVO - CONTINUOUS

Ethan behind the wheel, Josh's ARROWHEAD in his hand. On the radio, an exquisite, heartbreaking VIOLIN CONCERTO plays softly. He seems unable to move.

His door is pulled open.

INT./EXT. VOLVO - CONTINUOUS

Grace reaches into the car and turns off the engine. Gently she takes the arrowhead from him. A sharp intake of breath as she registers his broken, bloodied nose. Then she gets control of herself, and holds out her hand.

GRACE
Emma's been asking for you. Come
inside now, and we'll get you fixed
up.

Ethan gets out of the car. They walk to the house side by side, leaning into each other.

Before opening the door, Grace turns and looks up at the sky.

GRACE (CONT'D)
The blizzard's stopped.

They go inside. The door closes. The house sits bathed in the first, unexpected rays of sunlight.

THE END