

THE YEAR OF WONDERS

An Original Screenplay

By

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OVER BLACK:

The following handwritten words appear -

"We carry within us  
all the wonders we seek without us..."

- Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682)

And then -

"There are numerous wonders in the world, but none more  
wonderful than man..."

- Sophocles (495-406 B.C.)

The WORDS FADE, as a final quote appears -

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

- Louella Stone (1989 - Still Here)

SOUND UNDER: Pages TURNED. A slow, but steady pace. And then a VOICE. Female. Young. Unbelievably poised -

LOU'S VOICE

Do we choose the lives we live?  
(silence, then really thinking  
about it, before - )  
Or do you think we end up living the  
lives we've chosen?

And we FADE IN ON:

A MAP OF THE WORLD. One of those old, ornate ones from your grandfather's house. Colorful, larger than life illustrations. We're MOVING over the United States -

LOU'S VOICE

Everyone still says he just went crazy.  
That the pain - just got the best of him.

Over the ATLANTIC OCEAN now - and out towards EUROPE, ASIA, the REST OF THE WORLD, as we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

OTHER IMAGES FROM THE SCRAPBOOK. A collage of photographic cut-outs mixed with doodled, hand-drawings. AN ANCIENT CITY WITH A GLORIOUS GARDEN SET ATOP MARBLED COLUMNS.

LOU'S VOICE

Anne still calls it the "incident." And Brad, well, he just has this strange smile whenever he remembers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A SPECTACULAR WATERFALL IN THE MIDST OF SOME FORGOTTEN LAND.

LOU'S VOICE

But to me, in spite of everything that  
led up to it -

AN ENORMOUS MOUNTAIN. Stretching high above the clouds and  
right up and into the heavens -

LOU'S VOICE

- and everything that came after - even  
now, looking back -

A WINDING, WILD RIVER. Twisting. Turning. We're following  
its path through the immense jungle, as -

The page turns to the last one in the SCRAPBOOK - BLANK.  
WHITE. An empty canvass...

LOU'S VOICE

I can't help but think it was the most  
important time of our lives.

The WHITE of the page gets brighter and brighter, bleeding  
out to reveal an OPERATING LAMP -

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - DAY

DOCTORS at work to save someone's life. The precision is  
captivating as we MOVE IN on the lead SURGEON, his remarkably  
focused eyes the only hint of who he may be above the  
surgical mask.

His stare, as precise as his scalpel, he finishes the  
procedure with a flourish. Even beneath the mask - we can  
tell that he's smiling, another life saved, as -

THE P.A.

Doctor Joel Stone to ICU room 4. Doctor  
Joel Stone -

And the man's EYES change before ours as all of the NURSES  
and DOCTORS instantly turn towards him, immediately knowing  
something we don't.

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

The rest of the world fades away as DOCTOR JOEL STONE races  
down the hallway. Other STAFFERS watching on, all seeming to  
know something as well, as -

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - ICU - DAY

DOCTOR CONRAD HARRIS, late fifties, a friend, turns as Joel enters the room - an aching silence between them as Joel's eyes land on a WOMAN lying amidst the array of machinery keeping her alive.

MAXINE "MAX" STONE lies motionless as Joel dives towards her, pushing past Conrad, cradling her in his arms -

CONRAD  
The cancer caused -  
(his mouth so dry)  
- an embolism to the brain.

And as Joel stares back - unable to understand what he's just heard -

CONRAD  
We knew this was coming.

EXT. BARD SCHOOL - AERIAL - DAY

The sprawling grounds. A private school for the very privileged.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Eighth-grade STUDENTS try to understand the chaos of the trigonometry on the chalkboard as we MOVE IN towards LOUELLA "LOU" STONE.

Fourteen. Right on that edge between still being a child while her body fights to turn her into a young woman. Right now, she still has that "awkward smile" of innocence, though. She still has no idea who she is, as -

VOICE ON THE P.A.  
Louella Stone please report to the  
principal's office immediately.

Lou's smile drops instantly. Second by second, a realization taking over, as she turns to LINDSEY, her best friend in the world. And as she starts to cry -

LOU  
(she just knows)  
My mother just died.

INT. BARD SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

MOVING with Lou. Step by careful step. Rounding the corner to reveal ANNE STONE, her aunt, early thirties, doing a dreadful job at trying to pretend all is well.

And the moment they see each other the failure is complete.

INT. CAR - DAY

Anne, still trying to recover, drives as Lou watches the world race past the window.

ANNE  
We don't know anything yet, sweetie.  
(forcing each word)  
We - still - just - don't - know.

Lou doesn't turn back. Her wet eyes focused on the road ahead.

LOU  
Of course we do.

Anne aches. Of course they do.

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - THE ELEVATORS - DAY

The SOUND of the heavy doors opening jars Lou from wherever her thoughts had taken her as Anne, just as scared, places her hand on her shoulder as she leads her out.

And then - it's that image.

FAMILY and FRIENDS crowding the hallway in silence. Time has stopped here. Life, in suspended animation -

LOU'S VOICE  
If you've ever been through one of these,  
you know this moment. If you haven't,  
you will...  
(as she walks)  
Everyone's eyes are on you. No one  
knowing what to say. But still they try.  
And all you wish is that they would just  
disappear. That you could close your  
eyes - and wish them all away.

All eyes on Lou. All with the same "pity." All too much to take, but Lou keeps moving steadily through them. Step by aching step -

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LOU'S VOICE

And so you breathe. Trying to remember  
to keep your feet moving. Your balance -  
steady. It's amazing. You actually  
forget how to walk -  
(another breath, before - )  
One more step, Lou. Just take one more  
step...

She finally reaches the door to ICU room 4, opening it the  
rest of the way to reveal - Maxine.

LOU'S VOICE

And then it hits you.

The machines pumping life in and out of her. Joel hovered  
over her, numb, a lost man, too disconnected to even realize  
Lou has arrived.

LOU'S VOICE

It's real.

Lou steps further inside. Taking in the surreal image of her  
mother on life support.

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

Your mother is dying right before your  
eyes and - there's nothing you can do.

Joel, suddenly looks up, realizing she's there, and as he  
digs as deep as he's got, forcing a loving smile, Lou just  
stares past him -

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

How can there be nothing you can do?

Just too much to take, Lou tears back out of the room and  
down the hallway, as -

BRAD

Lou!

BRAD STONE, mid-thirties, her uncle, casts a reassuring  
glance down to Joel, and with it, he takes off after her.  
Joel turns back to Maxine, gripping her hand in his like  
he'll never let go, as -

INT. STAIRWELL - MERCY HOSPITAL - DAY

Lou races down the stairs - faster and faster.

BRAD

Lou!

(CONTINUED)

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Brad tries his best to keep up. But it's a losing battle as we MOVE IN on Lou's face.

LOU'S VOICE  
(remembering)  
I ran so fast...

EXT. MERCY HOSPITAL - DAY

Lou races from the building. We're in right on Lou's EYES, closing as tightly as they can as she runs on and on and on.

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - ICU - NIGHT

Joel sits amidst a mountain of MEDICAL RECORDS and TEST RESULTS. As if somewhere, within, lay the hidden miracle that will make this all go away.

ARNOLD STONE, Joel's father, makes his way slowly inside. He hesitates, so unsure of how to say this, but finally, placing his hand on him, forcing him from the trance -

ARNOLD  
They're waiting, son.

INT. DOCTOR CONRAD HARRIS' OFFICE - NIGHT

Conrad sits quietly before ABIGAIL WELLS, the spitting image of Maxine only twenty-two years older. PRESTON WELLS, her numbed husband, beside her.

Joel makes his way slowly inside and sits in the only other open chair. Neither Abigail nor Preston turn to look at him.

CONRAD  
We need to make this decision. The more time we wait, the harder it will be for everyone, I promise you.

Each word seems a thousand pounds of bricks placed on their lungs.

CONRAD  
Maxine is gone. All you are seeing are machines now. Ours. And her's. But just machines. Your wife, Joel -  
(turning to Abigail and Preston)  
And your daughter - is gone. We need to let her go....

The words almost seem to echo for a moment before -

(CONTINUED)

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JOEL  
There are still things we can do -

CONRAD  
No. There aren't.

JOEL  
It's possible -

CONRAD  
Nothing's possible, Joel. Not now.  
(back to Abigail and Preston)  
You need to let me end this. She's been  
through all she needs to. You all have.

Abigail and Preston turn towards one another. It's clear they've had this discussion already. Turning back to Conrad, they nod. And with it, they crumble, as -

JOEL  
(so desperate now)  
Abby, please, we can try -

PRESTON  
- she's done enough, Joel.

JOEL  
(hanging on for his life)  
No - she hasn't...

CONRAD'S BEEPER BLARES. The piercing sound cutting right through them, as -

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - ICU - NIGHT

NURSES are already at work as Doctor Conrad Harris rushes back into the room, checking the machines. Joel, Abigail and Preston right behind him.

Joel pushes Conrad aside as he realizes Maxine has stopped breathing.

JOEL  
Oh, God, please - stay with me, Max!

FAMILY and FRIENDS hearing the commotion crowd the doorway. Most losing any poise they had been holding onto as soon as realization washes over them.

Joel, desperately, starts CPR -

JOEL  
Breathe, Max. Breathe!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Abigail drops to her knees, praying -

ABIGAIL  
No. No. No. No.

Preston has to steady himself against the wall.

JOEL  
(oblivious to them all)  
Breathe, Max! Please, breathe!

Conrad turns back to Joel, trying to pull him away, as -

CONRAD  
Joel, stop!

But Joel's in another place now. The Family and Friends in the hallway have to turn away as the agony of the CPR continues. More desperate. Joel refusing to give up.

Preston eases one foot in front of the other towards his lifeless daughter, as finally -

PRESTON  
Let my baby be!

Preston physically pulls Joel off, tossing him to the ground.

And then just silence. Just the high-pitched steady flat-line indicator from the EKG. Conrad finally turns that off as well, as the door opens to reveal -

Lou, taking in the impossible image before her -

Of her mother. Lying still. Now forever. Of her grandparents. Numbed, into silent agony.

Of her father. Crumpled to the ground. So lost, as -

Lou drops the enormous SCRAPBOOK she's been gripping to her chest - the CONTENTS - scattering across the floor. The pages - torn from the old binding.

Joel reaches out for her, pulling her as close as he can. The two lost in the embrace. It's hard to tell who's holding who tighter, as Joel whispers -

JOEL  
I'm so sorry...

LOU'S VOICE  
And just like that...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Off Lou's deep brown, tear-filled eyes, we slowly FADE OUT:

LOU'S VOICE

She's gone.

Silence, over BLACK. Until finally, we FADE BACK IN ON:

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

All the luxury money can buy. But today, the MOURNERS making their way up the long walk-way don't even notice the new landscaping.

LOU'S VOICE

There's this blur of hours and days that follow. You don't lock the door because you can't take the pounding of the doorbell in your brain anymore.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

The door opens as more MOURNERS enter to pay their respects. People talking quietly amongst themselves. Some, visibly showing their grief. Others, talking about sports. Just the way it is.

LOU'S VOICE

At the one moment you want to run away from the world - all the world seems to come to you...

Lou sits amidst loving family friends, desperate to escape -

FAMILY FRIEND

It's going to be alright, Louella. I promise you. It's all going to be alright.

Lou just stares back at him as if he's speaking in another language, then finally gets up and disappears into the crowd.

LOU'S VOICE

There are all these plans to be made. Food for the mourners -

We see tray after tray of finger-foods as she passes.

LOU'S VOICE

Do we have enough drinks? Enough glasses to pour them into? What about the vegetarians? God, did we get enough food for the vegetarians?

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CONTINUED:

Lou makes her way up the stairs as two young BOYS race past her. Playing. VOICES are shouting upstairs, arguing over the funeral arrangements -

LOU'S VOICE

Then there's the arrangements. The real arrangements. The when and the how. The what. What do you do with the body of your mother? And who decides? What will she wear? The black dress or the brown? Which jewelry? And make-up. She always hated make-up.

(a beat, breathing...)

Which shoes?

(and then, so softly -)

There are so many shoes...

Lou rounds the corner to see Joel sitting in the middle of Preston, Abigail and his father, Arnold. He looks like he hasn't slept in ten years as the three around him continue their heated debate as if he were actually paying attention.

Lou finally turns and disappears into her own room, shutting the door behind her. Sanctuary.

INT. LOU'S ROOM - DAY

The decorations of a fourteen year old girl. Posters and pictures. Of beautiful boys and far away places. Of Dreams. Lou makes her way to the window and opens it. Closing her eyes against the kiss of the rushing wind -

LOU'S VOICE

Just breathe, Lou. You have to remember to breathe...

And she exhales.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Anne does the dishes, anything to keep busy. Brad, in the hallway, watches her, then finally heads upstairs.

EXT. LOU'S WINDOW LEDGE - NIGHT

Lou sits on the ledge outside the window as Brad makes his way clumsily outside towards her. For a moment neither says a word. Just taking in the unbelievably clear night sky.

BRAD

You know, all the fighting, no one is really angry with each other. You know that, right?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

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BRAD (cont'd)  
Everyone is just having a real tough  
time. Like you. They all just have to  
let it out somehow. It's not perfect,  
Lou. No one knows how to do this right.  
(forcing a smile)  
Not even me.

LOU  
They're all fighting about what they want  
- not what she wanted.

Brad is struck by the poise of the comment. The clarity.

BRAD  
Do you know what she wanted?

And turning towards him. The eyes of a child -

LOU  
So many things, uncle Brad. She wanted  
so many things...

Brad pulls her towards him -

BRAD  
Oh, God, sweetie, I know. I know. Just  
let it go. It's okay to let it all go...

Losing herself in his arms, she does. Her body beginning to  
shake with the release.

LOU'S VOICE  
And then you do. You let go. And when  
it finally comes, it's like a wave. So -  
forceful. It drowns you. So -  
uncontrollable - it strikes you - you  
might never be able to stop...

Brad tries to keep it together as he holds her tighter.

LOU'S VOICE  
Let it go, Lou. Just let it all go...

INT. JOEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Joel empties the bottle of Jack Daniels into his glass. His  
two-day old beard makes him look like a drunk. Brad stands  
in the doorway. He's been watching long enough.

BRAD  
Let's get you cleaned up, brother.

Joel doesn't look up. Just finishes off the drink.

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JOEL  
Leave it alone, Brad.

BRAD  
Come on, this isn't what she'd want. You know that.

JOEL  
You don't know a thing about what she would have wanted.

Brad takes a careful moment with the comment, before -

BRAD  
I know she would have wanted you to hold your daughter. I know she would have wanted you to tell her that it was going to be okay. That you - were going to be okay.

It takes longer to respond than it should - as Joel clearly fights with what he has to say. But finally - honestly -

JOEL  
I can't. I don't - know how to do that... I don't. To tell her that her mother's gone but it's all going to be okay? How do you do that? I can't even stand up, Brad.  
(lost in his brother's eyes)  
Can you understand that?  
(and then, the most honest admission he's ever made)  
She was everything...

BRAD  
I know.

JOEL  
What kind of father can't stand up?

BRAD  
Come on. Give me the bottle.

But Joel just loses himself again, as -

BRAD (cont'd)  
Joel, give it to me, please -

Brad reaches down, grabbing for it, but Joel yanks back, sending Brad crashing into the glass shelves behind him. Picture frames shattering as he falls. Joel regrets it instantly, but -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Lou and Anne appear in the doorway. Anne picking Brad up, stares pathetically back at Joel, as Lou takes in this painful image of her father. Joel just looks back up at her, aching -

JOEL

Lou, I -

But he just drifts...

ANNE

Lou, you're going to stay with us for awhile. Just - you know, for awhile.

LOU

(still locked on her dad)  
Okay.

Joel breathes through it, barely managing the words -

JOEL

Maybe, it's a good idea, sweetie. Just for awhile. While I - take care of everything - here.

Lou is drained by the comment, but as bold as she can -

LOU

It's okay, dad.

With that, she reaches down and the two embrace, only making it harder on both of them -

JOEL

I'll - call you tonight.  
(then, with all he's got)  
We're gonna be alright, I promise you.  
(and more to himself)  
We're gonna be alright.

Lou finally lets go and Anne leads her out of the room as Brad continues to stare down at his utterly lost brother.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - NIGHT

Anne and Brad lead Lou to their car. Anne keeps locking eyes with Brad - so much she wants to say, but now's not the time.

Lou turns back to her father's window - hoping - but he never appears, as she finally ducks into the backseat. Brad starts the car and pulls off into the night.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

Silence. Empty. And then the front door opens to reveal Preston, Max's father. He's struck by the state of the house. Almost - abandoned.

PRESTON

Joel?

No answer. So, he enters. Moving into -

THE LIVING ROOM. Joel sits on the couch. A drink in his hand. Now four days of a beard. Preston just looks disgusted as he approaches.

PRESTON

I have a court order, Joel. It's being served to the mortuary this morning. I didn't want to do this but you left me no choice. The funeral will be held tomorrow.

Joel downs the drink without turning.

JOEL

- it's done, Preston.

Joel, very drunk, gestures to the URN on the table before him. Preston has to steady himself as he realizes -

JOEL

Max didn't want to be buried. She wanted to be cremated and you knew it.

PRESTON

You son of a bitch! How - how could you do that?!

JOEL

It's what she wanted, Preston. This was the least I could do for her.

Preston stares down at the URN before him. Kneeling before it. His fingers trembling as they touch the cold metal.

Finally, regrouping, he rises and without another glance back, he heads out of the house as Joel's eyes fall back on the URN. Breathing a whisper -

JOEL

It's the least I could do.

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - OPERATING ROOM - DAY

We're MOVING IN on Joel. Surgical mask and gloves. He's staring down at the PATIENT on the operating table. All the eyes of the NURSES and DOCTORS on him. Waiting, as Doctor Conrad Harris approaches, more than concerned -

CONRAD

Joel?

We're in closer... Joel's eyes just drifting out with such a hollow gaze, as -

CONRAD

Joel?

Joel finally turns and hands Conrad the scalpel.

EXT. MERCY HOSPITAL - DAY

MOVING in towards the hospital. We see Joel, file box in hand, looking even more dreadful, making his way outside.

LOU'S VOICE

My father left the hospital a month later. But really, he had left everything the day she died.

MOVING WITH JOEL - One step in front of the other. Barely able to keep his balance.

LOU'S VOICE

Breathe, dad. You gotta remember to breathe...

INT. BRAD & ANNE'S HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Lou sits on her bed, the SCRAPBOOK lying before her. She examines each page and the far off world within as we see Brad appear in the doorway. Watching her.

LOU'S VOICE

So, how did we get here?

INT. BRAD'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

Brad sits on the phone as it RINGS on and on. His eyes landing on a picture of Joel, Max, Anne and him. A family vacation. All was well with the world - well, it once was.

INT. JOEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Joel pours another drink until he empties the bottle. His eyes cast across the walls covered by family PHOTOS. Max in each of them. The evidence of a life.

LOU'S VOICE

Is it like that poem said? Two roads  
diverged in a woods and I took the one  
less travelled by and that's what made  
all the difference?

The doorbell RINGS. Jarring him back to consciousness.

INT. JOEL'S HOUSE - STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Joel moves slowly down the stairs. Steadying himself from the alcohol, as -

LOU'S VOICE

I had never really understood that poem.  
Did it mean that one road was better than  
the other?

INT. JOEL'S FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

The door opens to reveal a MESSENGER wearing a walkman and holding up a large ENVELOPE.

LOU'S VOICE

That which road you chose in life  
actually made the difference?

INT. JOEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joel's eyes pass across the RETURN ADDRESS. It reads simply -  
"FROM MAX."

LOU'S VOICE

How were we supposed to know? If both  
roads were ones we hadn't been down  
before -

Joel, almost terrified, opens the envelope to reveal the VIDEO TAPE within.

CLOSE ON - A BLANK TV SCREEN - STATIC - AND THEN AN IMAGE  
COMING INTO FOCUS.

It's Max in the hospital. She's looking back into the camera  
with the most beautiful and desperate of smiles, as -

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MAXINE

Hey, you.

(allowing the moment to settle)

I know. It must be - a shock. But it's been a month, Joel. And that's long enough.

Joel can't breath. Instantly overwhelmed, as -

MAXINE

(smiling bigger, almost taunting -)

You better not have let them bury me.

You know how I am in small spaces.

Besides, it will ruin everything. I've got big plans for us.

Joel watches astonished, raising his hand to his mouth -

MAXINE

I'm assuming Lou's still with Brad and Annie. Don't beat yourself up about that, I'm sure mom and dad are doing that for you. Besides, I asked them to take her for awhile. It was good for Lou to get away. You needed the time. But you're ready now, and she needs you. So do I.

(coughing, settling, so frail, yet so poised, as - )

I am going to die, Joel. Somehow, we're both going to have to accept that. I'm just not quite sure how yet. There's no book. Or tricks. God, I wish there were tricks.

(starting to lose it now)

I'm so - sorry for leaving you. That I wasn't stronger. That my body - wasn't stronger. I swear to you I tried. Just don't let this devour you. I need you to be strong. Stronger than you think you are. As strong - as I know you are.

Joel is lost. Both aching with this impossible moment between them, as -

MAXINE (cont'd)

You were a gift. Life gave me - you. And for that I will always be grateful. For the taste of you. For your heartbeat under my ear as I slept. For your hand gripping mine when I stumbled. For your eyes, steadying mine, when I cried.

(MORE)

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MAXINE (cont'd)

And so, my love, I'm now going to give you a gift and you have to promise me you'll take it. We're going to take a trip. The three of us. We're going to take "the" trip, Joel. Look in the envelope, sweetie. Give it to Lou. She'll know what to do.

Joel tears through the envelope to reveal a few Xerox copied pages from the SCRAPBOOK and two PLANE TICKETS. His eyes fall on the illustration of the massive WATERFALL, as -

MAXINE

This is my last wish. This one, final adventure. And then I'll go -  
(smiling with all she's got)  
Make your life wondrous, Joel.  
(as finally - )  
Mine was...

Max nods to someone off-camera who shuts it off plunging the image back to STATIC as Joel just continues to sit in Silence. For an achingly long time, before -

LOU'S VOICE

(a whisper)  
So... that was my mom. She was beautiful, wasn't she?

INT. LOU'S ROOM - NIGHT

Joel makes his way into Lou's empty room. His eyes casting across more PICTURES of the family. Lou and Max together.

LOU'S VOICE

And dramatic. And mysterious. And playful.

He heads towards the window and opens it, as Lou had, feeling the kiss of the rushing wind against his face.

LOU'S VOICE (CONT'D)

And - wondrous...

And Joel finally begins to cry. The kind of cry that starts from a memory, then takes over the past, the present and everything you hope for the future.

His life changing in a breath...

INT. BRAD & ANNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Anne opens the door to reveal Joel staring back. Still unshaven. But now - his eyes seem to have a purpose. A new energy to them. He's more than sobered -

JOEL  
She upstairs?

ANNE  
(rocked back)  
Joel, how - how are you doing?

JOEL  
I'm okay.  
(and pushing past her)  
Lou?!

Brad rounds the corner, apron on, in the middle of cooking, but so happy to see him -

BRAD  
Hey, brother, you hungry?

JOEL  
No.

Joel makes his way upstairs as Anne locks eyes with Brad, suddenly overwhelmed -

ANNE  
Will you look at him?! This is insane!

INT. GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Joel bursts inside to see Lou in bed. Clearly shaken to see him, as -

JOEL  
Get your things, honey, we have to hurry.

Lou stares back at him uncomfortably.

LOU  
Have you been drinking?

JOEL  
No. Come on, we're gonna be late.

LOU  
For what?

Joel's smile is the first one we've seen in awhile -

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JOEL  
Just trust me.

Lou gets up and starts doing as she's told as Brad appears in the doorway. Moving beside Joel -

BRAD  
(in a whisper)  
We should talk -

JOEL  
We don't have time. But everything's  
going to be fine - everything's going to  
be better than fine -

Anne appears in the doorway, looking helpless - the mood just so imbalanced now -

ANNE  
Why don't we all just take a minute.  
Joel, you don't look like you're in any  
condition to even be driving -

JOEL  
I said - I'm fine!!

Lou stares back at them all - monkey in the middle -

BRAD  
Just slow down, okay, you're frightening  
her -

LOU  
No, he's not. It's okay. We're just  
gonna go. Dad, I'm coming.

Lou grabs her SCRAPBOOK as Joel takes her hand, pulling her down the hallway.

ANNE  
(turning to Brad, furious now)  
Aren't you going to do something?!

EXT. BRAD & ANNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Joel leads Lou, still in her pajamas, towards his Land Cruiser. Brad and Anne racing down the walkway behind them.

BRAD  
Joel?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
(with a final glance back)  
I'll call you!

With that, Joel gets into the car and peels away leaving a rocked brother and sister-in-law in his wake.

INT. LAND CRUISER - NIGHT

Joel stares straight ahead as Lou's eyes fall on the PLANE TICKETS on the dash. Picking them up -

LOU  
Are we going somewhere?

JOEL  
(startled by her voice, before - )  
What? Yes.

LOU  
You wanna tell me where?

JOEL  
Not yet. It's a surprise.

Joel takes back the tickets, but not before Lou catches the first page -

LOU  
We're going to London?

JOEL  
Just a stop-over.

Joel opens the glove compartment, pulling out a bag of PILLS. He grabs two and pops them in his mouth, then hands them to her -

JOEL  
Take two of these. They'll make you  
dream a little funny, but it's okay.

LOU  
Then why are we taking them?

JOEL  
Malaria.

And off her look -

EXT. LAX - NIGHT

The Land Cruiser is stuck in atrocious LAX traffic. They're practically at a dead stop. Joel keeps glancing at his watch anxiously.

LOU  
I need to ask you something. And you  
need to be honest, okay?  
(when he doesn't answer)  
Are you going crazy?

Joel just takes her in, before - his eyes fall on the PARKING STRUCTURE as the ATTENDANT suddenly steps out and puts the "LOT FULL" barrier up.

Reacting, Joel just turns off, and pulls to a stop at the front of the International Terminal. He gets out and opens the trunk, revealing the suitcases.

JOEL  
Come on.

LOU  
Dad, I'm in my pajamas!

JOEL  
You can dress on the plane. I brought  
your things.

LOU  
(so thrown)  
Which things?

A "PARKING COP" approaches.

PARKING COP  
Sir? You can't stop here, you're going  
to have to pull away.

JOEL  
We're late for our flight.

PARKING COP  
Just not my problem.

JOEL  
You're right. I'm sorry.

Joel hands him the keys.

JOEL  
Now it is. Enjoy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Joel grabs the suitcases and starts towards the terminal.  
The Cop looking down at Lou in confusion, as -

LOU  
(shrugging)  
The back window sticks.

INT. AIRPORT GATEWAY - NIGHT

Joel and Lou race to the gate and Joel hands the FLIGHT ATTENDANT their tickets.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
I'm sorry, Sir - but you are going to  
have to check that carry-on - we're  
already overloaded.

Joel looks down at the oversized bag he's holding.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT  
It will be fine, Sir.

She reaches for it but he quickly pulls away. Lou getting nervous now. Sensing the growing tension as a male ATTENDANT arrives.

ATTENDANT  
Is there a problem?

Joel finally just opens the bag and pulls out the URN.  
Handing it to Lou as she realizes what this is.

Joel then takes out the PILLS, and hands the bag with everything else in it to the Attendant.

JOEL  
Keep it.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Joel tries to place the URN in the overhead compartment as Lou watches on, still stunned. Finally, realizing it won't fit, he places it below the seat in front of her.

JOEL  
Do you mind, sweetie? You have shorter  
legs.

LOU  
(barely able to utter the words)  
That's mom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL

Yes.

Lou's just rocked -

LOU

You have gone crazy.

Joel grabs the SCRAPBOOK and lays it out before them. Lou, almost uncomfortable with him touching it.

JOEL

Okay. Why did you two make this book?

LOU

Dad, I want to go back to Uncle Brad's -

JOEL

Lou, the scrapbook, why did you and your mother make it?

Lou stares back. Deciding. Before finally, revealing her secret -

LOU

It was for after.

JOEL

After what?

LOU

After she got - better.

Joel nods, opening the scrapbook to the first page. To the QUOTES. Lou, seeing her mother's handwriting, just aches.

JOEL

We're going, Lou. Just like she wanted.

(off her look)

She knew she wasn't going to get better, sweetie. She knew. This was for us. For you and me. Not her. It was supposed to be our trip. That's what she wanted. That's why she had you make it.

LOU

No. She and I were -

JOEL

She told me, Lou. She knew.

Joel reaches into his pocket and pulls out the copied pages.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

A PICTURE OF THE WATERFALL FROM THE BOOK. Lou's eyes fall across her mother's HANDWRITING on the page. It reads -

"Trust him, Lou."

JOEL

Why are there so many? I thought there were only seven?

LOU

What?

JOEL

Wonders. I thought there were only seven wonders.

LOU

There were seven original ones. But then there were new ones added. And natural ones. And then things we just thought were cool so we added them ourselves.  
(but then - )  
Dad, we can't do this.

JOEL

Why not?

And Joel eases into a smile -

JOEL

Tell me about them. All of them. It's a long flight to Africa.

Lou stares back at him, so stunned, so unsure, but he really does seem almost rejuvenated, as -

LOU

We're going to Africa?

JOEL

London first. Where we'll both get vaccinated. But yes -  
(placing his hand to her cheek)  
We're going to Africa.

Lou's eyes cast back down to the book. And now we see her smile - the Maps. Brochures. Photos. A collection so lovingly assembled, as -

LOU'S VOICE

We're going to Africa, mom...

And we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

THE TURBINE ENGINES ROARING TO LIFE - THE PLANE JOLTING FORWARD -

LOU'S VOICE

Mom always said that there were these moments in life that defined who we were. And who we were going to be.

THE PLANE ROARS DOWN THE RUNWAY -

LOU'S VOICE

Life moments. The ones that everything before leads up to - and that everything after comes from.

AND THE PLANE LIFTS OFF. LEAVING EARTH -

LOU'S VOICE

The ones that change - everything...

MOVING THROUGH THE PLANE. Past the sleeping faces of STRANGERS. Finally, landing back on Joel - fast asleep, the scrapbook in his arms as Lou watches him.

LOU'S VOICE

I think for me. At the beginning. I didn't go along with it for her. And I didn't go along with it for me. At the beginning. I did it for him. On that plane. That night. It was the first time since it happened that I saw him finally sleep.

(a beat, a breath)

It's okay dad, it's okay... just sleep.

EXT. THE PLANE - NIGHT

Hanging below the atmosphere - the explosion of stars lighting the way. We HOLD ON the silence. The heavenly image of the cloud formations as the plane drifts off below them, finally losing itself within.

CLOSE ON - A PASSPORT.

A picture of LOU smiling awkwardly. The page turned. EMPTY. As - WHOMP! The ENTRY VISA STAMP slams down, making the first mark on her passport.

INT. ZAMBIA AIRPORT - DAY

Eighteen year-old MILITARY GUARDS holding twenty-year old weapons watch the entrances.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Inside, a mixture of VILLAGERS, OFFICIALS and dazed TOURISTS make their way through the "customs" area.

Lou runs her fingers across the ZAMBIA ENTRY STAMP in her passport, as Joel leads her through the mayhem.

They are instantly accosted by DRIVERS, GUIDES, all seeking to be hired. All calling out the names of their businesses.

LOCAL GUIDE

(English, his second language)

Victoria Manor. Good food. Very cheap.

(almost singing)

Vic-TO-ria Manor.

LOU

Dad, that's it! That's the place mom wanted us to go. Victoria Manor.

JOEL

(turning to the guide)

Victoria Manor?

The Guide, MOSES, early twenties, smiles as he tries to grab the URN. Lou yanking it back, as -

JOEL

It's okay. We're fine. Give me the book, Lou.

Lou hands Joel the scrapbook and he points to a page displaying a series of quaint cottages surrounding a beautiful central fountain.

It reads VICTORIA MANOR. "Gateway To The Falls."

JOEL (cont'd)

Victoria Manor?

MOSES

Yes. Vic-TO-ria. I will take you.

JOEL

How far is it?

MOSES

Not far. Good food. You'll see. You come for the falls, yes?

JOEL

(turning to Lou)

Yes. We've come for the falls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Another GUIDE tries to move in and Moses barks back at him in Tonga, the local language. Clearing the path -

MOSES  
This way. Good car. Nice seats. You  
will see.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - DAY

Smoke bursts from the tailpipe as each pot-hole sends this painful excuse for what's left of a "Land Rover" rattling, and Joel and Lou reeling. But they come with such frequency, and Moses seems so oblivious, that they can't help but laugh.

MOSES  
You like music? Yes?

Moses turns on his tape deck. MILLI VANILLI carrying out across Zambia -

MOSES  
I love America.

And on they drive through one village after another.

EXT. VILLAGE ROADS - DAY

More FACES. More EYES. Lou pulls out a disposable camera she must have bought from the airport and starts taking PICTURES. Taking in everything as the drive seems to go on and on and on. Until finally - day turns to night -

EXT. VICTORIA MANOR - NIGHT

Joel and Lou both try to sleep as Moses sings on to some other horrible song. Maybe the "Macarena." He turns off the music and the two stir awake to find -

The crumbling "Welcome Sign." Only it's spelled - "Welcom To Viktoria Maner." And then we see it -

It's the image from the PICTURE - only the nightmare version. Six run-down, thatched huts, surrounding an empty, long-since discarded fountain in the center -

MOSES  
(smiling)  
See? Not far.

## INT. VICTORIA MANOR - NIGHT

Moses leads the way to the front desk, calling out in Tonga as Lou and Joel take in the decaying surroundings. Finally, KOBE, the fifty year-old owner, shuffles in to greet them.

MOSES  
They come for the falls, Kobe.

KOBE  
(heavy Pretorian accent)  
Welcome to the manor.

LOU  
(holding up the picture)  
This - is not what this - looks like.

KOBE  
(unflinching)  
That is an old picture.

LOU  
That's false advertising.

KOBE  
(enjoying the challenge)  
How old are you?

JOEL  
Please. We're tired. We'd just like to get to our rooms.

KOBE  
Yes. You can have the Presidential Suite.

JOEL  
Terrific. Which one is that?

KOBE  
Whichever you choose. Name?

JOEL  
Joel Stone.

Suddenly, there is silence. Kobe is stunned -

KOBE  
Doctor Stone?

JOEL  
Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KOBE  
(starting to laugh)  
You owe me five hundred dollars.

JOEL  
I what?

Kobe calls out in Tonga, then -

KOBE  
Five hundred dollars. It is what was  
promised.

A number of small CHILDREN, as well as Kobe's WIFE and older  
DAUGHTER arrive. Taking them in.

KOBE (cont'd)  
It is Doctor Stone!

They all break into huge smiles, clearly knowing something we  
don't -

JOEL  
Why do I owe you five hundred dollars?

Kobe, sifting through a drawer, finally produces a crushed,  
aged, OPEN box. The return address has only a Post Office  
Box Number and reads - "FROM MAX."

KOBE  
This came many months ago with the first  
five hundred. A letter said you would  
pay five hundred dollars more if I gave  
it to you.

Joel takes the box. Immediately knowing what this is, as -

LOU  
It's open.

KOBE  
We needed to make sure it was not -  
political. Mrs. Max? She is your  
mother, yes? On the TV? Very pretty.  
(off her look)  
Is she outside in the car?

JOEL  
No. She's not. Do you have a VCR?

MOSES  
Only Grandfather.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Lou stares up at her father -

LOU  
I want to see it now.

Joel nods. Feeling the weight return.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - NIGHT

Back in Moses' Rover, Joel's eyes stay trained on Lou who clutches the video to her chest. It's so clear he wants to say something, but for the life of him, he just doesn't know where to begin.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - NIGHT

Lou and Joel sit in silence as Moses pulls to a stop in this tiny village. All eyes falling on these strangers. And there, in the center, is the main hut.

MOSES  
Grandfather is a very important man.

INT. GRANDFATHER'S HUT - NIGHT

Moses leads Joel and Lou inside to meet GRANDFATHER. He could easily be a hundred years old. His bed is a pile of old, ripped blankets. His table - a cardboard box. But there, right in the middle of the hut, is a TV/VCR Combo connected to a battery pack wrapped with twine.

Moses explains to Grandfather in Tonga who they are and Grandfather immediately smiles. An answer to a prayer. Then, hearing more, his smile fades, as Grandfather speaks to Moses who translates -

MOSES  
Grandfather says your mother's eyes were  
those of an angel's.  
(off their look)  
He has also seen the tape.

Grandfather reaches out and hugs Joel giving him no time to react. Then, Grandfather turns and hugs Lou as well. And with that, they head out of the hut leaving them alone.

LOU  
You know what this is, don't you?

JOEL  
Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU

She sent you one before? To tell you to  
take me on this trip?

JOEL

Yes.

LOU

Why didn't you tell me?

JOEL

I don't know, Lou.

The two stare back at one another. So uneasy with each  
other, as Lou, deciding, puts the tape into the VCR.  
Breathing - she presses play.

STATIC. And then - there she is. Max. In her hospital bed.  
But she looks good. Excited. Hopeful.

MAXINE

Hello, my sweet angel.

Lou just looks paralyzed -

MAXINE

This is so strange. I have no way of  
knowing how long it's been. I don't even  
know if this is even you watching. For  
all I know it could be some stranger in  
some hut in the middle of nowhere. Well,  
I'm going to assume it's you. That my  
beautiful daughter and my wonderful  
husband have journeyed half way across  
the world just to sit somewhere and  
listen to me.

Joel is watching Lou, not the video.

MAXINE

I'm so sorry, Lou. For leaving you. I'm  
trying to hold on - believe me - I'm  
trying. But - we're just - going to have  
to accept this, I think. All of us.

And she let's this settle. They all do. Each isolated from  
the next, before, lightening -

MAXINE

This was one of our favorites, Lou.  
Remember? Victoria Falls. Twice as big  
a Niagara. You always said it was like a  
lost world.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MAXINE (cont'd)

Well, now you've come to find it. I'm going to try to send more tapes. If you follow our plan, I'll be there waiting. Even if you don't. I'll still be there with you. I'm so proud of you both for doing this. It means - everything to me.  
(and then, such a glorious smile)  
It's going to be wondrous...

Max finally nods and the TV goes back to static. Lou and Joel just sit in silence. Neither able to muster a word.

Finally, Lou moves to the machine and takes out the tape. Pulling it to her chest. A treasure.

EXT. GRANDFATHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Joel and Lou emerge in silence to find themselves surrounded by the entire VILLAGE. Must be forty of them.

MOSES

They had all hoped that Mrs. Max might get better. They also have seen the tape.

Lou just takes in all their faces. All smiling so lovingly. Comforting. The impact on Lou is profound.

EXT. VICTORIA MANOR - NIGHT

The wind rushes through the trees, swaying the mosquito nets back and forth as Lou moves across the grounds, searching -

LOU'S VOICE

All that time. I had no idea. All those calls. The brochures. Maps from around the world. And all that time - she knew.  
(a beat, a breath - )  
You were so strong, mom. How am I ever supposed to be that strong?

INT. VICTORIA MANOR - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

Joel sits at the bar. Kobe pours another drink with Moses at Joel's side.

Lou appears in the doorway. She's not surprised. For a moment, she just watches, then catching the eye of Moses, she gestures to him, then turns and slips back away.

MOSES

(moving in towards Joel)  
You should sleep. We leave early, yes?  
(off his drunken stare)  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOSES (cont'd)  
The falls, Mr. Max. They are far. We  
should get you to bed, yes?

Moses and Kobe move to help him up, as -

EXT. THE ZAMBESI RIVER - DAY

A prehistoric backdrop. Trees and rock and water mixing on the banks in a primordial ooze. In the center, the RIVERBOAT churns on, spitting the blackest smoke you've ever seen from its exhaust.

Lou sits at the front of the boat. Moses, in the rear behind the old, Zambesi PILOT.

Joel, behind them, very much in his own world as well, as his eyes seem transfixed on the hypnotic waves lapping against the hull - and we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

IMAGES MOVING UP RIVER. The winding course. The SOUNDS and MOVEMENT in the trees. The EYES of the jungle watching them.

Here, they are simply cut off from the rest of the world.

And then, suddenly, Lou places her hand to her chest. Feeling something. Joel stirs from his trance. Feeling it as well. The POUNDING. The SHAKING, as -

MOSES  
(smiling)  
Her heartbeat. She is strong, yes?

As the boat rounds the corner - there it is -

THE BASE OF VICTORIA FALLS. Like God himself was dumping an ocean from the heavens. The ROAR is deafening. The spray from the falls sending an ethereal mist spreading out for miles.

It is simply, humbling. A truly impossible sight.

Joel makes his way beside Lou. Neither able to speak a word as they just watch it. Sucked in by its power. Lou, finally turning back towards him, lets herself go, as -

LOU  
(from the center of her soul)  
She wanted to see this...

And as she stares back at her father, she suddenly realizes -

He's doing the same -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE

He's crying. Your father - is crying.  
It's something - you'll never forget...

And there, on the river in Zambesi - Joel and his daughter  
let their emotions go. An utter release.

Finally, Lou reaches into her backpack and pulls out the URN.  
She stares down at it for an awful long time -

Building up the courage, she opens it, taking a handful of  
the ASHES. Then, finger by finger, she releases her fist,  
letting the ashes scatter into the mist of Victoria Falls.

LOU'S VOICE

Do you feel it, Mom? The mist on your  
face?  
(and then - )  
Like a thousand kisses at once. They're  
from me.

As Lou closes her eyes and stretches her face out into the  
mist, we slowly, DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

EXT. ZAMBESI RIVER - NIGHT

Lou and Joel stare out at riverbanks in silence. An  
emptiness now. Almost a let down. But as the boat churns on  
we also notice that now they both seem more awake than we've  
ever seen them. Their eyes, more alive. Aware. Yet,  
isolated. And then, something up ahead -

A BONFIRE. TORCHES. From both sides of the river, as we  
TIME CUT INTO:

EXT. ZAMBESI RIVER DOCK - NIGHT

The entire village from Grandfather's is here. The bonfire  
roaring. Lou is surrounded by the villagers as Grandfather  
places a tribal, ceremonial garb on her. Embracing her.

Joel watches on. Captivated. Grandfather speaks. Moses,  
translating -

MOSES

You set her free at the falls, yes?

LOU

(barely a whisper)  
Yes. Some - of her.

Grandfather smiles. An old soul's secret -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOSES

He says that is good. It is better - a little at a time.

Then Grandfather reaches into his own pack and pulls out a hand-made LEATHER SACHEL. Embroidered on the outside is an image of an ANGEL IN FLIGHT.

Grandfather eyes the metallic URN.

MOSES

He says you need a lighter burden to carry.

Lou nods, gratefully. Then, reaches up and kisses Grandfather on the cheek.

LOU

Tell him I said thank you.

GRANDFATHER

(his best attempt at English)  
You are welcome, little angel.

And the ceremony continues. Grandfather, taking a piece of the ceremonial garb from around Lou's neck - tears it - kissing it - then tosses it into the fire. Then, nodding to Lou, she does the same.

The material is carried into the air by the force of the heat. Scattered into the wind against the backdrop of the perfect sky. And finally, floating back down and disappearing into the rushing water of the Zambesi.

LOU'S VOICE

And just like that - it began.

Joel watches his daughter. Captivated by her poise. Her immersion in all of this. Her spirit. As we slowly, FADE OUT:

LOU'S VOICE

A little at a time...

SOUND UNDER: WHOMP!

CLOSE ON - LOU'S PASSPORT. NAIROBI'S immigration stamp.

INT. NAIROBI AIRPORT - DAY

This time, it's Lou leading the way. Her eyes scanning the chaos in the airport until they finally land on -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARUSHA GAME RESERVE. A number of TRAVELLERS are already gathering with bags of gear beneath the welcome sign.

LOU

This is it. This is the one!

They settle in with the rest of the GROUP, Lou, introducing them. But Joel already seems removed.

INT. LEAD LAND ROVER - DAY

The first of a fleet of four. Loaded up, exploding with gear and baggage. Lou watches the wilds of Africa through the window. Giraffes. Elephants. On the horizon, a small group of Massai HERDSMAN move their cattle across the plains.

CLOSE ON - THE SCRAPBOOK. The pages of Tanzania. Images of MOUNT KILIMANJARO pasted beside maps, notes, brochures.

Lou turns back to the plains as the Land Rovers reach the TANZANIA BORDER.

EXT. ARUSHA GAME RESERVE - NIGHT

The Land Rovers are parked out front. The gear being unloaded by PORTERS. The air alive with the SINGING and PURRING and ROARING of creatures somewhere out in the night.

Lou sits on the bench before the main lodge taking it all in as Joel approaches.

JOEL

Rooms are ready. We're going to leave at six in the morning.

Lou just nods. Silently. Waiting. Desperate, as -

JOEL (cont'd)

There was no tape, Lou.

And she's crushed.

JOEL

Maybe she sent it to the National Park.

(off her look)

Look, I was talking to some of the others in there. This is actually a really tough climb, sweetie.

LOU

I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL

I'm not sure you do. This may be too tough.

Then she gets it.

LOU

You don't want to go?

JOEL

That's not what I'm saying.

LOU

Yes, it is.

JOEL

Lou, I'm just saying we came. That's a lot already. We just need to make sure we know what to expect, that's all. We haven't really talked about any of this, and that's my fault, but we should have a plan.

Lou's angry now and she can't cover it -

LOU

We had a plan. We had lots of plans. But Mom died. So, I don't want to make any more plans!

Joel's struck, but trying to recover -

JOEL

I'm doing the best I can here, Lou. I'm trying. But I'm making it up as we go - just like you.

(and then, so honestly - )

I don't know how to do this either...

Lou nods. Accepting the struggle.

LOU

When did you know she was going to die?

JOEL

Lou, that's -

LOU

You're a doctor. So, you had to know, right? So, why didn't you tell me? I could have spent more time with her. It wasn't fair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Joel takes the comment much harder than she expected. Absorbing a thousand memories at once, before, finally sitting beside her and settling in for it.

JOEL

I knew how aggressive the cancer was. I knew how fast it was spreading. I saw every test. Spoke to every specialist. So, as a doctor, yes, I knew everything there was to know, Lou. But not for one second did I ever believe she would die. Not her. Not your mom. As her husband. As your father - how could I have ever known that?

LOU

So, you lied to yourself.

JOEL

Yes.

LOU

And me.

JOEL

Yes.

Lou lets it sink in, as does Joel. Before -

LOU

I have to climb this mountain, dad. It's what she wanted.  
(and then, so honestly - )  
I have to climb this mountain.

Joel eases into a soft smile. Loosing himself in the pain and yearning of his daughter's eyes -

JOEL

Then that's what we'll do.

EXT. BASE OF KILIMANJARO NATIONAL PARK - DAY

The mountain looms above like Olympus. Reaching right up and off the Earth. Multiple TOURS are getting their acts together. Gearing up. Choosing PORTERS and GUIDES. There must be sixty TOURISTS eagerly waiting to begin the ascent.

WINLUCK, the twenty-something Tanzanian guide, lays out the route for the eight-person team that includes Lou and Joel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE

They had come from all around the world.  
Like us.

There are two sisters from Oklahoma, PATTI, forty, and LARA, mid-thirties.

LOU'S VOICE

Patti and Lara were sisters. They had planned this trip for ten years. When Patti's husband left her for his secretary, just a few months after Lara's lover left her, they decided it was finally time.

An Italian father, CARLO and his two sons, FEDERICO, sixteen, and PAULO, twenty, listen intently to Winluck -

LOU'S VOICE

Then there were the Italians. The O's. Carlo, Federico and Paulo. They brought their own pasta.

LLOYD, a thirty-year old banker from London sorts through his gear with a mixture of confusion and fear.

LOU'S VOICE

And then there was Lloyd. Who, frankly, everyone thought should have stayed home. Including Lloyd.

Winluck continues to trace the path they're about to take on the map.

WINLUCK

Tonight, we sleep in Mandara. Nine thousand feet. You have questions?

All eyes scanning the others. Weighing the group. Weighing each other, and off Winluck's smile -

WINLUCK

You will...

EXT. THE MARENGU ROUTE - DAY

Heading up and out of the flatter, savannah-like farmland and crossing into the dense, overwhelming rain forest. The group is starting to get to know one another.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lara and Patti are leading the charge. Lara, urging everyone in song - "I'm on the top of the world looking, down on creation" - Even Paulo joins in. With his broken English, Karen Carpenter meets Pavarotti.

Federico walks beside Lou who does her best to appear capable of the climb which is clearly already a challenge for her. Federico eyes the scrapbook bursting out of her back-pack.

FEDERICO

It is heavy. This book? Why do you carry it?

LOU

Because it's my book. Why do you carry your junk? You brought pasta to a mountain.

FEDERICO

Because it is my junk. And when you taste my pasta -

LOU

I'm not tasting your pasta, Federico.

Federico just stares back at her. Enjoying this.

Behind them, Joel walks disconnected from the rest of the group. One foot in front of the other. Eyes on the ground, not on the peaks above.

EXT. MANDARA HUTS - NIGHT

At nine thousand-feet, the small A-frame structures lie near the upper edge of the rain forest. Earlier groups are already settled in and making their way to the larger mess hall as Winluck leads our group in.

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Must be forty HIKERS. All digging in. Faces from different countries. Different languages being spoken. A collection of world emissaries.

Joel and Lou take their seats at the end table. The rest of their group filing in and sitting with them. Lloyd is the last to arrive, already exhausted.

LOU'S VOICE

Lloyd had tried to make the ascent two times before. The first time was after his brother died. He was the real adventurer in the family.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)  
Lloyd said this was something he just had  
to do for him.

Lou locks eyes with Lloyd. A new-found connection.

LOU'S VOICE  
I liked him instantly.

Patti and Lara are in the middle of telling a story, as -

LOU'S VOICE  
Lara had been to India. To Iraq.  
Everywhere. She was a reporter.  
She'd seen so much.

On a small gas-stove, the O's heat up another round of pasta  
as they serve what's been cooked to their travel companions.  
Federico serves Lou, smiling, as -

LOU'S VOICE  
The pasta was actually really good.  
Though, of course, I never told him.

We MOVE IN on Lou. Taking in these strangers. The laughter.  
The life. Her eyes falling back on her father. Not  
interacting. His eyes casting down to his wedding ring.  
Twisting it round and round across his finger.

Finally, Joel gets up and heads out of the mess hall.

EXT. MANDARA HUTS - NIGHT

Joel, sitting a good distance from the huts, removes a FLASK  
and starts to open it, as -

LOU  
I wish you wouldn't.

Joel doesn't have to turn. He just closes the cap. Caught.

LOU  
Why don't you talk to these people?  
They're interesting. They've seen so  
much.

JOEL  
I don't have anything to say to them,  
Lou.

Lou steps right before him.

LOU  
Then why don't you talk to me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
I do talk to you.

LOU  
No, you don't. Not about anything that matters. We never have.  
(really thinking about it - )  
We don't even know each other.

Joel is struck. Hurt.

JOEL  
That's ridiculous. You're my daughter.

LOU  
Is it? What's my favorite color?  
(off his look)  
It's not ridiculous. What's my favorite color, come on? What are my friends' names? My favorite movie?  
(moving closer)  
Have I ever been kissed?

JOEL  
Lou, that's not -

LOU  
I'm not attacking you, dad. I'm not.  
(then, so sadly - )  
You know what, I don't really know you either, so that's my fault.

Silence. Both registering the challenge.

JOEL  
Have you?

LOU  
What?

JOEL  
Ever been kissed.

LOU  
No.  
(smiling with him - )  
But I almost did once. Bobby Rose. Last year's dance. We kept looking at each other with that look, you know? It was so stupid. Sitting there, staring at each other, cross-eyed. Mom said I should have just made the move.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JOEL  
I bet she did.

LOU  
She said guys liked that. She said you  
did.

The voices from the mess hall start to grow louder as  
everyone starts filtering out.

JOEL  
What is your favorite color?

LOU  
Blue. Like mom's eyes.  
(carefully)  
Can I have the flask?

Joel nods. Grabbing it from his pocket and handing it to  
her. She opens the cap and starts pouring it out.

LOU  
We won't make it like this, you know  
that?

JOEL  
I do.

Lou nods. And then -

LOU  
What's your favorite color, dad?

Joel reaches out and brushes his hands across the brown bangs  
that hang down across her eyes.

JOEL  
(a whisper)  
Brown.

And as she softens, losing herself in his eyes -

LOU'S VOICE  
And just like that...

EXT. MANDARA HUTS - NIGHT

MOVING ACROSS the sleeping camp.

LOU'S VOICE  
So, suddenly...

INT. MANDARA HUTS - NIGHT

ACROSS the sleeping faces of the Italians. Across Lloyd.

LOU'S VOICE

Like the shadow of a bird flying  
overhead, there, then gone. No evidence  
of what happened - but you know...

INSIDE - LOU'S HUT. Lou watches her father sleep.

LOU'S VOICE

We crossed a line. We connected. Maybe,  
for the first time. How do you grow up  
not knowing your father? Not having him  
know you? Does that happen to everyone?

EXT. WHAT SEEMS LIKE HEAVEN - WHITE

We're literally inside the clouds. And then - tiny specks.  
MOVING. They're people. Hiking up and out of the mist.

EXT. HOROMBO TRAIL - DAY

Winluck leads the trek but it's clear that the going is  
getting much tougher. Oxygen thinner and harder to breath.  
Each step, more of a challenge.

Lloyd looks just plain beaten as he stumbles to keep one foot  
in front of the other. Lou appears beside him. Helping him  
regain his balance -

LOU

What was your brother's name?

LLOYD

What?

LOU

Your brother. The adventurer?

LLOYD

Ralph.

(off her look)

Not much of a name, was it? He could  
have loved bike riding, you know? Or  
fishing? Something where you could sit.  
He could have been a movie critic. I  
love movies. What was your mother's  
name?

LOU

Maxine. But everyone called her Max.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LLOYD

Max. Now, that's a name.

Off Lou's smile - on they go. Through the heather and moorland on this five-hour trek to the next base-camp.

At a rest-break, Federico hands a bouquet of heather to Lou.

FEDERICO

For your book, yes? To remember the smell.

(he touches his nose)

The senses. They are the most important.

LOU

Then I'll keep my eye out.

(then, smiling)

And my nose and my ears and my fingers.

Okay?

Lou places the heather between two pages of the book, then re-packs it, as her eyes connect with Joel, just watching her.

EXT. HOROMBO HUTS - NIGHT

Similar set-up to Mandara. TREKKERS gathered in groups. Playing cards. Re-packing gear.

Lou and Joel sit opposite one another across a camp-fire. There's a new connection between them that is instantly tangible -

LOU

But that's what she said!

JOEL

That I chased her?

LOU

That you were in med-school and she was a nurse and that you were always following her around making up stuff for her to do just to try to keep her talking to you.

JOEL

I was in med-school. She was a nurse. Absolutely. But it was her chasing me around trying to keep me talking to her.

LOU

That's not what Uncle Brad says.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL

You talked about this with Brad?

LOU

She was cool, dad. You wanted her.  
There's nothing to be ashamed of.

JOEL

I was the one who was cool!

The others all turn at the volume of the exclamation.

JOEL (cont'd)

I was!

And all eyes are on him now. But suddenly, there's a  
lightness. The memory opening him up. Joel just breathes,  
instantly transported -

JOEL (cont'd)

It was the way she walked...

Lou moves closer. The others do as well. But Joel could be  
alone on a desert island. He's back in the memory. He's  
back with her -

We see just the shadow of IMAGES - the MEMORIES playing out  
as we CUT back and forth between JOEL - and the PAST -

Two FEET move on just the ball of the foot -

JOEL

It was the strangest thing. She just  
walked up on her toes. And the heels of  
her feet never touched the ground. I  
teased her, we all did, but she didn't  
care. She said it was because she  
thought she should have been born a bird.

The bare feet are dancing. Spinning. Barely touching the  
ground -

JOEL

That in her heart, she knew that she was  
always meant to fly. She was goofy like  
that. She was very goofy, your mom.

There is total silence as all are captivated now.

JOEL

(closing his eyes)  
And she had this hum.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

We see the smiling eyes of Maxine. The curl of her mouth -

JOEL

This way of singing without actually  
singing a specific song. You'd ask her,  
but she never realized she was doing it.  
And she never knew what the song was.  
But it always sounded familiar.

Joel looks back up to realize Lou is now inches from him.  
Lost in every word. And though others watch and listen -  
this is the most intimate conversation this father and  
daughter have ever had.

JOEL

I fell in love with her the moment I saw  
her. I couldn't get that hum out of my  
head. I even tried walking on my toes to  
get her to notice me. And then one day  
she did. There was this place on the  
roof at the hospital.

We're on the roof. Max kneels by the ledge -

JOEL

I was up there one night alone. Must  
have been for an hour. And then I  
realized she was there, too. On the  
other side of the roof. A patient she  
was caring for had died that morning.  
The patient had no family. No friends.  
But there she was, your mother, holding  
her own funeral for this stranger right  
there on the roof of the hospital.

Max has the woman's BELONGINGS in her hands as she lovingly,  
carefully, sorts through them -

Joel shakes his head in wonder. Back in the memory, as -

JOEL (cont'd)

And without saying anything. Or deciding  
anything. I joined her and we continued  
the ceremony together. We didn't say a  
word to one another for hours.

What must be Joel's POV - Max turning back towards us,  
towards him, handing a woman's comb -

JOEL

We just - sat there. Looking through  
that woman's belongings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Joel finally looks back up at his daughter.

JOEL

She was right, your mom. I did chase  
her. I never stopped.

We hold on the empty roof-top. Now abandoned. Finally,  
returning from the memory -

Silence. Everyone taking in just how private a moment they  
have just witnessed. In the background, Winluck and some of  
the other guides have assembled with a collection of very  
strange wooden instruments.

The most extraordinary MUSIC begins to dance across the  
mountains. The PAN FLUTE. The STRINGS. Percussion played  
on empty food CANS. The trekkers all start to peel away from  
the group and gather around as Lara grabs Patti and pulls her  
to the center of camp as they start to dance.

It's a slow transition as everyone still eases themselves  
away from the story they've just heard as they start to join  
in. Clapping. Dancing. And then, Federico is before Lou.

FEDERICO

You should dance.

LOU

With you?

FEDERICO

My father is very good, too. But I  
prefer you dance with me.

Lou turns to Joel who can only smile, freeing himself finally  
from the memory, as -

JOEL

(eyeing him)  
She's fourteen, Federico.

FEDERICO

Yes. Like Juliette.

JOEL

(easing into a smile)  
Bobby Rose is gonna be heart-broken.

LOU

Dad!

But with that, they're off. Federico taking Lou's hands in  
his. Pulling her closer and moving to the center of camp.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Joel gets up and moves closer to watch. Lou, tentative at first. Then slowly, allowing herself to relax into Federico's arms. And we're in CLOSER now, her eyes locking with his, as -

LOU'S VOICE

This is the other time you forget to breathe.

Federico smiles back at her as Lou's eyes trail off, losing herself again -

LOU'S VOICE

My mom was a wonderful dancer...

(then, so softly - )

Sometimes, I think I'm just her shadow.

EXT. KIBO TRAIL - DAY

The games are over. This is real trekking. All bravado has been left behind as every single one of them struggles. Here, at fifteen thousand-feet, the terrain isn't even pretty to look at.

Winluck takes in their faces. Checking each of their conditions. Some are definitely starting to hit the wall. Carlo, Federico's father, is coughing uncontrollably and Federico goes to help Paulo with him.

WINLUCK

So. We will stop here, yes? Very close. But good.

LOU

What?

WINLUCK

Mr. Carlo. Mr. Lloyd. They cannot go on.

Lloyd is bent over, grasping his head from the headache.

WINLUCK

Mrs. Patti. Mr. Joel. We go down. You come again.

LOU

We're not going down! We're here now! What are you crazy?

LARA

Why don't the rest of us head up while everyone who needs to, rests?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WINLUCK

No. We stay together. It is better.

LLOYD

I am not stopping. Not this time.

JOEL

(rising to his feet)

Me neither.

PATTI

I am.

(turning to Lara)

I just can't.

PAULO

I will stay with them. But the others,  
they should go.

Winluck takes in all their expressions. Lou rising to her feet. This is a crusade now -

LOU

What kind of guide are you, Winluck?!  
You're just gonna let us get this close  
and then make us turn back? It's right  
there!!

JOEL

Lou!

LOU

I'm going dad! If I have to go by  
myself, I'm going!

Winluck starts to laugh. Slowly and quietly at first, then  
louder and louder, the group all a little thrown -

LOU (CONT'D)

This isn't funny!

WINLUCK

You make the mountains proud.

(off her look)

Your lungs, they cannot make the summit  
unless your heart - must make the summit.  
Now, we know. Your's must. And so you  
will.

LOU

So, what, it was a test?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WINLUCK  
Everything is a test.

LOU  
(and realizing)  
So, we passed?

EXT. GILLMAN'S TRAIL - NIGHT

Seventeen thousand-feet. MINER-LIGHTS send single beams of light cutting through the darkness like tiny fireflies. Then we start to make them out. Winluck leading. Followed by Federico, Lou, Lara, Joel and finally Lloyd. Patti, Paulo and Carlo have stayed back.

EXT. GILLMAN'S POINT - DAWN

The rim of the crater. Making the push for the last mile to the summit.

LOU'S VOICE  
We rest every thirty minutes. Then every fifteen. Your lungs ache. Your mouth dry. Everything you know is telling you to stop. That you've pushed yourself too far. That you can't make it. That you won't make it. So, you just don't listen. You refuse to. You just take one more step. And then another.  
(thinking, remembering - )  
A little at a time...

Then they all suddenly stop. Silenced.

LOU'S VOICE  
And then, just like that, it happens...

The SUN rises on the horizon. Another gift from the Gods -

LOU'S VOICE  
You're on top of the world.

EXT. UHURU PEAK - THE SUMMIT - DAY

Nineteen thousand-feet. Our group stares back at one another. Lloyd begins to cry. Lara putting her arm around him.

LARA  
Let me take your picture.

Lloyd reaches into his jacket and removes a photo of his BROTHER.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He holds it beside him as she takes a picture of him and the photo. Lloyd then places the photo he brought with him on the SUMMIT PEDESTAL that holds other mementos from past trekkers.

Lou makes her way to the edge of the cliff. The others all watching on. Knowing what she's about to do. Lara moves up beside Joel, gesturing, as -

LARA (CONT'D)

Looks like maybe she was supposed to be a bird, too.

Joel notices that Lou, unaware, is walking on her toes. Her heels never touching the ground as she makes her way to the cliff's edge.

Lou opens the SACHEL and removes a handful of ashes, then eases her fingers open and lets the wind take hold, the ashes scattering out across the top of the world.

And as we MOVE IN on Joel, so impacted by the moment, Lou slowly, carefully, takes his hand in hers, as we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

INT. 747 - NIGHT

Lou places the brochures from the hike and the heather Federico gave her into the scrapbook as Joel makes his way back to his seat. Juxtaposed against the other PASSENGERS, we can tell just how far they've journeyed.

Both, still wear their trekking clothes. More than standing out. Joel settles back in beside her. His eyes falling on the scrapbook as Lou looks up at him, excitedly -

LOU

So, after Cairo -

JOEL

I think maybe we should go home.

Lou's stunned. Not at all what she was expecting.

JOEL

It's just - it's been six weeks, Lou. Do you realize that? Look at us.

Joel's eyes cast back to the immense scrapbook. All the pages still unexplored.

JOEL

I just don't know if we should keep doing this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU  
Doing what?

JOEL  
Forcing ourselves to confront this.  
Everyday. Experiencing this without her.

LOU  
We're not experiencing this without her -  
we're experiencing this together, you and  
me. Why can't that be enough?

Joel's having such a tough time now, as -

JOEL  
This just isn't real, Lou. What we're  
doing -

LOU  
You're wrong. Maybe it's just too real  
for you.

And off his hollow eyes, Lou looks up at the stewardess -

LOU  
I think he needs a drink.

Joel just takes the hit, as -

CLOSE ON - LOU'S PASSPORT. WHOMP! EGYPT'S ENTRY STAMP  
hammers down. We are...

INT. CAIRO AIRPORT - DAY

Lou and Joel move through the airport. Collecting their  
bags. Neither locking eyes with one another. The emotions  
still raw.

INT. EGYPTIAN CAB - DAY

Still in silence, the two make their way through downtown  
Cairo. Outside the window, the vastness, the literal HUM of  
this extraordinary city goes unnoticed.

INT. RAMSES HILTON - DAY

Joel and Lou make their way to the front desk. The HOTEL  
MANAGER looking up to greet them.

HOTEL MANAGER  
(with a British accent)  
Welcome, Sir. I trust you have a  
reservation?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
Stone. Joel Stone.

The Manager checks the computer, squinting, then confused -

HOTEL MANAGER  
But - you've already checked in, sir.  
There must be some confusion.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The Hotel Manager opens the door to the room -

HOTEL MANAGER  
Hello? Mr. other Stone?

BRAD (O.S.)  
Look at you -

They all turn to see Brad entering from the bedroom. Lou racing to him, embracing him.

LOU  
You're not gonna believe what we did. It was incredible!

Brad looks back down at Lou, entranced -

BRAD  
You've changed something. Your hair?  
(and then - )  
Lou, you look just beautiful...

Joel makes his way closer, the two brothers embracing as well.

BRAD  
You look - different, too.

JOEL  
Not sure that's a compliment.

BRAD  
It is. How are you?

LOU  
You know what? I really don't need to hear this again.  
(eyeing Brad)  
He's all yours.

With that, Lou heads into the bedroom. Joel, shaking off Lou's "dig."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
How did you find us?

BRAD  
Your credit card. The reservation.  
(a beat, before -)  
I spoke to Conrad, he said you resigned  
from the hospital. You know you could  
have just taken a leave?

JOEL  
Only if I had the intention of ever going  
back.

BRAD  
So, that's it. You're not a doctor  
anymore?

Joel just looks away, refusing to answer as Brad moves  
closer. Then, carefully -

BRAD  
You really climbed Kilimanjaro?  
(and off Joel's look)  
I saw the tape.

Brad gestures to a VIDEO TAPE next to the TV. Beside it, the  
packaging. Joel's eyes falling across the return address -  
FROM MAX, then back to his brother, so unsure how he feels  
about this, as -

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM - DAY

Lou looks up as the door opens -

JOEL  
We got a message from mom.

ON TV - THE IMAGE OF MAX. Her face looks thinner. Her skin  
more pale. The disease is starting to win. We are -

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Joel and Lou sit before the TV. Silent. Brad, behind them,  
feeling every word as they do.

MAXINE  
Hello, my two world travellers. God, I  
love you both. If you're watching this,  
it means you must be back from Africa.  
Did you make it to the top of Mount  
Kilimanjaro? I bet you did.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAXINE (cont'd)  
I can picture you both there. I'm so  
proud of you I'm - bursting...

Then, Max suddenly looks off. To what, we're not sure, but she clearly loses her train of thought. It happens in a blink. And then, a "response" to an unasked question -

MAXINE  
What?

MOVING IN on Joel and Lou. Each feeling this as if it's happening right now -

JOEL  
(softly, a diagnosis)  
The tumor's spreading to her brain.

ON THE VIDEO - Max finally seems to come back around, as -

MAXINE  
Did we start yet?

A MAN'S GARBLED VOICE  
We should stop this, we should -

MAXINE  
No.  
(turning back to camera)  
Don't be afraid, Lou. I'm not. I just -  
lose myself sometimes. That's all. I  
just lose myself.

Joel looks to Lou, utterly lost in her mother's eyes -

MAXINE  
The Pyramids, Lou. Touch the top for me.  
Touch the top...

Max starts to drift again. And then -

MAXINE  
(suddenly so confused)  
Did we start yet?

And as Max continues to stare off camera, the video image finally turns to STATIC. Joel, Lou and Brad each letting this wash over them, before -

LOU  
(without turning to her father)  
If she could have the strength to keep  
pushing us - if she could do that for us -

Lou finally looks back through tear-filled eyes -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOU

How can we just give up?

Joel can't take his eyes off her, as -

EXT. OUTSKIRTS ANCIENT MEMPHIS - EGYPT - DUSK

THE PYRAMID OF KHUFU (Cheops). Enormous. Almost five hundred-feet tall and occupying an area that could contain St. Peter's from Rome, the Cathedrals of Florence, Milan, Westminster and London's St. Paul's all combined!

The bus door opens and Lou is the first one out. Her eyes scanning across the scope of the place. It's surreal.

BRAD

That's one really big triangle.

LOU

It's not a triangle, it's a tetrahedron.  
(off his look)

You should have seen Victoria Falls.

With that, Lou leads the way -

EXT. THE GREAT PYRAMIDS - DUSK

Lou moves closer to the great Pyramid. From ground level you can't even see the top. As if it stretches right out of the atmosphere.

She starts to climb. One foot in front of the other up these narrow, endless stone steps. Higher and higher. Never looking back.

Brad turns to Joel, challenging. Smiling. Connecting.

BRAD

Wanna race?

And up they go. One step after another. Physically walking their way to the heavens.

Finally, when Lou's gone as far as she can, she suddenly realizes, she's made it to the top.

She turns back to see Joel and Brad not having nearly as easy a time. But they, too, finally make it. Turning back, no need for words now -

Closing her eyes, Lou touches the stone surface.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Beside her, Joel and Brad do the same. The silence of the moment only enhances its impact on them all.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS ANCIENT MEMPHIS - EGYPT - DUSK

Lou makes her way far from the rest of the TOURISTS. Joel and Brad holding back as she heads out across the plateau. The sands of Egypt stretched out forever before her, as -

JOEL  
You still haven't answered my question.  
Why'd you come?

BRAD  
To see my brother and my niece. To see  
that you were okay.

JOEL  
That's all?

BRAD  
That's plenty.

Joel, shaking it off, trying to make sense of all the thoughts vying to be heard -

JOEL  
You don't think we're just running away?

BRAD  
Maybe. And maybe that's okay.

As Joel takes in the comment, their eyes cast back out towards Lou on the outskirts to see -

- her reaching into the satchel, taking a handful of the ashes, and opening her hands. The ashes - instantly swept off into the night.

Joel finally makes his way beside her. Placing his hand gently on her shoulder. Then, breathing, deciding -

JOEL  
Where to next?

EXT. RAMSES HILTON - DAY

Joel and Lou load up the awaiting cab as Brad moves in towards Joel, embracing him -

BRAD  
Get home safe. I miss you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As they pull apart, locking eyes for a final moment, Lou approaches and gives Brad a hug as well. Brad reaches into his bag and removes a gift-wrapped box, handing it to Lou.

LOU  
What is it?

BRAD  
Catches memories. Like fireflies in a bottle.

With another kiss, Lou and Joel finally get into the cab and it pulls out and into the chaos of Cairo's traffic. Brad drifts off into the street, trying to keep his eyes on them for as long as he can. Then, they're gone.

INSIDE THE CAB - Lou tears open the box to find a brand new, beautiful camera. But turning back out the window, searching, she realizes Brad's already lost amidst the teeming streets, as they drift back out into the world -

LOU'S VOICE  
Mom had said the wonders of the world represented the best of people because they were about our past -

And we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

EXT. SPACE - AERIAL

The Earth spins on below. It is so layered and beautiful and enormous. And now we notice something specific. A man-made structure. The only one that can be seen from space.

LOU'S VOICE  
- but they also celebrated all the possibility of our future -

EXT. THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA - DAY

MOVING ACROSS this massive structure. The TOURISTS. Dwarfed by the enormity of it all -

LOU'S VOICE  
They were our greatest promise of what we could be. Of who we could be.

Lou and Joel make their way across the ancient stones. They are now decked out with more gear.

Time has clearly passed. Lou leans out over the side. Staring down at just how far it goes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE (CONT'D)

To see them all had been her dream. Now,  
it had become ours. To live the life...

Her hand reaches into the satchel, then releases the ASHES  
out over the wall -

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

...that she no longer could.

Lou turns back to see her father, lost in the lines of the  
mountain range above -

LOU'S VOICE

But we had crossed another line...

EXT. CHINESE RAILROAD - DAY

The WEALTHY inside. The PEASANTS on top of the cargo cars.  
We MOVE IN towards one of the windows to see Lou and Joel.

LOU'S VOICE

It was as if, a decision had been made  
without either of us ever actually making  
it.

Their attire - their eyes - they continue to fade more and  
more into the world they're in. No longer tourists.

LOU'S VOICE

Suddenly, one day, there was no longer a  
schedule - or a plan - suddenly, one day,  
we were just - drifting.

EXT. BHUTAN - DAY

Lou and Joel move through this tiny village. An old WOMAN  
smiles with red teeth, stained from the betel nut she's  
chewing as she points off down this winding village path.

OLD WOMAN

Kuzo zangpo.

LOU

Kuzo zangpo la.

The Woman's bare feet kicking up dust as she passes along the  
foaming blue torrent of the Paro Chhu River.

LOU'S VOICE

We met a thousand people -

EXT. BHUTAN PASS - DAY

Lou and Joel make their way past the tiny settlements and army posts. Joel buys some food from a street VENDOR, handing it to Lou.

LOU'S VOICE

We ate a hundred foods I'd never even seen before -

EXT. NEPAL - BASE OF EVEREST - DAY

The base-camp from where expeditions start from. The prayer flags blowing in the Himalayan winds. The prayer wheels being spun by those about to begin their own journeys. Joel and Lou take a picture with a young Sherpa GUIDE.

LOU'S VOICE

We only saw Everest, we didn't climb it. We figured Kilimanjaro was enough. But would you believe who was trying -

Lloyd, from Kilimanjaro, hugs them both. So excited to see them. We MOVE IN on Lou's smiling face. Somehow, she seems different. More poised. But now, so does he.

LOU'S VOICE

Turns out he was more of an adventurer than his brother after all.  
(then, really thinking about it)  
I bet he'll make it.

Lou removes a handful of ASHES from her satchel and the winds blowing the prayer flags carry them off into the Himalayas.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Joel and Lou sit in a hotel room watching the VIDEO on TV. It's Max. Looking ever sicker. Weaker. But putting on such a brave face - excited -

MAXINE

Did you spin the prayer wheels? I bet they were beautiful...

LOU'S VOICE

Now and again, we'd get another tape. I can only guess some were thrown away. Or lost. But somehow, when we did get to see her - and hear her - it always made us remember how far from home we'd come.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Joel gets up and leaves the room while the video is still playing. Lou watching him go -

WE MOVE THROUGH A MONTAGE OF THEIR JOURNEY. ACROSS THE WORLD. TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.

LOU'S VOICE

At home, we were a normal family. Dad went to work. So did mom. I went to school. We lived a life. But now, here, I couldn't help but realize how disconnected we had actually been. How - hollow we had been. Somehow, we had just let the days pass without noticing just how much else was passing.

STONEHENGE - ENGLAND.

LOU'S VOICE

Now, nothing - felt hollow anymore.  
Nothing - passed without notice anymore -

THE RIVER THAMES.

Lou lets another handful of ASHES fall. Joel, beside her, breathing with the release. She turns back to him and he kisses her gently on the forehead. And on they go.

LOU'S VOICE

Everything began to taste and smell more distinct. Feel more acute. Sound - clearer. Everything just became - more alive.

THE COLOSSEUM - ROME.

Federico, Carlo and Paulo lead the way down the streets -

LOU'S VOICE

In Italy, we even met up with the O's again.

Federico smiles down at Lou. He slips his fingers around hers and she grasps them back.

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - DAY

The "O's" have ordered so there's so much food it's practically falling off the table. Lou and Federico continue to be caught up in one another.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lou's eyes - those of first love. Shy. Excited. So, overflowing with conflicting emotions. Joel can't help but notice.

EXT. THE TREVI FOUNTAIN - NIGHT

Federico leads Lou into the square and towards the fountain.

FEDERICO  
You are looking different now.

LOU  
What's that supposed to mean?

FEDERICO  
It is your eyes.

Federico stops before the fountain, taking Lou's hands in his. We can practically see her stop breathing, as -

FEDERICO  
They do not look away so much anymore.

Lou holds his stare - not about to look away now, as -

FEDERICO  
Your senses - they are more alive now I think.

Federico caresses her fingers with his -

FEDERICO  
Touch, yes?

LOU  
(barely a whisper)  
Yes.

FEDERICO  
(gently touching her nose)  
The smells...

LOU  
Yes.

FEDERICO  
And taste?

Lou, breathing deep - makes the move. Her lips touching Federico's as she experiences her first kiss.

And finally, pulling back away - her smile just lights her up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE  
(so proud)  
I made the move, mom...

EXT. ITALIAN STREETS - NIGHT

Federico continues to lead Lou on a tour of the streets.  
Their fingers intermingled. Neither letting go, as -

LOU  
You were my first kiss, you know?

FEDERICO  
Yes? Then you will always remember.

LOU  
Yes.

And then, smiling again -

FEDERICO  
Maybe, your second, too?

Federico kisses her again, as suddenly - a young, Italian GIRL, maybe fifteen, spots them and races right towards them - her barrage of Italian may be in another language - but we get the gist.

Lou is practically pushed out of the way as Federico tries to explain to his girlfriend why he's just kissed Lou.

Just heart-broken - Lou takes off into the night.

INT. ITALIAN HOTEL - NIGHT

Joel looks up as Lou races into the room and then right into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her, as -

JOEL  
Lou?!  
(moving to the door)  
What happened? What did he do to you?!

INSIDE THE BATHROOM - Lou slides to the floor, gripping her knees to her chest -

JOEL (cont'd)  
What did he do?! Lou, open this door  
right now!!

Lou finally does. Joel racing inside, kneeling beside her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
Did he hurt you?

LOU  
He has a girlfriend...

And as she starts to cry -

LOU  
Mom should be here...

Joel just aches as he watches the pain of his daughter.

EXT. ITALIAN HOTEL - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Joel and Lou sit on the roof. All of Rome before them, as -

LOU  
Why didn't he tell me? Why did he lie?  
I didn't even really like him.  
(then, so honestly -)  
So, why does it hurt so much?

JOEL  
Because it's supposed to. And you're  
supposed to let it.

Joel reaches out and gently brushes the tears from off her cheeks, but now there's no stopping them, as -

LOU  
I miss her so much, dad. I miss her  
every second. She's supposed to tell me  
what to do.

This just devastates him -

JOEL  
I know.

LOU  
Who's going to teach me everything?  
Who's going to show me - how to be a  
woman? How - to get married? How - to  
hold my babies? It's not fair.

JOEL  
I know.

Joel reaches for her and pulls her towards him -

LOU  
I can't breathe...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL

Yes, you can. Yes, you can.

And as she continues to cry in his arms, Joel is finally the support she needs. Strong. Loving. Embracing. Her father.

EXT. VENICE - NIGHT

Joel and Lou sit at a quaint Cafe eating Italian pastries, the beauty of Venice all around them, as suddenly-

LOU

What does it feel like to have sex?

Joel literally spits out the mouthful all over the table.

Across from them, a gorgeous, older ITALIAN WOMAN, sips her Bellini, amused, as she can't help but listen in -

LOU

I was just thinking about it. You know.  
City of romance and all.

JOEL

Well don't. You shouldn't be thinking  
about that. Especially here.

LOU

I'm serious. You're gonna have to be the  
one to tell me these things now. You  
know that.

Joel wipes the pastry from his mouth. Building up the  
courage -

JOEL

Are you sure you're ready for this?

LOU

I am if you are.

Joel takes in her stare. This is one of the moments - as  
finally -

JOEL

Okay. What do you want to know?

LOU

When was the last time you and mom made  
love.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
(not what he expected)  
Lou!

LOU  
It's just a question. It's not like I think you guys didn't do it! I wasn't delivered by a stork, dad. Mom did natural child birth. I heard all about it. Now, tell me. When was the last time?

Joel can't believe he's going to answer, but shaking his head, he finally does.

JOEL  
In the hospital. A few weeks before.

LOU  
Oh my God, you're kidding?!

JOEL  
No. Your mom liked to make me nervous. Just like you're doing to me now.

LOU  
And having sex in the hospital -

JOEL  
Yep. That did the trick.

Lou looks away, a little embarrassed. So does Joel. Until -

LOU  
So, how old were you the first time?

JOEL  
Lou -

LOU  
How old, dad?

JOEL  
Fifteen.  
(then, eyeing her)  
But I'm a man, it's different for girls.

LOU  
Why? Everyone says that.

JOEL  
Because you're my daughter, that's why. And everyone is right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LOU  
So, what does it feel like?

Joel catches the eyes of the WOMAN again. As if she, too, is waiting for the answer -

LOU  
Come on, dad, tell me. What does it feel like to make love?

Joel loses himself back in her eyes. So open. So honest. So desperate to know. Finally -

JOEL  
It feels like you're both breathing the same air.

And now Lou's captivated -

JOEL  
Like the same blood is coursing through the same heart. Like there's only one heartbeat. It feels like -

LOU  
You're both one person.

JOEL  
Yes.

LOU  
That's what mom said, too.

Lou smiles. Joel knowing he was tricked.

JOEL  
You and your mom -

LOU  
She said you were fourteen though, not fifteen.

JOEL  
I'm still a man and you're still my daughter and you're still too young to even have this conversation.

THE WOMAN  
Love knows no age.

Joel turns towards her, smiling -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JOEL  
I think "love" needs to mind her own  
business.

THE WOMAN  
Ahh. And you were doing so well.

Lou, still smirking back at her dad, takes his hand in hers.

LOU  
I'm in no rush, dad. Don't worry.  
(and then -)  
But it does sound nice.

JOEL  
(softly)  
It's wondrous, Lou. When it's right.

And as the Woman toasts her approval with her Bellini, we  
DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

EXT. SINGAPORE - LITTLE INDIA STREET FESTIVAL - NIGHT

The festival of the Hindu God, Lord Subrani. The FAITHFUL  
move to the hypnotic DRUMMING as they dance.

Lou stares at her newly-pierced ears in the mirror of a  
street vendor's stall. She's growing into a woman right  
before our eyes -

JOEL  
May I have this dance?

Lou smiles back, grinning, as Joel suddenly notices how she's  
walking. He pulls her closer, with a whisper -

JOEL  
You're toe-walking again...

Lou smiles even bigger as they laugh and spin and loose  
themselves in the dance -

LOU'S VOICE  
We sent word home now and again. Just so  
they knew we hadn't been eaten by  
cannibals or something.

INT. BRAD & ANNE'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Brad, Anne, Preston, Abigail and Arnold look through the  
photos of Joel and Lou on their journey across the world.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE

Or joined some religious cult like that  
cats and the cradle guy.

They seem a million miles away. In one - we see Joel getting  
his ears pierced! Brad just starts to laugh. Each one of  
them caught up in the genuine awe of what they're seeing.

LOU'S VOICE

Somewhere along the way - we had changed.

EXT. A SIXTY-FOOT WOODEN GULLET - THE TURKISH COAST - DAY

Sailing through the Mediterranean. The CAPTAIN, a fifty year-  
old Turk, is teaching Lou how to pilot. In the back, Joel is  
scrubbing the deck -

LOU'S VOICE

We were no longer tourists - we had  
become - inhabitants - of the world. Not  
from other people's pictures. Or from  
the movies. Or from the news - but from  
living in it. Completely.

MOVING IN on Joel. The physical exertion all consuming -

LOU'S VOICE

I had never seen him so clear.

EXT. UNDERWATER - TURKISH COAST - DAY

A rainbow of moving color as, SPLASH! Joel and Lou scatter  
the fish out of their way as they dive deeper and deeper.  
Only the sound of the BURBLING oxygen from the scuba tanks  
breaks the silence as they swim on.

EXT. THE GULLET - THE TURKISH COAST - NIGHT

By the light of torches, Joel and Lou sit under the stars.  
The rest on the boat having drifted off to sleep.

LOU

Did you always want to be a doctor?

JOEL

Always.

LOU

And you like it?

JOEL

(moved)

No one's ever asked me that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU  
Well, I am.

JOEL  
I think maybe because when you're truly good at something, when you just know that you're doing exactly what you were meant to do - there's this - harmony.

LOU  
And you were good at it.

JOEL  
I was.

LOU  
Why are you talking in the past tense?

Joel just stares back at her. Clearly, he doesn't want to continue down this path, but -

LOU  
I'm asking you. What are you saying?

JOEL  
I can't go back to that.

LOU  
That doesn't make any sense!

JOEL  
- because I don't trust it anymore, Lou.  
A surgeon, who doesn't trust himself -  
(and letting that drift)  
- there's no harmony in that.

LOU  
Because of mom? Dad, that's not what she would have wanted. That's not -

JOEL  
I couldn't save her, Lou. With all that I know and all that I am, I couldn't save her...

Joel just stares back at her - knowing this will haunt him forever.

EXT. THAILAND VILLAGE - NIGHT

Right on the river, the LOCALS drift on the water on their small lamp-lit boats.

INT. THAI HOTEL - NIGHT

A PADLOCK on the door. Two small cots and a single ceiling fan. Lou turns to see her father tossing in his sleep.

LOU'S VOICE

He had never slept well. I remember that. But one day, it started to get worse. And then - the nightmares came.

Joel bursts up out of bed. His face covered in sweat. His eyes wild. For a moment - he has no idea where he even is.

In the bed beside him, Lou pretends to be asleep. But she's watching him. And she's worried now.

EXT. THE RIVER KWAI - NIGHT

We're cruising down the jungle river on this barge named THE DISCO DUCK. And yes, the Village People blast from the speakers.

Lou sits up front, taking in the twist and turns of the river up ahead. Her eyes falling back on Joel trying to sleep. But he's restless again. She begins to stroke his forehead.

LOU'S VOICE

I asked him about the nightmares, but in the mornings, he'd never even remember having them.

(he finally starts to calm)

Maybe they came because one day, he also stopped talking about her.

JEREMIAH, a seventeen year-old American, gestures from across the barge for Lou to join them. Lou hesitates, but as they keep waving her in, she decides, crossing to them.

SAMANTHA, also seventeen, hands Lou a joint. Lou stares down at it, as the others realize -

JEREMIAH

It's alright. You just take a little puff, then suck it in real quick like you've just been caught. First time's a rush -

Lou, all eyes on her, casts a quick glance back to her dad, making sure he's still asleep, before taking the hit. Sucking it in and talking all at once -

LOU

Like this -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She starts coughing. The others applaud. It is absolutely genuine. No judgement here, as -

SAMANTHA

Take another one. Easy now.

Lou does. This time she holds it. And this time, it hits her as her face eases -

LOU

So this is pot, right?

And off her glazing eyes, we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

IMAGES IN THE NIGHT. The jungle. The river. More pot.

LOU'S VOICE

Harmony. To find that balance between all things. The heart. The soul. Your dreams.

MOVING IN closer towards Joel, caught in another nightmare -

LOU'S VOICE

To find your place in the world. That's what I think it is.

Lou is getting more and more stoned, crossing another line -

LOU'S VOICE

So, what happens when you lose it? When the balance - falls?

The greatest question of her life -

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

How do you find it again?

And off her fire-lit eyes, we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

MAXINE. Smiling back at us, but upside down, as -

MAXINE

You gonna get up, sleepy head?

Lou blinks her eyes open, and as she does, she realizes it's Joel staring back at her, not her mom, we are -

EXT. RIVER KWAI - DAY

The barge is docked on shore with a number of others. Joel hovers over Lou, as she finally wakes, realizing it was just a dream. And when she recovers, she remembers -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU  
I think I ate everything on this boat.

INT. THAI JUNGLE - DAY

Joel and Lou make their way up the path through the jungle, passing by ELEPHANTS trying to pull a bus from the two-feet of mud it's currently embedded in. Lou pops one of the Malaria pills, and offers one to her dad -

JOEL  
Already did.

Putting them away, she clearly looks guilty as hell, as finally -

LOU  
So, I got stoned last night.

Joel stops in his tracks. Stunned.

LOU  
Are you going to be like the old dad now or the new one because I still feel all weird and I'm not so sure I can handle this right now.

JOEL  
Do you have any idea what happens to people they catch here doing that?

LOU  
I'm sorry. It was stupid.

JOEL  
They put you in prison.

Lou looks genuinely guilty - Joel eases off.

JOEL  
I mean it. You're way too young to even be thinking about stuff like that.

LOU  
I know.

JOEL  
Okay, then.

LOU  
So, that's it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
That's it.

Lou breathes. Wow, off the hook, as Jeremiah approaches -

JEREMIAH  
You guys jumping?

EXT. RIVER KWAI - ROPE BRIDGE - DAY

This extremely questionable bridge hangs from one cliff to another above the river. Joel and Lou watching on, as -

Jeremiah and Samantha jump! Falling from the bridge, SCREAMING at the tops of their lungs, and yanking back as the bungee reaches its full extension.

JOEL  
You're not serious?

LOU  
Oh, yeah. Definitely.

CLOSE ON - Joel's feet. The bungee rig attached.

JOEL  
You've double checked everything?

The Guide just smiles back with very few teeth as Joel and Lou, strapped together, position themselves for the fall.

JOEL  
I'm an educated man and I'm jumping off a rope bridge in Thailand rigged by a guy who doesn't understand a word I say.

LOU  
Yep.

JOEL  
Then you count.

LOU  
Three.

JOEL  
Oh, my God...

LOU  
Two...

JOEL  
Lou!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU

One!

And SILENCE. As they free-fall. Finally, bouncing to a stall as the bungee extends seventy-five feet below. They're screaming and laughing all at once as they recoil -

JOEL

Oh - we gotta do that again!

Off Joel's upside down look, laughing his head off, we  
DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

EXT. INDIA - DAY

A cow, up ahead, seems to be leading the way in as Joel and Lou make their way through the streets of this small, Indian town on their way to this hotel off the main path.

INT. INDIAN HOTEL - DAY

Lou stares back out at the streets. They're so full and colorful. Overflowing with life, as -

JOEL

Joel Stone. We have a reservation.

THE CLERK

Yes - Doctor Stone, yes?

AN AUSTRALIAN ACCENT

You're kidding?

Joel spins to see PAUL HASTINGS, mid-forties, dropping the phone and approaching. Looking like a local, his heavy accent is a bit startling, as -

PAUL

You're a doctor?

JOEL

(almost uncomfortable with  
the answer)

Yes.

PAUL

What kind?

LOU

He's a surgeon.

Joel shoots her a look. Not happy, but -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAUL

You're kidding me? I've been waiting four days for a guy to come in from Calcutta and you just walk right through the door?

(turning to the hotel manager)

Get word to Ellen that we're on our way. Tell her we've just found our surgeon!

And off Joel's thrown look -

EXT. VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS - MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL - DAY

It's a nightmare. A flat span of ground covered by a weathered, torn tarp. Within, twenty beds filled with PATIENTS. But the overflow has people lying all over the floor.

JOEL

You must be joking?

PAUL

I wish I were. We're lucky to have what we have. Come on, he's over here.

Paul leads Joel and Lou through the maze of illness.

PAUL (CONT'D)

There's my boy! Little Raja, my main man!

An eight year-old INDIAN BOY looks up through hollow, deadened eyes, as Paul grasps his hand. A tube sticks out of his chest. An old gas mask attached to an even older oxygen tank whines as it pumps on, threatening to stop at any moment.

Paul then turns to the exhausted Indian Woman beside him, Raja's mother, RAMJA.

PAUL (CONT'D)

This is Doctor Stone from America. Talk about your miracles. Just walked right into our lives when we needed him.

(turning back to Joel)

India's funny that way.

Joel, caught in this desperate mother's stare, instantly overwhelmed, pulls Paul off to the side.

JOEL

I can't do this. You need to bring him to the hospital.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL (cont'd)  
(off his look)  
A real hospital.

PAUL  
What country do you think you're in?  
This is as real as it gets.

JOEL  
So, take him to Agra!

PAUL  
It's a day's drive from here.  
(his frustration building now)  
He's got one collapsed lung from the  
crash. The fluid needs to be released  
every twenty minutes or he'll drown.  
It's a fluke he's even survived this  
long! You're it, mate. Life or death.  
Now, are you going to save this boy's  
life or not?

Joel just takes the barrage, his eyes falling on Lou. She's  
sitting beside Little Raja and his mother. Making him laugh.

A WOMAN'S VOICE  
This him?

ELLEN LEEDS, British, late thirties, approaches.

PAUL  
Well, we're still trying to sort that  
out. Ellen Leeds. Joel Stone, our would-  
be surgeon.

ELLEN  
I can assist.

JOEL  
You're a nurse?

ELLEN  
I am today.  
(eyeing Lou)  
This one yours?

LOU  
Lou.

ELLEN  
It's very nice to meet you, Lou.

PAUL  
(a challenge to Joel)  
I'll prepare the OR, then?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Locking eyes with Lou, he finally nods. What else can he do?

INT. MAKE-SHIFT OR - DAY

Just a smaller enclosure with a less torn tarp. Ellen is disinfecting the equipment as Joel scrubs in.

ELLEN  
Just passing through?

JOEL  
What?

ELLEN  
India. Why are you here?

JOEL  
(staring down at his hands)  
It's been awhile since I was in surgery.

ELLEN  
Yeah. Well, same as riding a bike,  
right?

Joel breathes. Not quite.

EXT. VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS - MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL - DAY

Lou continues to sit by Little Raja, holding his hand in hers, gently brushing his forehead as he struggles to breath.

LOU  
Don't worry. He's the best, my dad.  
(and then, so genuinely)  
He's got harmony.

Little Raja turns back to Paul, nodding. Paul rolls him back towards the "OR" as Ramja just watches her son disappear behind the torn tarp.

INT. MAKE-SHIFT OR - DAY

The SOUNDS filtering in from outside. The WIND blowing against the tarp. The reality of just how tenuous this situation is, bearing down -

Joel makes his way to the operating table as Ellen looks up.

ELLEN  
He's under.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Little Raja, now under anesthesia, breathes easier as Joel reaches for the scalpel. Ellen's eyes on his every move. Seeing how hesitant he is -

ELLEN  
Are you alright?

But Joel doesn't answer. His memory now perhaps back at the last operation he performed. That day so long ago -

ELLEN  
Joel?

Joel snaps out of it. His eyes falling back on her as she speaks so softly. Almost a prayer -

ELLEN  
Forget where you are. Forget this old equipment. Forget the sounds. The smells. Forget it all. Just look at this boy. One collapsed lung. Three broken ribs pressing close to his heart.  
(then so gently)  
Can you save him?

And Joel's fog finally seems to clear. Relaxing his own breath, as - a revelation -

JOEL  
Yes.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL - DAY

Lou exits the hospital to find Paul hovered over an old, bent bicycle frame. He's doing his best to pound it back into some sort of shape.

LOU  
He was in an accident?

PAUL  
Military transport. Just drove him off the road right into an oncoming car. For a country so consumed in the afterlife, you'd think they'd hold actual life a little more dear.

Lou sits beside him. Paul now focused on her.

PAUL(cont'd)  
You and your father. What's the story? Why are you here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU  
No reason. We just are, I guess.

PAUL  
No one's just here. So, you're not  
tourists, then?

LOU  
(really lost in the thought before -)  
I'm not sure what you'd call us.

Paul laughs.

PAUL  
Well, then you've certainly come to the  
right place.  
(then, gesturing)  
You want to give me a hand with this?

Lou, grateful for the invitation, moves in as we DISSOLVE  
THROUGH TO -

THE OPERATION - Joel and Ellen falling into a remarkably  
comfortable rhythm. With each move, we may just notice  
Joel's stature, poise, all falling a bit back into sync, as -

THE REPAIR - Paul and Lou somehow managing to resurrect the  
bicycle.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Torches light the perimeter of the hospital. Lou lies fast  
asleep beside the fully-repaired bicycle. Paul moves in and  
wakes her. Her eyes fluttering open, forgetting where she is  
for a moment, before -

PAUL  
He's done it.

INT. MAKE-SHIFT OR - NIGHT

Ellen and Joel, clearly exhausted, stare down at Little Raja  
as Paul leads Ramja into the OR tent. Upon seeing her son,  
she just breaks down. Rushing to Joel and embracing him with  
all she has.

She speaks in the local Hindi dialect as Ellen translates.

ELLEN  
She thanks the Gods for bringing you  
here. For sending you on whatever  
journey brought you to us.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN (cont'd)  
(laughing through her tears)  
She says you need a proper meal.

INT. MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A post-op celebration. More food than anyone should ever see is being passed through the clinic. Ramja directs the meal as she sits by her son, still groggy, but awake. He's through the woods. Course after course is brought out as Joel, Lou, Paul and Ellen try to keep eating.

LOU'S VOICE  
Paul was right. No one was just here.  
It took something to bring them -

MOVING in on Paul. Laughing. So full of life.

LOU'S VOICE  
Paul's wife had died trying to give birth to his son. Neither of them survived. Paul left home seven years ago and never turned back.

MOVING in on Ellen. A familiar light in her eyes.

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)  
Ellen's husband had been killed in Somalia. He'd been a doctor with the Red Cross. It took her two years on her own to finally find the body.

MOVING in on Joel. So, at ease with them all, as -

LOU'S VOICE  
And dad and I...  
(a breath, before - )  
Well...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Joel tosses restlessly as Lou stares back at him.

LOU'S VOICE  
That night was the worst nightmare of all.

She moves closer. As if trying to make sense of it. His forehead covered in sweat, she reaches out and touches it. She's scared.

EXT. MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL - DAY

Joel and Lou make their way to the hospital to see Ellen and Paul already deep into patients.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL

Looks like you've got your hands full.  
Is it like this everyday?

ELLEN

Wait until lunch. We're the only  
medicine within a hundred miles.

JOEL

I just came to - check on our patient.

Ellen gestures to little Raja who's actually looking pretty good.

ELLEN

He's doing great.

JOEL

Good.

ELLEN

Feel free to just dive in here. There's  
plenty to go around.

Lou watches her father carefully, as he seems caught by the decision. His eyes passing across the FACES of the PATIENTS -

ELLEN

Why don't you start over there?

Then, almost just a reaction -

JOEL

Okay.

Joel moves in to see the next patient as we MOVE IN on Lou, struck by the choice. But she doesn't comment.

ELLEN

Could use your help, too, Lou.

And as Lou continues to watch her father, we DISSOLVE THROUGH THE DAY:

Patient after Patient. The hours just drift one into the next. With each one, Joel seems to be more and more at ease. The effort, more and more familiar.

AMAR, an Indian boy of fifteen, arrives with a cart full of supplies.

PAUL

There he is!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

They move in to help him off-load -

ELLEN  
Joel, Lou, this is Amar. He helps with  
the clinic. Just got back with more  
supplies - two day ride. He's our local  
hero.

LOU  
Nice to meet you.

AMAR  
It is nice to meet you.

LOU  
You speak - English.

AMAR  
As do you.

Lou is struck by him. Handsome. Poised. Cocky.

ELLEN  
Amar's been with us since the beginning.  
Don't think we'd survive without him.

Amar is equally struck by Lou - Joel and Ellen lock eyes -  
more than a little aware of what's happening here -

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Lou stands before the mirror trying to fix her hair. She  
looks frustrated. Trying one way, then the next, then back  
to the first way.

Her father, coughing awake, startles her -

JOEL  
You look beautiful.

Lou takes him in - how bad he looks -

LOU  
Why do you think you're coughing all the  
time?

JOEL  
It's nothing, sweetie. I'm just tired.  
You meeting Amar this morning?

LOU  
No! I'm just - going to the clinic.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Joel nods, getting it, as -

LOU  
You really think I look okay, though?

JOEL  
I do.

Lou turns back, kisses her dad, and heads for the door. As soon as she's gone, Joel falls back into bed. Exhausted.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL - DAY

There have been improvements since the last time we were here. Time has obviously passed and Joel has helped turn this into what is actually starting to resemble a real hospital.

Lou works with Paul and Amar to cast a young GIRL's broken leg. Lou and Amar keep "locking eyes," then breaking away.

Lou's eyes then land on Joel and Ellen with another PATIENT. The connection growing between them is so easy to read, as -

LOU'S VOICE  
Days became weeks. And suddenly, just like that, we were no longer drifting.

EXT. VILLAGE BAZAAR - DAY

Joel and Lou sit at a street-side cafe. Across the way Joel keeps his eyes on Ellen bargaining with a VENDOR, as -

LOU  
You want to stay here, don't you?

JOEL  
(thrown)  
What?

LOU  
It's been weeks.

JOEL  
Are you - you want to leave?

LOU  
I'm not saying that. I just don't know what we're doing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
We're helping with the hospital. I  
thought - Lou, I don't understand what  
you're trying to say.

But before Lou can answer, Ellen is back. Handing two odd-  
looking hats to them.

ELLEN  
Couldn't resist. They just called out  
your names.

But Joel and Lou are still locked in it, as -

LOU  
Yes, you do.

And with that, Lou heads off into the bazaar. Joel just  
watches her go. Letting it sink in.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Lou sits by the side of the river watching CHILDREN swimming  
and playing. She doesn't even turn as Joel sits beside her.  
For a moment, neither says a word. And then, finally -

JOEL  
That day of the surgery - with Raja - I  
honestly didn't know if I could do it.

LOU  
I knew you could.

JOEL  
It felt good, Lou.

LOU  
To trust it again?

JOEL  
To trust me again.

Then, taking her time, she finally asks -

LOU  
You like her, don't you?

JOEL  
Nothing has happened between us. You  
know that, Lou.

LOU  
But you want it to?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL  
I don't know that.  
(letting it sink in, perhaps  
for the first time)  
Maybe.

LOU  
(so honestly)  
I just don't know if I'm ready for this  
to be over...

Joel just takes in her eyes. So strong. So poised. He understands completely.

EXT. VILLAGE BAZAAR - DAY

Joel and Lou make their way through the vendor stalls. Taking in everything, as suddenly -

Joel stops. His eyes falling on something specific. And then we see what he does. Grabbing the LONDON TIMES from off the stall, his fingers passing across the DATE.

He looks like he's been shot. Or woken up. As -

LOU  
What's wrong?

Joel just hands her the paper, then heads off by himself into the bazaar. Lou stares down at the date. Letting it register. Her eyes scanning back up, but Joel is gone, as -

LOU'S VOICE  
It had been a year...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Lou rushes into the room.

LOU  
Dad?

But it's empty. Her eyes falling on the SCRAPBOOK, buried under bags of clothing. Her eyes then falling on the ANGEL SATCHEL hanging on her bed-stand, as -

LOU'S VOICE  
(barely a whisper)  
Two paths diverged in a woods.

She opens the satchel. There may be two hand-fulls of ashes left, and then -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)  
But the poem never said how to get back  
home.  
(a beat, a breath - )  
Mom forgot to tell us how to get back  
home...

EXT. OUTSKIRTS MAKE-SHIFT HOSPITAL - DAY

Lou makes her way to the hospital to find Paul and Amar.

LOU  
Have you seen my dad?

PAUL  
Not all morning.

ELLEN  
Lou?

Ellen appears behind them.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Ellen and Lou search the river banks but he's nowhere to be found. Finally, Lou, running out of steam, turns towards her.

LOU  
Where would he be able to get alcohol?

And as her voice trails off -

INT. SMALL RESTAURANT - DAY

Lou and Ellen enter but he's obviously not here. They're clearly starting to worry.

INT. ANOTHER BACK-ROOM RESTAURANT - DAY

He's not here either as the sun starts to dip below the horizon.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - NIGHT

Lou and Ellen, spent from the search, continue to push on as their eyes fall on a small cafe at the end of this stretch of road. And suddenly, they're stopped in their tracks -

They can see him inside. Relief. Exhaustion. Then anger. All mixing as one, as -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU  
I'll go.

But Ellen stops her, forcing her to look at her, as -

ELLEN  
Lou, I know I couldn't possibly know everything you're going through, but this is one of those moments I do know.

Lou lets it settle.

ELLEN  
Until I finally saw my husband's grave. Until I finally let myself really feel it, nothing was clear. There was always a chance, I thought. One last open window. I knew differently in my head, but I wouldn't let my heart accept otherwise. Until I knew. This isn't so different, Lou. This year. That it's over. It's a reminder. It is an end. For both of you. It's okay to feel that. But it can also be a beginning. If you let it.

Lou nods, understanding, but is unable to manufacture a response. And stepping aside, Ellen lets her pass.

INT. INDIAN CAFE - NIGHT

Joel sits before an empty glass and a full bottle of the local, black-market alcohol as Lou sits quietly opposite him. He looks the worst we've seen him since the day Max died. It takes a moment, before -

JOEL  
I can't get my head around it.

LOU  
(so gently now)  
Whether to drink or not?

JOEL  
No. I know I can't. I've been staring at this bottle for hours. I can't get my head around a year. How did a year pass?

LOU  
(forcing a smile)  
A little at a time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL

I don't know how this ends...

Joel finally looks up at her. So ashamed.

JOEL (cont'd)

You're my daughter and I'm exposing you to... Daughters are not supposed to see their fathers like this.

LOU

Why not? I think they all should.

JOEL

They're supposed to find comfort in them. Support. Safety.

LOU

Dad, I've never been more comfortable with you in my life. More safe. More supported.

JOEL

This trip -

LOU

Don't blame this trip.

JOEL

This trip, Lou, has been the most genuine thing I have ever done in my life. And that's because of you. I would have turned back after Africa. At any moment. But then, I'd look at you. It's been your strength that's kept us going, not mine. And not hers. It's been you who's been teaching me.

(his eyes welling up)

I just - miss her.

LOU

I know.

JOEL

She'd be so proud of you.

As Lou embraces him with all she's got -

LOU

I love you, dad.

JOEL

I love you, too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

And we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

EXT. INDIA - DAY

The morning comes.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

As the sun rises, the village outside comes alive with the SOUNDS of life as Lou stirs. Her eyes falling on her father. This morning, for some reason, a feeling of peace. Of resolution. Then, getting up and nudging him -

LOU  
Dad, we gotta get up.

But he doesn't respond. Lou, a little annoyed, nudges him again.

LOU (CONT'D)  
Dad.

But still nothing. And now it's more frantic -

LOU  
Dad, wake up!

EXT. VILLAGE STREETS - DAY

Lou runs as fast as she can through the street VENDORS and MERCHANTS. Tearing around the corner. Then finally stopping. Gasping for breath -

LOU  
Ellen?!

Ellen and Paul turn from their patients to see her.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Paul looks up from Joel who still hasn't moved. Ellen stands beside Lou -

PAUL  
It's malaria.  
(turning to Ellen)  
You'll have to get him to Agra.

LOU  
How could he -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

But then a thought suddenly hits Lou as she races to his pack and opens it. And there it is. His bottle of malaria pills. It's almost completely full. Her heart sinking in confusion.

LOU  
He wasn't taking them.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - DAY

Joel lies still - passed out in the back of this excuse for a pick-up truck as Ellen and Lou sit on either side. Neither knows what to say as the truck bucks its way across the unstable terrain.

INT. AGRA HOSPITAL - DAY

For an American, this is a nightmare. Too many PATIENTS. Too little STAFF and equipment. Joel lies on a dirty cot in the hallway. Tossing. Sweating. Oblivious to it all.

DOWN THE HALL - Lou shouts into the pay-phone.

LOU  
No, this is a collect call to America!  
No! I'm not in America! I'm trying to -

Lou's hands are shaking. Her eyes scanning the chaos. Illness all around her. Closing in.

LOU (cont'd)  
No! I'm trying to call home! Please!

And the phone goes dead. Lou dropping the receiver. Utterly overwhelmed, as -

DOCTOR PRACHAI  
(in perfect English)  
You are the daughter?

Lou spins towards the gentle face of this thirty year-old Indian Doctor, PRACHAI.

INT. DOCTOR PRACHAI'S OFFICE - DAY

Lou and Ellen sit opposite Prachai as he tries his best to underplay this all.

DOCTOR PRACHAI  
It is Malaria. You three were not taking any medicine?

LOU  
I was. My dad, I don't know -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR PRACHAI  
Well, he wasn't. There was nothing in  
his system.

LOU  
(terrified by each word)  
Is he going to die?

Doctor Prachai takes her in. Then, gently -

DOCTOR PRACHAI  
He is very sick. But I shouldn't think  
so. No.

Lou swallows. Not as complete an answer as she would have  
hoped. Ellen takes her hand as Prachai turns towards her.

DOCTOR PRACHAI (cont'd)  
You're not the mother?

LOU  
She's dead.

DOCTOR PRACHAI  
(taking a moment, before -)  
Any other family?

LOU  
I haven't been able to reach them.

DOCTOR PRACHAI  
You'll give me their names and we'll have  
the embassy contact them with all the  
information.

Lou stares back. Mouth dry. Hands still shaking.

DOCTOR PRACHAI  
Don't you worry, Mrs. Stone. We'll get  
him better and the two of you back home  
in no time.

And we MOVE IN on Lou - the blank canvas again -

LOU'S VOICE  
Mrs. Stone... No one had ever called me  
that. That had always been her.

INT. INDIAN HOSPITAL - ROOM - NIGHT

Lou stares at her father who continues to toss and turn in a  
fevered nightmare. No idea she's even there.

EXT. INDIAN HOTEL - NIGHT

MOVING towards the entrance. The TOURISTS coming and going.

LOU'S VOICE

Home. I didn't even know what that meant  
anymore. A house we hadn't seen or  
missed...

INT. INDIAN HOTEL - NIGHT

MOVING down the hallways. The wallpaper peeling to reveal  
years of layers beneath.

LOU'S VOICE

A school with friends whose faces I  
couldn't even remember...

INT. INDIAN HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

MOVING in towards Lou at the window. On the bed beside her,  
the SCRAPBOOK and the SATCHEL. Ellen watches her in silence.

LOU'S VOICE

A life we hadn't lived in - a year...

EXT. INDIA STREET - DAY

Ellen and Lou make their way to the hospital. In the  
distance, completely unnoticed by either of them, the TAJ  
MAJAL.

INT. INDIAN HOSPITAL - DAY

Lou and Ellen move through the early morning chaos of new  
ARRIVALS. Rounding the corner to find -

An OLD WOMAN lying in the bed Joel had been in the night  
before. Lou races back into the hallway, grabbing a NURSE -

LOU

Where's my father?! What happened?!

The Nurse stares back at them confused. Ellen speaks to her  
in Hindi as Lou races on down the hallway.

ELLEN

Lou!

But she's gone. Opening doors to see one terribly sick  
PATIENT after another. Frantic now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU  
Dad?! Dad?!!

She runs into a young DOCTOR.

LOU (CONT'D)  
Where did you put him?!!

Again, a concerned face stares back trying to understand what this foreigner is asking. And she opens another door - and another - and another -

LOU  
Dad!!!

A VOICE  
Lou!

She's spun around to find herself staring back at Brad and Anne. And instantly, she just crumbles into their arms.

LOU  
Oh, my God.

BRAD  
Everything's going to be okay.

ANNE  
We're here, sweetie.

Ellen reaches them -

ELLEN  
He's okay, Lou. He's been moved upstairs.

Anne and Brad turning towards this stranger, as -

ELLEN  
You're Joel's brother.

INT. INDIAN HOSPITAL - JOEL'S ROOM - DAY

Brad leads Lou and Anne into Joel's room as Ellen stands back in the hallway. Joel's still oblivious to the world.

Lou makes her way to his side. Taking his hand in hers. He doesn't even realize she's there.

BRAD  
You're going to go back home with Anne, Lou. Tomorrow. I'll stay with your dad until he's well enough to travel back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU  
(eyes still on her father)  
I'm not leaving him.

Anne kneels beside her. Trying her best to be gentle.

ANNE  
It's time to go back home, Lou. There's  
nothing you can do for him here.

LOU  
I can be here. That's enough.

EXT. INDIAN STREETS - NIGHT

Lou leads Anne through the streets. Lou, oblivious to all around her. Anne, scared by each new FACE. By each new SOUND.

LOU  
This is it.

Anne stares in horror at the run-down hotel before her.

ANNE  
You're staying - here?

INT. INDIAN HOTEL - NIGHT

MOVING through the halls. Anne looks almost afraid to touch anything. Lou finally reaches her room and opens the door. Suddenly, under these circumstances, it does seem more run-down than it did last night.

ANNE  
Get your things.

As Lou stares back -

LOU'S VOICE  
And suddenly, just like that - it really  
is over...

EXT. LUXURIOUS INTERNATIONAL HOTEL - NIGHT

Anne tips the DOORMAN happily as they are led into the sprawling lobby.

LOU'S VOICE  
And the real world starts rushing back  
in. Suddenly - just like that...

## INT. LUXURIOUS INTERNATIONAL HOTEL - NIGHT

Anne breathes easier with each step as the BELLHOP leads them to their two decadent rooms side by side. Smiling -

ANNE  
Now you can finally get a good night's sleep.

LOU  
I've been sleeping fine.

ANNE  
Well...

Anne just runs out of things to say.

ANNE  
Why don't we both take a little rest.  
I'm exhausted. Okay, honey?

As Lou just nods, Anne gratefully tips the BELLHOP and makes her way into her own room.

## INT. LUXURIOUS INTERNATIONAL HOTEL - ROOM - NIGHT

Lou stares out the window taking in the sights and sounds of the city below. Her eyes then falling back on the Angel SATCHEL. And she pulls it closer. Opening it.

The very few handfals left.

Lou hears a knock at the door, opening it to find Ellen -

Lou just grabs her. Hugging her. Never wanting to let go.

## INT. LUXURIOUS INTERANTIONAL HOTEL - PATIO - NIGHT

Lou and Ellen take in the sounds of the city together, as Lou turns towards her -

LOU  
Are you in love with him?

ELLEN  
(smiling so gently)  
I'm not ready to love him, Lou. I'm not ready to love anyone yet. And neither is he.  
(and then, a secret - )  
I like him a lot, though.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU  
He likes you a lot, too.

ELLEN  
So, maybe one of these days. In one of  
these countries...

LOU  
On one of these journeys...

ELLEN  
Maybe.

And as Lou holds her stare -

ELLEN  
Put me in your book, okay?

LOU  
I've put you in my heart. It's safer.

Through the walls, they can hear the raised VOICES in the  
next room of Brad and Anne fighting.

EXT. LUXURIOUS INTERNATIONAL HOTEL - DAY

Anne throws a final look back as she gets into the cab. Brad  
and Lou watching her go -

BRAD  
She's never liked to travel.

Lou just smiles.

BRAD  
You hungry? I'm hungry.

LOU  
I know a great place.

And more impressed with every word from this girl -

EXT. INDIAN STREET - DAY

Brad and Lou are MOVING THROUGH this open air market as Lou  
orders food in the local language from a street vendor -

BRAD  
What the hell did you just order?

LOU  
It's better if you just eat it without  
knowing all the details.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Brad nods. Accepting the challenge. His eyes just keep taking her in, until -

LOU (CONT'D)  
What?

BRAD  
You're your mother. It's unbelievable.

Lou just swallows, as -

BRAD  
I'm serious, Louella. You've become a woman. A strong, beautiful, wonderful woman. You've become your mother. She would be so proud.

Lou seems so strong now, so clear, as -

BRAD  
Tell me about your dad? What's he become?

Then, so simply -

LOU  
He's become my dad.

INT. INDIAN HOSPITAL - DAY

Lou and Brad make their way down the hall as Ellen races out to greet them.

ELLEN  
He's awake!

Lou tears into the room to find Joel awake. She races towards him. Embracing him with all she's got.

Finally, Lou pulls back. The two locking eyes. And then angrily -

LOU  
What the hell's the matter with you? How could you not take the pills?

JOEL  
The nightmares, Lou, about mom. They made them worse.

LOU  
(and understanding)  
We'll get over them. Together.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOEL

Yes. I know we will.

Lou forces a smile. Both knowing what she's going to say before she does -

LOU

I'm ready to go home, dad.

Joel's eyes pass from Brad, to Ellen, who nods knowingly, they've obviously already had this conversation. Then, finally, his eyes fall back on Lou -

JOEL

Me, too.

And as they hold each other with all they've got, we DISSOLVE THROUGH TO -

EXT. THE EARTH BELOW US - SPINNING

We see the MOUNTAINS. The OCEANS. We may even catch a glance at that GREAT WALL. Then we see a PLANE making its way towards North America -

LOU'S VOICE

And just like that...

INT. THE PLANE - NIGHT

Brad and Joel are both asleep as Lou looks out the window trying to catch a glimpse of whatever she can.

LOU'S VOICE

Every mile seemed like a thousand. Every hour, like a second. Once you make that decision, it's amazing how fast it comes.

EXT. LAX - TARMAC - DAY

The 747 touches down. The wheels spitting smoke as they return to Earth.

CLOSE ON - LOU'S PASSPORT.

The page is filled with ENTRY VISAS from endless countries from around the world. The page is turned - same problem. And the next. And the next. We are -

INT. LAX - IMMIGRATION BOOTH - DAY

The immigration OFFICER starts to laugh, looking down at Lou.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OFFICER

Is there any country you don't have a stamp from?

Lou smiles back -

LOU

This one.

The officer finally reaches the last page. It's empty. And WHOMP!

OFFICER

Then welcome home.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

MOVING IN towards the house. Seems like we haven't been here forever. The cab arrives and stops out front.

Lou looks up at the front door. A stranger to this place.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

The door swings open. The house is just as they left it. Well, minus the empty bottles of alcohol. And then, Lou's eyes land on a stack of ENVELOPES.

They are all marked - FROM MAX. Everyone knowing exactly what these are -

BRAD

These are the ones that were returned. Wrong addresses some of them. Others, just weren't accepted through customs, I guess. But these are the last of them.

Lou moves slowly towards them. Lowering her hands across the words - FROM MAX, as -

JOEL

But - how did you get them?

BRAD

The P.O. Box is mine.  
(then, off their stunned looks)  
I was the one who made the tapes. I was the one who sent them for her.

Joel stares back at him, a mixture of wonder and appreciation all at once, as -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAD (cont'd)  
It meant the world to her what you two  
did. It meant the world...

And off their look - CLOSE ON - THE TV.

STATIC cutting to the image of Max in bed. Her appearance has changed. She's clearly approaching the end and she knows it. We are -

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

MOVING ACROSS the faces of Lou, Joel and Brad taking in the videos. We don't hear Max, but with each tape, she begins to drift further. Each tape. Harder to watch. And yet they do. Not turning for a second, until finally -

MAXINE  
Do you remember the poem, Lou? Robert  
Frost? He had a secret, you know? One I  
didn't tell you. It doesn't matter which  
path you take. It only matters what you  
do once you've taken it.

Max suddenly drifts off again for what seems like an eternity. Joel actually gets up to turn it off when she suddenly turns back towards the camera.

MAXINE  
The last page, Lou. The empty one.  
The one I wouldn't let you fill...

Lou pulls her legs to her chest. Lost in her mother's eyes -

MAXINE  
That one's up to you. Fill it with your  
own wishes, not mine. Fill it with your  
life.  
(and then, finally - )  
Fill it with wonders...

Max suddenly seems to get distracted - lost - then gaining control again, as -

MAXINE (cont'd)  
I'm ready to begin...

But the tape ends. And finally, there is silence. Each just breathing, as -

LOU  
(barely a whisper)  
That's it? That's all of them?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRAD  
No. There's one left.

Brad reaches into the drawer by the window and pulls out a tape. No envelope. This one is marked on the tape itself.

It reads simply - Welcome Home.

BRAD (cont'd)  
For when you got back.

They each take in the comment. Each realizing this will truly be the last they ever hear from her. Brad hands the tape to Lou who just stares down at it. Afraid, as -

LOU'S VOICE  
Welcome home...

INT. LOU'S ROOM - NIGHT

MOVING THROUGH Lou's empty room. Towards the open window to find Lou on the ledge again. Holding the bursting SCRAPBOOK in her arms. Her hands moving across the PHOTOS she took. The MEMENTOS she kept.

INT. JOEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

MOVING THROUGH Joel's room. The backpack stained from a hundred places from around the world. He takes in the surroundings, feeling like a stranger.

INT. JOEL'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

MOVING ACROSS the sink. The shaving cream. The scissors. The razor. But for some reason, Joel can't seem to begin.

And then, Lou is standing beside him. Her eyes locked with his in the mirror, as -

LOU  
Are you ready?

JOEL  
Yes.

Lou picks up the scissors and begins to cut away at Joel's beard.

EXT. ABIGAIL AND PRESTON'S YARD ABOVE THE BLUFF - DAY

Abigail and Preston make their way down to the cliffs below their estate, as -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE

We had a lot of healing to do. We all knew that.

- they finally reach Joel and Lou, who's holding the ANGEL SACHEL to her chest. Joel, clean shaven, almost looks younger. Lighter.

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

I had always planned for the last of it to be something we did together. One look at Grandma's eyes, and I knew I had been right.

Brad and Anne silently join them on the edge of the cliff.

LOU'S VOICE

Mom had always loved the ocean. The smell of the breeze. The salt on her tongue.

And Lou, breathing, finally turns it upside down. The last ASHES falling from the satchel are immediately picked up by the wind and carried out across the ocean.

LOU'S VOICE

Now, they were hers, forever.

MOVING IN on each of them. Each saying their final, silent good byes. Joel moves beside Lou and pulls her closer. No need to say a word. They both know exactly what the other is thinking.

EXT. BARD SCHOOL - AERIAL - DAY

We're MOVING IN towards the school.

Lou sits amidst some friends. Lindsey among them. Maybe it's because we know her, but Lou just seems so much more alive than the rest of them -

LOU'S VOICE

I had been gone a year. And though I tried to explain why to my friends, even Lindsey couldn't understand it. Eventually, I just stopped trying to explain at all.

EXT. MERCY HOSPITAL - DAY

MOVING IN towards the hospital.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU'S VOICE

Little by little, we tried to return to  
the life that we had lived...

INT. MERCY HOSPITAL - OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Joel's eyes peer over the mask as he continues the procedure.

INT. BRAD & ANNE'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Lou, Joel, Abigail, Preston, Arnold, Brad and Anne all sit  
around the table. Every now and again, Joel and Lou seem to  
connect eyes with some hidden thought, some personal joke  
between them.

LOU'S VOICE

But we weren't the same anymore. And we  
never would be. And that was okay.  
(then, really thinking about it -)  
No, that was better than okay. We'd  
found a new harmony...

INT. JOEL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joel and Lou read a letter from Ellen. Pictures of her,  
Paul, Amar and Little Raja sitting on his repaired bicycle  
spread out before them.

LOU'S VOICE

Now and again we'd hear from Ellen.

Lou watches Joel, knowing just how much he genuinely misses  
her.

LOU'S VOICE

Maybe one of these days... Well, maybe.

EXT. THE BLUFFS BELOW THE ESTATE - DAY

Lou sits by herself before the cliffs. Breathing in the salt  
air. Extending her tongue and smiling -

LOU'S VOICE

I do go to the bluff now and again. To  
taste the salt on my tongue.

A BIRD suddenly flies right overhead and then out over the  
ocean as Lou smiles at the thought -

LOU'S VOICE

Sometimes I even think I hear her  
whispering in the wind...

(CONTINUED)

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Lou looks down at the SCRAPBOOK in her lap. Her eyes passing across the cover page and the single word - WONDERS.

LOU'S VOICE

I never watched the final tape. Somehow, that just felt like it would have been the end. This way, I can always think that there's another journey on it. Another... possibility. Sometimes it helps.

She opens the book and begins to flip through the IMAGES of their journey, all the FACES, as -

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

It's funny. Thinking back now on our year. It's not the places I remember. It's the moments.

We see the PICTURE of Lloyd, crying that night on the summit. Of Lara dancing that night by the fire. We see Federico serving pasta. Jeremiah and Samantha posing by the Disco Duck.

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

But of all the wonders we saw, I think, in the end, the most wondrous thing was seeing ourselves. And seeing who we could, and wanted, to be.

Finally, the picture of Amar, Paul and Ellen.

Lou's eyes smile back, clear and focused now, as -

LOU'S VOICE

You knew exactly what you were doing, mom. It's like Winluck said. Your heart can't make it to the summit unless it had to. And we - couldn't make it back home -  
(a beat, a breath - )  
Until we were ready to.

Lou finally closes the book, placing it into her backpack, then heads off along the path away from the bluffs -

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

So, did he go crazy? Did we? Maybe. But maybe that's just what it takes sometimes. Maybe, sometimes, we all need to get a little lost.

Lou suddenly stops walking. Her eyes are so clear. Her evolution into a young woman complete, as -

(CONTINUED)

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LOU'S VOICE

There are always two roads. But maybe  
the real secret, the one Mr. Frost didn't  
even know, is that we don't ever have to  
choose. It's our lives. If we want.  
And we should want. We can choose to  
take them all...

Now we see why she has stopped.

She stands at a path with TWO ROADS before her to choose  
from. And smiling, she takes a step, as we FADE OUT:

Over BLACK:

LOU'S VOICE (cont'd)

Trust me. It'll make all the difference.

THE END