THE TRIGGER EFFECT

by

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inspired by the documentary by

James Burke

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thank you,
Rosario Varela

EXT MOUNTAINSIDE NIGHT

This is a scrabbly mountainside, all hard brush and dry boulders, dimly visible in the moonlit night. A small distance ahead of us, there's a cluster of shapes, low to the ground, theground,gathered around something. It's:

"Friday."

Moving closer, we see the shapes are animals, coyotes gathered around a kill, GROWLING and GRUNTING as they rip apart what's left of whatever it was. The coyotes, the terrain, the chilly night -- wherever we are is an inhospitable place.

From somewhere far off the coyotes hear a noise and scatter in all directions. We follow one coyote in particular, tagging along as he bounds across the choppy hillside in his lopsided gait.

All at once the coyote breaks out of the scrub brush and onto pavement, which surprises us, but not as much as what we see behind him --

-- it's Los Angeles, spread out below the coyote as a magnificent array of lights, one of those Mulholland views. The coyote trots along the edge of the road for a while, until the lights of an approaching car startle him back into cover.

The car passes, its radio BLARING, and the coyote might as well never have been there.

CUT TO:

EXT STREET NIGHT

POW! POW!

A GUY takes two gunshots in the chest and SLAMS up against a wall, dead. ANOTHER GUY rushes forward and crouches over him.

OTHER GUY
RAY! NO!

He looks up, in the direction of whoever shot Ray, and SCREAMS, firing madly from a semi-automatic weapon.

The BAD GUYS, in retreat, take cover and return the fire, one of those gun battles where a million bullets fly and no one gets hit. Just as all this seems seriously unbelieveable --

INT MOVIE THEATRE NIGHT

-- we realize we're in a movie theatre, and this action is from a cop film on screen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Halfway back in the crowded theatre are MATTHEW and ANNIE KAY, in their thirties, attractive, well-dressed. Neither of them is particularly enthralled with the film, but they're giving it a go. The crowd around them is urban, downtown Hollywood, the theatre about half full.

A SKINHEAD and his GIRLFRIEND sitting behind Matt and Annie either love the film or hate it, it's hard to tell, as they are engrossed in conversation about something else, taling in normal speaking voices.

Forced to listen, Matt and Annie are going crazy. Matt in particular is a cauldron, he looks about to explode. He leans over to Annie and whispers.

MATTHEW
I'm about to say something awful.

The Skinhead conversation continues unabated. As a car ROARS by on screen --

SKINHEAD
My brother's got a truck like that.

Matt rolls his eyes, in agony.

SKINHEAD (cont'd)
Different color though.

MATTHEW
(to Annie again)
I gotta say something.

ANNIE
Go for it.

SKINHEAD
(to his Girlfriend)
Yeah, you wish!

Summoning his nerve, Matt turns and gives the Skinhead the old Half Turn Angry Glare.

But the Skinhead conversation continues. Matt looks at Annie, shrugs, and goes back to watching the movie.

SKINHEAD (cont'd)
(to his Girlfriend)
I don't think he even <u>has</u> two of 'em. He <u>says</u> he does --

Annie turns around and faces him squarely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

ANNIE
SHHHHH!

The Skinhead regards her for a moment. She does not turn back.

SKINHEAD
Hey, fuck you, bitch.

Annie just stares at him, surprised. She turns and looks to Matthew. He's staring at the screen, as if he hasn't heard.

But he heard. He feels Annie's gaze on him and turns around, sneaking half a glance at the Skinhead.

SKINHEAD (cont'd)
(to his Girlfriend)
What a fuckin' bitch.

Intimidated, Matthew turns back around without saying anything. Annie, surprised and angry, turns back as well.

They stare at the movie screen, not each other, while the Skinhead turns back to his girlfriend.

SKINHEAD (cont'd)
She's the one that should fuckin' shut up.

The color rises in Matthew's cheeks. His jaws clench. After an agonizing thirty seconds, he leans over and whispers to Annie again.

MATTHEW
You want to move?

She looks at him.

ANNIE
I hate it anyway, let's just go.

They get up and slide out of the row. Annie walks ahead, up the aisle. Matthew gets a couple rows past the Skinhead's. He stops. He looks back, over his shoulder. The Skinhead, as if sensing it, looks back at him. They hold eye contact for a moment --

-- then Matt turns and walks away, up the aisle and out of the theatre.

CUT TO:

EXT MOVIE THEATRE NIGHT

MATT and ANNIE come out of the theatre lobby and onto a terrace. They head for the elevator.

MATTHEW
I'm sorry.

ANNIE
You don't have to be.

MATTHEW
I mean, it's Hollywood, you know?

ANNIE
Believe me, I know, I thought of it --

MATTHEW
The guy could have a gun, a knife --

ANNIE
-- I know, you don't know.

MATTHEW
How smart is it to play Neanderthal when it can get you killed these days? Right? Fuck.

ANNIE
Take it easy, Matthew, I said I understand.

MATTHEW
Fuck.

He SLAPS the down button for the elevator. The moment he does so, we leave them and jump --

INSIDE THE ELEVATOR MACHINERY.

There is a low POWER HUM as the metal contact point on the other side of the button makes contact with a metal plate inside the panel.

A circuit closes, which flicks a relay switch on a panel of many. A signal pulses down a wire, and at the top of the elevator shaft a large stack of counterweights goes into a controlled descent, raising the elevator car.

Below us, the elevator doors WHIRR open and MATT and ANNIE climb in, continuing their conversation. We can't make out what they're saying, though, we're too busy watching and listening to the BUZZ and CLICK of the circuits and machinery and currents they pay no attention to.

As abruptly as it started, the sequence of connections plays itself out in reverse and --

INT PARKING GARAGE NIGHT

-- the elevator doors slide open. MATT and ANNIE step out and into a parking garage.

ANNIE
Why don't you just let it go?

MATTHEW
I'm asking you a question. Doesn't it bother you, on some level, that I, your husband, your protector if you want to get real basic about it, didn't, you know --

ANNIE
What?

MATTHEW
The guy called my wife a fucking bitch to her face and I sat there like a statue! That doesn't bother you?!

ANNIE
Okay, yes. It does bother me. It would have been nice if you had come to my defense, it would have been great, but I understand why you didn't. It's 1994, it's Los Angeles, I understand. I don't blame you.

MATTHEW
But?

ANNIE
But I do wish things had been different. Yes.

MATTHEW
I'm going back in there.

But they keep walking toward their car.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
I mean, I just don't get this. If you say you understand, how can it still bother you?

She sighs and puts a hand on his face.

ANNIE
Can we go home?

CUT TO:

EXT STREET NIGHT

The sky RUMBLES, a storm on the way. MATT and ANNIE pull to a stop at a red light.

INT CAR NIGHT

MATT's still stewing, ANNIE doesn't know what to say, so she says nothing. Matt turns and looks out the window as they wait at the light. He stares blankly at a newsstand.

At the newsstand, while the VENDOR is occupied with a customer, a HOMELESS GUY reaches behind him and pulls a bag of chips from a rack near the register. He pockets them and turns around, unseen by the Vendor.

But Matt saw, and as the Homeless Guy turns away he locks eyes with him, realizing he's been busted.

Matt just stares at him, seeing but barely registering. He absent-mindedly brushes a button on his door.

The doors lock with a dull CHUNK, the light changes, and the car sweeps away.

The Homeless Guy watches.

CUT TO:

EXT DRIVEWAY NIGHT

A metal security gate at the top of a driveway glimmers in the light rain that has just started to fall. The gate stands inert for a moment, until a soft CLICK emanates from a power box.

The box BUZZES, a hydraulic arm sucks the gate forward off its latch, it WHIRRS softly across the driveway, headlights approach --

-- and MATT and ANNIE pull through. The gate swings shut behind them with a gentle CLICK.

INT KAY KITCHEN NIGHT

MATT and ANNIE come into the house. Matt punches a code into an alarm panel as Annie heads down the hall, toward where a baby can be heard crying.

INT BABY'S ROOM NIGHT

CARMEN, fortyish, Latina, is pacing, rocking a six month old BABY, when ANNIE comes in.

ANNIE
She still feels bad, huh?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARMEN
She only slept for about an hour.

ANNIE
(taking the baby)
That's it? You poor thing. Do you feel bad? Huh?

She feels her forehead.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Oh, it's worse! She's burning up!

MATT appears in the doorway.

MATTHEW
She is?

ANNIE
Feel her. We have to call Waldstein.

MATTHEW
(feeling her forehead)
Yeah, you're right.

ANNIE
Thanks, Carmen. Have a good weekend.

CARMEN
(putting on her coat)
Remember, it's the long weekend. The holiday.

ANNIE
Right, see you Tuesday.
(to Matthew)
Will you call the doctor right away, please?

MATTHEW
(checks his watch)
Why not, he hates us already.

INT A TELEPHONE NIGHT

A strange, muffled SOUND that in some vague way resembles speech resonates in our ears. A gray felt diaphragm vibrates with the sounds. A field of uneven metal poles make a zigzaggy path over a glowing circuit board as Matthew's voice becomes distinct for a moment:

MATTHEW (o.s.)
Great. Thanks for calling --

INT BEDROOM NIGHT

MATT is in their bedroom, getting undressed, talking on a cordless phone.

MATTHEW
(into phone)
-- us back so quickly.

He presses a button, hanging it up with a soft BEEP. ANNIE pokes her head out of the bathroom, in her nightshirt.

ANNIE
What'd he say?

MATTHEW
Not to worry unless it's over a hundred and three, and he'll phone in a prescription first thing in the morning.

ANNIE
Good.

She goes back into the bathroom. Matt sits on the edge of the bed, listlessly taking off his shoes.

MATTHEW
(a mutter)
I want tonight over again.

Annie pokes her head out of the bathroom again.

ANNIE
You say something?

Matt shakes his head no.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Why don't you see what's on TV?

She goes back into the bathroom. He sighs and lays back against the pillows.

Outside, there is a flash of lightning, followed almost immediately by a THUNDERCLAP. Matt sits up. Annie steps out of the bathroom.

MATTHEW
Thunder. Cool.

In the other room, the baby SHRIEKS and cries.

ANNIE
I'll go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW
Big storm coming.

ANNIE
I'd say it's already here.

She leaves. Matt lays back on the pillows again, reaches over to the light, and flicks the switch.

INSIDE THE LIGHT BULB,

the brilliant blue bolt of energy that arcs between the wavering filaments abruptly FIZZES out.

Everything is black.

CUT TO:

EXT BIG BEAR NIGHT

A forest stands at the edge of a mountain lake. A legend:

"Big Bear Lake
106 miles northeast"

The lights of a small town twinkle on the other side of the lake from the forest.

EXT FOREST NIGHT

A deserted highway runs through the center of this pristine forest, the light crust of frozen snow on the ground shines in the glow of a lone streetlight.

On the forest floor, a few nocturnal animals dart here and there. A snowshoe hare stops in its tracks and looks up, sniffing the air. It looks alert, sensing something.

Suddenly it turns and darts away, into the underbrush, as fast as it possibly can.

There is a low HUMMING sound that grows quickly louder, within seconds it's a full ROAR --

-- and something falls from the sky, something only the size of a watermelon but moving like a rocket, blasting through the trees, snapping them off like matchsticks, sending up a spray of snow in its wake as it SCREAMS down and across the forest floor before it SLAMS into the earth, burying itself in a hole twenty feet wide and ten feet deep.

The forest shudders.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The meteor sits in the center of its crater, glowing. It seems to BUZZ, to CRACKLE with a sound like static electricity.

The lone streetlight, burning fifty yards from the crater, SIZZLES abruptly and goes out.

With a gentle WHOOSH, the forest --

-- bursts into flame.

FROM HIGH ABOVE THE LAKE,

the twinkling lights of Big Bear City wink out, one quadrant at a time, in rapid succession.

In a few seconds, the only light comes from the brightly burning forest, its orange tongues reflected off the glassy lake.

CUT TO:

INT KAY HOUSE NIGHT

Red digits in an alarm clock read 11:44. Until they go black.

A red light glows in an alarm panel, next to the word "Armed." It goes out.

The TV abruptly goes black, as does everything else in MATT and ANNIE's bedroom. In bed, they GROAN.

MATTHEW
Oh, God. Now what?

ANNIE
A blackout?!

MATTHEW
Fucking California. We're outta here.

He gets up.

ANNIE
Check the circuit breakers, maybe it's just us.

MATTHEW
(at the window)
It's not just us. The streetlight's out.

ANNIE
It is a blackout.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW
Don't have to sound so happy about it.

ANNIE
I used to like blackouts when I was little.

MATTHEW
It'll probably come right back on.

ANNIE
You know, you light candles, start a fire -- where are you going?

MATTHEW
(putting on shoes)
Outside.

ANNIE
Why?

MATTHEW
I don't know -- walk the perimeter?

She sits up quickly and starts putting on her own shoes, excitedly.

ANNIE
I'll check Sarah.

He looks at her. She looks at him.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Fun!

CUT TO:

EXT HOUSE NIGHT

Sure is dark out. MATT comes outside, shining a flashlight this way and that.

From across the fence at the edge of his driveway, he sees another flashlight beam, this one extremely powerful, a halogen beam, in the yard next door.

He goes to the fence.

MATTHEW
Hello?

The beam turns and shines in his face, blinding him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NEIGHBOR
(a voice behind the light)
Who are you?

MATTHEW
Your neighbor. Could you get that out of my eyes?

The Neighbor redirects it.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Thanks.

The Neighbor, a burly guy in his fifties, just stares at him.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
So whaddya make of this?

NEIGHBOR
Blackout.

MATTHEW
Yeah, yeah. Just what we need, right?

The Neighbor doesn't answer, just starts shining his flashlight back and forth over Matt's house, almost accusingly. Matt looks over his shoulder, watching the investigation.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Uh -- what are you, uh -- ?

The light comes back into his eyes.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Hey, come on.

NEIGHBOR
Oh yeah. Sorry. So you don't know anything about this?

MATTHEW
Must have had something to do with the storm, I guess.

NEIGHBOR
Uh huh. Well. Lock up.

He turns and heads back into his house, shining his light inquisitively over Matt's property one more time.

CUT TO:

INT BEDROOM NIGHT

MATT comes back into the bedroom, which is now lit by a single candle.

MATTHEW
You know how we've lived here all these years and never met our next door neighbor?

ANNIE is in bed again.

ANNIE
Yeah?

MATTHEW
That was a very good policy.

ANNIE
What do you think happened?

MATTHEW
I don't know. Hey, where's our Walkman? It's got a radio, doesn't it?

ANNIE
That broke, like, three years ago.

He slides back into bed, next to her.

MATTHEW
See, if there's another earthquake, we're totally unprepared. Sarah okay?

ANNIE
Never woke up.

He kisses her neck.

MATTHEW
Hey, it <u>is</u> kind of romantic, isn't it?

He kisses her neck some more. She is reticent.

ANNIE
I don't know --

MATTHEW
Don't you want her to have a brother to protect her?

The unintentional reference breaks any mood they had a shot at establishing. Matthew pulls back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There is an uncomfortable pause.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
You know, I should keep the flashlight in here. Just in case.

He gets up and leaves the room. She watches him go, frustrated. Her turn to fall back against the pillows.

CUT TO:

INT KAY BEDROOM DAY

It's morning now and a piercing SHRIEK from off screen blasts MATT's eyes open. He squints at the digital clock on the nightstand, but its face is still dead, so a legend helps us:

"Saturday."

ANNIE hurries into the bedroom, carrying SARAH, who is crying desperately.

ANNIE
It's worse.

MATTHEW
(not fully awake)
What?

ANNIE
Her fever, I swear to God, it's worse, feel her.

She sits on the edge of the bed, next to him, and he feels his daughter's forehead.

MATTHEW
Oh, no. The power's still out?

ANNIE
Yes.

MATTHEW
It must have been the storm. You think it was the storm?

ANNIE
I don't know. Matthew, call the doctor.

INT KITCHEN DAY

MATT, dressed in whatever he threw on, snaps up the kitchen phone and punches a number he knows by heart.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

But when he raises the receiver to his ear, all he hears is a rapid busy signal.

He hangs it up and tries again. Same result.

He hangs the phone up slowly. He thinks for a moment. From down the hall, he can hear Sarah wailing, in real discomfort.

He walks back down the hallway, thinking.

INT BEDROOM DAY

ANNIE paces with SARAH, trying to soothe her. MATT comes in, goes to the closet, and gets a jacket.

MATTHEW
I'll go get the prescription.

ANNIE
Did you talk to Waldstein?

MATTHEW
Be back in half an hour.

ANNIE
Matthew, did you talk to the doctor?

MATTHEW
We talked last night, he said he'd call it in to the pharmacy, I'll just go get it.

ANNIE
Why won't you answer my question?

MATTHEW
The circuits are busy. You know how it is, phones get all tied up when this kind of thing happens.

ANNIE
I don't like that. I do not like that at <u>all</u>.

MATTHEW
Don't overreact. I will have the prescription in thirty minutes.

CUT TO:

EXT HOUSE DAY

MATT comes out of the house, car keys in hand. He happens to look across the fence, to the Neighbor's house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Neighbor's car is gone, and a metal gate has been hastily rigged and closed in front of the front door. Curtains are drawn in front of all the windows.

Matt frowns at this, wondering what it means. He gets in his car, starts it, and turns it around. He reaches up to the visor and pushes the button on the remote control for the security gate.

The gate doesn't budge.

MATTHEW
Oh, shit.

He pushes the button again. Nothing. He shuts the car off and gets out. He goes to the front gate and looks at it. He tugs on it. Solid. He looks down at the control box. He opens the metal access door and stares at a maze of wiring.

Not much help there.

He stands. There's no way that gate is moving an inch without electricity.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Well, that's that.

He turns and walks back to the house. He's about to go back in when through the front windows he sees ANNIE, pacing in the living room now, trying to comfort an inconsolable SARAH.

He stops. Can't go back in there. He thinks some more.

AT THE CAR,

Matt bends down. It seems he's examining the headlights for some strange reason.

He stands up. He sighs in resignation.

CRASH!

The car SMACKS into the security gate rather tentatively, hard enough to dent the bumper, but not hard enough to dislodge the gate more than a fraction.

IN THE CAR,

Matt shakes his head.

MATTHEW
I am out of my fucking mind.

But he puts the car in reverse, backs up as far as he can --

CONTINUED: 2

-- and punches it. With a horrible metal CRUNCH, he flies into the gate, GRINDING it open and taking off down his driveway. As he pulls out into the road, Matt laughs, almost unintentionally. That was kind of fun.

IN THE DRIVEWAY,

Annie hurries out to see what in God's name that noise was. She sees the twisted gate and puts two and two together. She looks down at Sarah, whose crying has abated slightly in her arms.

ANNIE
Yeah. And I'm the one overreacting.

CUT TO:

EXT CANYON ROAD DAY

MATT drives quickly down a curvy canyon road. As he comes around one curve, he nearly collides with another car that's absolutely tearing up the road, as fast as it can and still make the curves.

Matt swerves and slows.

MATTHEW
Jerk.

He starts down again.

CUT TO:

EXT KAY DRIVEWAY DAY

ANNIE holds SARAH with one arm and the keys to the other car in the other. She sits in the driver's seat, turns the ignition, and flips on the radio.

She punches it to AM and hits a programmed button. "980" comes up on the digital display.

But only static comes from the speakers.

She hits another button. Same thing. She pushes the rest of the buttons, one by one, she switches to FM and hits them again, but gets the same result on every station.

Static.

CUT TO:

EXT CITY STREET DAY

MATT pulls around a corner and approaches the parking lot of a large strip mall, with a supermarket, a dry cleaner, a Thrifty Drug, the usual.

Business seems slightly brisker than usual, especially at the grocery store, but you wouldn't say anyone's panicking. Matt parks.

INT THRIFTY DAY

MATT comes into the drugstore. The lines are long at the checkstands, where of course the power is out. An announcement comes over the P.A.

VOICE (o.s.)
Attention Thrifty shoppers. Due to the power outage, we cannot accept credit cards, ATM cards, or personal checks. Please use the smallest bills you have or be patient as our cashiers try to make change --

BACK AT THE PHARMACY COUNTER,

Matt, at the front of a line, is dealing with a beleaguered PHARMACIST.

MATTHEW
Could you just check one more time?

PHARMACIST
I did check one more time, I don't have it.

MATTHEW
He said he'd call it in this morning.

PHARMACIST
Well, the circuits are out, he probably couldn't get through. He'll keep trying, come back in a couple hours.

MATTHEW
I know what is -- it's amoxicillin, twenty-five milligram capsules. He's prescribed it for her before.

PHARMACIST
Maybe you have a refill left on an old prescription.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW
No, I don't. Look, just give it to me and I'll bring the prescription in when the power's back on.

PHARMACIST
I can't do that, sir. I could lose my license.

MATTHEW
My six month old daughter has a fever of a hundred and three.

PHARMACIST
I can appreciate that.

MATTHEW
I don't want you to appreciate it, I'm just telling you something here.

PHARMACIST
(patience ebbing)
Yeah?

MATTHEW
Yes. Now, we're not talking about morpheine, okay, it's penicillin.

PHARMACIST
What do you want me to do? I'm not a physician, I can't prescribe drugs. The law is the law.

MATTHEW
Look, you know me --

PHARMACIST
I don't know you.

MATTHEW
What do you mean, you don't know me?! I've been coming here for -- I've watched you fill this exact same prescription three times, it's in a drawer five feet away from you! How hard can it be?!

The line behind him is growing impatient. The Pharmacist gets frosty.

PHARMACIST
Whether I know you or not doesn't matter.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

PHARMACIST (cont'd)
I cannot break the law, and nothing you say will change that. This is a pointless conversation, and there are other people who --

MATTHEW
I am not going to go home to a sick child without the medicine she needs because of one asshole who doesn't have the -- the --

He trails off, realizing he's gone too far. They stare each other down for a moment. The Pharmacist gestures for Matt to lean in closer. He does.

PHARMACIST
Tell you what. You turn around and get your little butt out of here before I kick it out.

Matt notices the Pharmacist's forearms for the first time. They're like four by fours.

After another moment of eye contact --

-- Matt turns and leaves.

CUT TO:

INT KAY KITCHEN DAY

The kitchen door to the house opens and MATT returns. He goes straight to the phone, picks it up, dials a number, and gets the rapid busy signal. He SLAMS it down.

ANNIE, down the hall, hears him and sighs in relief.

ANNIE
Thank God.

She heads toward him, down the hallway.

ANNIE (cont'd)
She's asleep, but she's covered in sweat. Did they give you the capsules or the drops?

Matt just stands there, frozen, as she approaches him. She raises one hand as she draws close to him, and he looks down at it. It's her right hand, palm outstretched. The hand is empty. Waiting.

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNIE (cont'd)
Matt?

MATTHEW
They wouldn't give it to me.

ANNIE
What?

MATTHEW
The asshole pharmacist, I'm telling you, I got into a huge fight with the guy, but Waldstein never got through with the prescription and legally they can't give --

ANNIE
Oh, God.

MATTHEW
-- legally, they can't dispense without a -- you know, it's the law, there was nothing I could --

ANNIE
She's getting hysterical, Matt.

MATTHEW
Look, the phone'll probably be working again in --

ANNIE
Probably? You don't know that. Nobody knows. I tried the car radio while you were gone and all I got was static. We don't know anything right now, certainly not how long it'll take for things to get back to normal.

MATTHEW
The radio was static?

ANNIE
All over the dial.

MATTHEW
I'll go to Waldstein's office and pick up the prescription directly from him.

ANNIE
It's Saturday, Matt, he's not in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

MATTHEW
Well, we can give her cold baths, like that one time--

ANNIE
I tried that, what do you think I've been doing here all this time?

MATTHEW
Hey, don't blame me for this.

ANNIE
I'm not blaming you.

MATTHEW
Of course you are. You're starting to panic and you're looking for someone to blame.

ANNIE
That isn't even close to the issue. The issue is that our daughter is very sick. She needs something. She can't get it herself. Now we either have it for her, or we don't.

MATTHEW
I don't know what you want me to do.

She just looks at him.

ANNIE
Well, I don't either.

She heads back down the hall.

ANNIE (cont'd)
I'll try another bath.

Matt sits there for a moment, stewing, burning up inside. He follows Annie halfway down the hall and just stands there, feeling like shit as he hears her pick up Sarah, who immediately starts to WAIL.

Matt starts to breathe harder, and harder the more his daughter cries. He BANGS his open hand against the wall.

Finally, he turns.

He marches back down the hall.

He rips open the front door.

INT CAR DAY

MATT jams the keys in the ignition.

He pops the car into drive.

He hits the gas.

CUT TO:

EXT STRIP MALL DAY

MATT double parks in front of the pharmacy doors and stalks inside.

INT THRIFTY DAY

The store is twice as crowded as before, and there has been a not-so-subtle increase in the tension level. There is another announcement:

VOICE (o.s.)
Attention Thrifty shoppers. The store will be closing in thirty minutes. Please make your selections now, all registers will be closed in thirty minutes.

On his way to the back, MATT passes a very vocal argument at the front register, where a MAN is demanding they accept his personal check.

MAN
No, you calm down! I been writing checks in here for seventeen years!

Matt's breathing gets harder and faster as he starts down an aisle that leads to the pharmacy counter. All the way at the back, he can see the PHARMACIST, who is with a customer.

Matt slows as he reaches the end of the aisle. The Pharmacist, a prescription slip in hand, turns and goes into the back, where the drugs are stored.

Matt stops, thinking. The Pharmacist bends down, out of sight. It's now or never.

Matthew moves. He strides quickly out of the aisle, to the counter, and slips quietly over it. The people in line watch him do it. Over the counter, he turns, expecting them to object or reprimand him, but they just stare at him blankly, as if watching TV.

Ducking low, Matthew slips around the corner. From a crouching position, he peers around the edge of a cabinet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In back, he can see the Pharmacist, down at the same level, tipping capsules out of a drawer.

The Pharmacist stands. Matthew looks ahead of him. The row of drawers he pointed to during his argument with the Pharmacist is just five feet away, across an open space.

Sweating now, Matt looks to the ceiling and rolls his eyes, unable to believe himself.

He looks up. He can just see the top of the Pharmacist's head as the man turns and walks through a doorway into a back room.

Without hesitation, Matthew scuttles across the floor and runs his finger down the row of drawers with names written on them. He can't find what he's looking for. Time ticks away.

He keeps looking, rivulets of sweat running down his face.

Behind him, a GUY at the counter WHISPERS to him, urging him on.

GUY
Hurry up, man!

Finally, Matthew sees a familiar label:

"Amoxicillin -- 50 mg."

He rips the drawer open, grabs a handful of the capsules, and is stuffing them in his jacket pocket when --

VOICE (o.s.)
Hey!

He whirls. A STORE MANAGER is staring at him from across the counter, aghast.

STORE MANAGER
SECURITY!

Now everything happens at once. The Store Manager SHOUTS again for security, the People at the counter move out of the way of any potential conflict, and the Pharmacist comes hurrying out of the back.

Matthew pockets the capsules he's got, drops the drawer, runs the length of the counter, and leaps over the other end.

The Store Manager doesn't give chase.

<u>But the Pharmacist does</u>.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

Matthew tears down an aisle, toward the front of the store. The Pharmacist is slower, but he's not that far behind.

STORE MANAGER
POLICE! SOMEBODY CALL THE POLICE!

Matthew breaks out into the open at the front of the store. A SECURITY GUARD is barreling towards him from one side, the Pharmacist is coming from the back, but Matthew vaults the turnstile and races out the front doors.

EXT PHARMACY DAY

MATTHEW has his keys out of his pocket before he gets to the car. He unlocks it --

-- the Pharmacist and Security Guard come flying out of the store --

-- Matthew jumps in and slams the door --

-- they paw at the handle --

-- and he hits the door locks.

The Pharmacist HAMMERS on the window, SHOUTING obscenities, nearly breaking it, but Matthew gets the car started and SQUEALS away.

The Pharmacist squints at the license plate as it recedes.

PHARMACIST
(trying like hell)
Two -- T -- no, L -- ah, shit.

He lost it. He looks at the Security Guard.

PHARMACIST (cont'd)
What the fuck is the matter with people?!

CUT TO:

INT KAY HALLWAY DAY

ANNIE comes quietly out of the baby's room and closes the door softly behind her. MATTHEW, coming down the hall, stops next to her. They whisper.

MATTHEW
You only gave her half, right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNIE
Yeah. I'm sorry if I was -- if I attacked you before --

MATTHEW
You don't have to be sorry.

He embraces her, to say it's all right.

ANNIE
Why did they give you fifty milligram capsules?

Pause.

MATTHEW
They didn't exactly give them to me.

She pulls back, to look at his face.

ANNIE
Matthew --

He kisses her, on the mouth.

ANNIE (cont'd)
(still whispering)
What did you do?

He doesn't answer, just kisses her fully. She responds.

He moves her back, gently, against the wall. The kiss goes on.

CUT TO:

INT BEDROOM DAY

The soft afternoon sun falls through the half-closed blinds and onto the carpet of Matthew and Annie's bedroom. It traces a path across the floor to MATTHEW and ANNIE, who are on the carpet too, he on top of her, sweaty.

With a deep sigh that tells us everything worked pretty well this time, he rolls off of her and they lay side by side, naked, on the floor.

For a moment, neither one of them speaks. Finally:

ANNIE
God.

MATTHEW
The power should have gone out <u>years</u> ago.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They laugh, hard.

ANNIE
Shhh! Don't wake her up.

So now they laugh silently, but together.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Matt --

MATTHEW
What?

ANNIE
How did you get the penicillin?

MATTHEW
I think you can probably guess.

ANNIE
Did you -- hurt anybody?

MATTHEW
No.

ANNIE
Did anyone recognize you?

MATTHEW
No.

ANNIE
There had to be other ways. I don't like this.

MATTHEW
You liked something about it.

She looks at him.

ANNIE
I think we're getting into a weird area here.

He rolls over, on top of her again.

MATTHEW
I think we're getting into a fantastic area.

He kisses her neck. She tilts her head, to open it to him, and her gaze falls on the blinds. Outside the window --

-- someone walks past.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

Annie GASPS, startled, and grabs for the nearest article of clothing.

MATTHEW
What what what?!

ANNIE
There's somebody outside!

MATTHEW
What?!

ANNIE
Right outside our window, I saw somebody! Looking in!

Matthew leaps up, pulling on his pants.

MATTHEW
Wait here.

INT LIVING ROOM DAY

MATTHEW, shirt and pants on now, creeps into the living room. Outside the window, he sees a figure move away quickly, as if it saw him.

INT HALLWAY DAY

MATTHEW hurries to a closet and rummages through it quickly. He comes up with a baseball bat.

INT KITCHEN DAY

MATTHEW scurries through the kitchen, staying below the window line. Outside, the figure is moving towards the kitchen door.

Matthew hurries over ahead of it, grips the bat, and flings the door open, brandishing his weapon.

The MAN, bigger than Matthew, more muscled, looks at him --

-- and laughs.

JOE
Is that any way to answer your door?

Matthew lowers the bat in relief.

MATTHEW
Joe, for Christ's sakes, you scared the shit out of us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE
What the hell happened to your gate?

Annie appears behind Matthew.

ANNIE
Hey Joey, how are you?

MATTHEW
I said to stay in the room.

She gives him a look.

ANNIE
Sorry, Sarge.

MATTHEW
No, I mean, what if he'd been somebody?

JOE
Thanks a lot.

ANNIE
(to Joe)
Come on in.

CUT TO:

INT LIVING ROOM DAY

MATTHEW, ANNIE, and JOE come into the living room.

MATTHEW
So how's this for a kick in the head? L.A. slaps us around again.

ANNIE
Is the power out at your place too?

Joe stops and looks at them.

JOE
You guys don't know, do you?

MATTHEW
Know what?

JOE
Didn't you talk to people, weren't you curious -- ?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNIE
Sarah's sick, we were distracted. What's going on?

JOE
This is a major situation -- power's out everywhere, radio and TV are off the air --

MATTHEW
Was it the storm?

JOE
Nobody can get the whole story. What I heard is that between eleven-thirty and midnight last night, there were seven consecutive lightning strikes to Indian Point Three.

MATTHEW
What's Indian Point Three?

JOE
It's a nuclear power station, Matthew. In the Palm Desert.

ANNIE
Oh, my God.

MATTHEW
Was -- is there -- radiation -- ?

JOE
Depends who you believe. The only thing they'll admit for sure is there is a major blackout, which is kind of hard to deny at this point.

MATTHEW
How big? Southern California?

JOE
Try all of California. And Nevada. Arizona. And Colorado.

ANNIE
From one power station going down?

JOE
I heard a controller in the DWP panicked when he saw a nuclear station was in trouble and he took L.A. off line.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

JOE (cont'd)
But we're the biggest power center in the world, when we went down we started sucking power from all around us. The other systems probably went down like dominoes.

ANNIE
Where'd you hear that?

MATTHEW
Annie tried the car radio, all she could get was static --

JOE
Yeah, everybody's radio is like that.

MATTHEW
So this isn't just a power outage. They're bullshitting us. I heard if there's a nuclear blast, there's a thing called an EMT, an electromagnetic -- something, and it'll shut down anything electrical and screw up the airwaves for transmission.

ANNIE
A nuclear blast?! Oh, come on, Matthew, that's not the sort of thing you sleep through --

MATTHEW
Maybe a meltdown then. When have you known radio to go out? When have you ever known that to happen?

ANNIE
This is horrible, this is really horrible. No power, no radio --

JOE
People are freaking out. I was in a club downtown last night --

As he talks, we see the images he's referring to:

INT DANCE CLUB NIGHT

The power goes out on a crowded dance floor. JOE looks around as a SHRIEK, or a CHEER, or maybe both, rises up from the crowd.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE (v.o.)
You know how it is when the lights go out in a crowd, it's kinda fun, but with this weird edge --

EXT STREET NIGHT

The CROWD from the club pours out onto the darkened sidewalk.

JOE (v.o.)
The club isn't exactly in the best part of town, and when people realized where they were they started -- sort of running to their cars in the dark street --

Bodies cross every which way in front of Joe.

JOE (v.o.)
I'd never seen people look at each other that way before, with this feeling that -- I don't know, it was different from everything else that's happened out here.

A CLUBGOER, a young woman, falls in front of Joe. He stops to help her to her feet, to prevent her being stepped on. She looks at him, wild-eyed, not sure to thank or fear him.

JOE (v.o.)
It was like nobody was going to go home and watch the news for twenty-four hours this time, they were -- I don't know, it felt like something had started. I think I saw one fire on the way home --

The Woman pulls away and runs down the street.

INT LIVING ROOM DAY

MATT and ANNIE are staring at JOE, frightened.

JOE
-- and guys, I have to tell you. This morning I heard that twenty-six people died last night in the worst looting since the riots.

They just stare at him for a moment. Finally:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNIE
Joe -- I wonder if you would stay here with us until the power comes back on.

Matthew looks at her.

JOE
Sure. That's why I came over -- make sure you guys were okay.

MATTHEW
(to Joe)
This is all -- confirmed? You know for sure? You seem pretty informed.

JOE
Hey, everything I know I heard in the line at rock 'n roll Ralph's this morning, so take it for what it's worth.

ANNIE
So all this, or part of this, may be just a rumor.

JOE
Anything's possible.

MATTHEW
Our neighbor must have heard the same things, his house is all gated up, his car's gone, he took off.

ANNIE
I know it's a rumor, it has to be, people wouldn't do that again.

JOE
Let's go find out.

ANNIE
Wait a minute, wait a minute, you guys aren't going anywhere stupid --

JOE
No, trust me. Just somewhere we can get a good look at things.

CUT TO:

EXT MULHOLLAND LOOKOUT DAY

This scenic overlook is a small state park perched on the edge of Mulholland Drive, overlooking Los Angeles. The iron gates are firmly closed, with a large PARK CLOSED sign attached for good measure, but there are a few dozen cars parked haphazardly on the roadside anyway.

MATTHEW and JOE pull up and park, in Matthew's car. They climb out and see the gate closed, but there are people beyond.

Joe climbs the fence. Matthew follows.

Inside now, they walk slowly to the railing at the edge of the hillside. About TWENTY people are spaced along the railing, staring down at the city. A large black cloud hangs over the place, and the sky to the northeast is an ominous orange.

The sight is hard to interpret, and there is some debate, over the CLICK and WHIRR of the cameras almost everyone has with them.

GUY
They're burning it down again. Jesus Christ, they're burning it down.

OTHER GUY
Could be a forest fire -- I heard Big Bear --

GUY
I'm telling you, a cloud like that's from fires here in the city, it's the only thing it can be from --

OTHER GUY
No, it's coming in from the north, you can see it --

GUY
I <u>saw</u> people setting fires, I saw it with my own eyes!

Next to Matthew, a WOMAN pulls the camera from her eye and wipes away tears.

MATTHEW
(soft, to himself)
What the fuck is the matter with people?

A hand CLAMPS down on Matthew's shoulder. Joe's.

JOE
Let's get back to your house.

CUT TO:

INT KAY KITCHEN DAY

In a series of quick images, the contents of several drawers are emptied out and arranged on the kitchen counter. There are:

-- two packages of two size D batteries, one package of four AA, one loose AAA,

-- two working flashlights, one fairly dim already,

-- an odd assortment of a dozen candles, different sizes and colors,

-- a cigarette lighter and a fire starter,

-- and a small stack of cash, mostly singles, a few fives and tens, and a lone twenty.

ANNIE is going through the contents of the refrigerator, emptying much of it onto the counter. MATTHEW counts the cash. JOE is on a stool, rummaging in a cabinet high up.

MATTHEW
Seventy-one dollars, among three working adults? I can't believe this.

ANNIE
We have that box of change in the closet, there might be another fifty in there.

JOE
Got a full bottle of tequila up here, but the Scotch situation looks grim.

MATTHEW
Will ya quit screwin' around?

JOE
Oh, lighten up.

ANNIE
Yeah, Matthew, is it my imagination, or are you enjoying this just a tiny little bit?

MATTHEW
Of course I'm not <u>enjoying</u> it. Are you crazy?

JOE
He's enjoying it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW
Okay, the way I see it, the only serious problem we have at the moment is cash. And all the ATM's are down, nobody'll take Visa --

JOE
Come on, your canned food alone is enough for a week, and it's not gonna be anywhere near that long. We've got plenty of money.

MATTHEW
No, I'd say we need at least a hundred more.

ANNIE
Why?

MATTHEW
Because I want to buy a gun.

They just look at him for a moment.

JOE
Well. I know a place.

In the other room, Sarah starts to cry.

ANNIE
Absolutely not.

MATTHEW
We're going to discuss this.

ANNIE
Matt, I <u>hate</u> guns. <u>You</u> hate guns.

MATTHEW
Yes. Yes, I do. And I don't want to be an asshole here, but I don't want to be an idiot either. <u>There is no power in this city</u>. You didn't see what we saw up on the hill.

ANNIE
That's not conclusive. We need to know more about what's going on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

MATTHEW
I agree. But that's not a possibility at the moment, unless we drive around and interview people, which doesn't seem realistic. In the meantime --

JOE
You know what, Annie, this crossed my mind too, but I didn't want to say anything because it's your house. But you know what it's about? It's about not being naive.

MATTHEW
It's going to be dark in an hour or two, very dark, and I don't intend for myself, or my wife, or my child to be the topic of conversation in the water line at Ralph's tomorrow morning.

ANNIE
Now, just wait a minute. A lot more than twenty-six people died during the riots, and we didn't go buy a gun then.

MATTHEW
We had power then. There's a difference.

ANNIE
Those people are seeking out danger, we're not.

MATTHEW
Well, what if we heard people were taking advantage of the situation to break into houses? What if we heard five people were dead in the hills?

ANNIE
Yeah, sure, "what if," but the fact is we haven't heard that, we have no reason to believe danger is imminent --

JOE
So what do we do, wait until it is? Wait until it's too late?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

MATTHEW
It's a precaution, Annie. That's all.

She just looks at them both. In the other room, Sarah is crying, louder now.

ANNIE
Yes, I agree, the situation is bad, but it's this very kind of thinking that will make it a lot worse. How do you know we won't end up hurt or killed <u>because</u> you got a gun?

JOE
Annie, we're not going out looking for trouble. We're just making sure that if trouble comes to us, we're ready for it.

ANNIE
(to Matthew)
You've never even shot a gun.

MATTHEW
I've never done a lot of things I should have. Maybe I'm starting.

ANNIE
I can't listen to this.

She turns to go to Sarah, who is WAILING.

JOE
Annie, come on --

ANNIE
(turning back)
Let me put it this way, guys. I will not sleep under the same roof with a gun. Okay?

She turns and walks off, down the hall.

Matthew and Joe watch her for a moment, then Matthew takes the cash off the counter, pockets it, and takes his jacket off the back of a chair. He looks at Joe.

MATTHEW
You coming?

IN SARAH'S ROOM,

ANNIE is just picking up SARAH to comfort her when she hears the kitchen door open and close.

ANNIE
Damn it.

CUT TO:

EXT GUN SHOP DAY

An ARMED GUARD stands outside a gun shop in downtown Hollywood. MATTHEW and JOE park and get out of the car.

JOE
How exactly do we plan to pay for this?

Matthew holds up his wrist, showing his watch.

MATTHEW
It's worth five hundred.

They come to the door. The security gates in front of the store have been drawn together, leaving only a two-foot crack in between. They stop, not sure what this means.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Are you, uh -- open?

The Guard looks them up and down and nods. They turn sideways, to squeeze through the gap in the gate. The Guard brushes their jackets open as they pass, checking them out.

INT GUN SHOP DAY

If anyone had any hope left for the male of the species, one look at the inside of this gun shop oughta take care of that. The place is dark, packed, surly, and devoid of the feminine influence. MATTHEW is waiting in an impatient line when JOE hurries over to him, gesturing to a commotion at one side of the store.

JOE
They got TV reception over here!

They turn and join the several other people hurrying over to a GUY who holds a small television in one hand. They gather around, people jostling for position as close as they can get.

TV Guy is awfully proud of his hookup.

CONTINUED:

TV GUY
-- hooked a gas generator up to a satellite dish on the roof next door -- ran a cable down here -- TV's battery powered -- only took me about an hour and --

The crowd SHUSHES him, to hear the TV. Matthew and Joe's view is partially obstructed, but they can still get a glimpse of the three inch screen. The image on it is grainy, full of distortion and crazy signal interruptions, but it can be made out.

It's a NEWS REPORTER, talking to a GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
-- trying to get me to discuss things we just have no confirmation of. We have reports of lightning strikes to a nuclear facility, we have reports of a major forest fire, we've heard reports of a lot of things we've already disproved. But until we have established contact with the --

NEWS REPORTER
As of this moment no one has made contact with Indian Point?

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
Look, it's difficult to make contact anywhere in California right now, that in itself doesn't indicate anything's wrong --

TV GUY
That man is lying.

NEWS REPORTER
Has the National Guard been called into the affected areas?

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
In most areas, yes, and a dusk to dawn curfew is in effect. I want to stress that there is no need for panic, that the rule of law will be preserved throughout the seven states affected by the power interruption.

MAN
Seven states?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

OTHER GUY
Jesus Christ!

NEWS REPORTER
We're able to broadcast via satellite from New York. What's happened to the radio and television signals in Southern California?

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
Possibly individual equipment problems --

TV GUY
Oh, give me a fucking break --

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
-- but I want to assure those within the travel-restricted area that they will be able to --

A MAN freaks out.

MAN
Travel restriction?! What the hell is that?!

He is SHUSHED.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
-- information from their local police station or National Guard encampment. Believe me, a little knowledge will go a long way toward easing fear.

NEWS REPORTER
How long will this outage last?

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
I have no idea.

Behind them, the CLERK calls out.

CLERK
Next!

Matthew and Joe tear away and hurry over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

CLERK (cont'd)
(as they step to the counter)
Cash only, fifteen day waiting period on all handguns so forget about that, we're outta twelve gauge shells and all ammunition for twenty-twos, thirty-eights, and forty-fives, unless you want hollow point, that we got for thirty-eights only. So what'll it be?

Matthew and Joe look at each other, unprepared.

MATTHEW
(low)
You handle it, man.

JOE
Why me?

CLERK
Hey, people are waiting, fellas.

MATTHEW
(still to Joe)
Come on, man, you're in construction, you're better at this shit.

JOE
What the hell's that supposed to mean?

CLERK
(leaning around them)
Next!

JOE
No, no, no, no, no. We're looking for something for, uh -- home defense.

CLERK
Sure you are. How much cash you got?

JOE
We've got this.

He gestures to Matthew, who takes off his watch and holds it out to the Clerk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 4

JOE (cont'd)
(expecting resistance)
And before you turn it down, I think you should know that happens to be worth six hundred dollars.

The Clerk takes the watch, glances at it quickly, and tosses it into a box filled with more watches, rings, and other jewelry.

CLERK
You got three hundred credit. I recommend --

He takes a twelve gauge shotgun and SMACKS it on the counter in front of them.

CLERK (cont'd)
-- Browning twelve gauge pump. Blue steel barrel, seven shell capacity, wood grain stock. If you feel your personal safety requires something more easily concealed, you can get a hacksaw across the street at the Builder's Emporium. I'll even throw in a box of shells.

JOE
I thought you were out of twelve gauge shells.

CLERK
Yeah, my mistake. So that's the deal. Three hundred, you want it or not?

JOE
The tag says ninety-five dollars.

CLERK
All prices are triple.

JOE
What are you, kidding?

CLERK
Hey pal, you're the one trying to buy a shotgun during a blackout, don't take the moral high ground with me.

He grabs the watch out of the box and holds it out to them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 5

CLERK (cont'd)
Now you can have the gun or you can have your watch back, which one you want?

CUT TO:

INT KAY KITCHEN DAY

ANNIE is in the kitchen, the phone in her hand. She dials a number, gets a rapid busy signal, and hangs up.

She tries again.

And again.

And again.

CUT TO:

EXT GUN SHOP DAY

MATTHEW and JOE come out of the gun shop, carrying the twelve gauge and a box of shells. As soon as they're out the door, Joe turns.

JOE
I am a general contractor. I am not "in construction."

MATTHEW
Oh, come on, I didn't mean anything by that.

JOE
And I would like to know what the fuck the fact that I build houses has to do with buying weapons.

MATTHEW
I just meant that you're better at bargaining, and that kind of thing.

JOE
Bullshit.

MATTHEW
Joe. Please. You're being kind of neurotic about this --

JOE
Because it shows your attitude. You basically see yourself as white collar and me as working class --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW
Oh, for God's sake, that's not it at all.

JOE
-- that's exactly it, and it always has been.

MATTHEW
I am not going to stand here on the sidewalk holding a shotgun and have a stupid argument with you. I'm getting in the car.

He walks to a Ford Explorer parked at the curb.

JOE
Maybe I didn't finish college. Maybe I didn't make three hundred thousand dollars last year --

MATTHEW
Neither did I, okay?

He tries the passenger door, but it's locked.

JOE
-- but did you notice whose wife asked me to stay in the house when things got a little rough?

Matthew turns back. He looks at Joe.

MATTHEW
Will you please unlock the fucking door?

Joe's gone too far and he knows it. He points a car alarm remote control at the Explorer and CHIRPS it. The doors unlock.

INT CAR DAY

JOE and MATT get in and close their doors. Silence for a moment. Joe feels like shit.

JOE
It doesn't mean anything.

Matt doesn't answer. Joe starts it up and pulls away.

JOE (cont'd)
You just pissed me off, that's all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW
Drop it.

Joe shakes his head and looks out the window. They ride in silence.

CUT TO:

INT KAY LIVING ROOM DAY

ANNIE is on the phone when MATTHEW and JOE return. She holds up a finger, to keep them quiet, but they're not talking to each other anyway.

ANNIE
Great. Great. Yeah, I'll be sure to tell him that. Well, you too, I'm glad I got through. Bye.

She hangs up. She looks at them.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Where is it?

Joe reveals the shotgun, which he was half-concealing behind one leg. Annie just looks at it. She shakes her head.

MATTHEW
What's this? No fight?

ANNIE
You wouldn't listen to my opinion before, why should I think you will now?

MATTHEW
Annie --

ANNIE
That was Amy on the phone. I finally got through, I just kept trying for almost an hour. She said she and Gavin are fine, they heard the nuclear thing was just a rumor --

JOE
I told you it may be.

ANNIE
-- and they also specifically heard that there was no looting last night.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She turns and heads for the other room, leaving Matthew and Joe alone.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Oh, and by the way -- Gavin did not go to buy a gun, and has no intention of doing so. You know, I always thought he was a stud.

She leaves. They stand there for an awkward moment. They look at each other.

JOE
You know, so did I.

MATTHEW
In those tee shirts he wears?

JOE
Absolutely.

He leans the shotgun against the fireplace and sets the box of shells on the mantle.

CUT TO:

EXT LOS ANGELES DUSK

The sun goes down over Los Angeles. No lights come on to take its place.

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

ANNIE, alone in the living room, lights a candle on the mantle. She sets it down, next to the box of shotgun shells. Intrigued, she opens the box and takes out one of the shells. She examines it in the candlelight.

It's a fat plastic cartridge, folded at one end, with a gold cap at the other. And a small, round firing pin.

She sets it down and picks up the gun, feeling its weight. She looks down the barrel, which glows an odd blue in the candlelight.

Annie looks over her shoulder, to see if she's alone.

CUT TO:

EXT KAY HOME NIGHT

From outside, the only light coming from the house is the flickering candles in the living room, dimly visible from the street.

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

There's a fire in the fireplace now. MATT, ANNIE, and JOE are sitting around, drinks in front of them.

JOE
What I'm saying is there is a line -- a, a slender thread of technology -- that separates one kind of behavior from another. Human behavior from animal behavior. You cut that thread -- and any one of us is capable of doing whatever's necessary to survive.

MATTHEW
I never knew you thought that. I've known you since college, I never knew you believed that kind of thing.

JOE
I'll go even further. I think what we call civilized behavior is nothing more than convenience. Society provides abundant food, for the majority of people, so we don't have to kill for it. But if society didn't, we would kill, and we wouldn't be wrong to do so. All morality is situational.

ANNIE
I don't believe that.

JOE
Easy for you to say. Look at your life. Look at your house. Look at your bank account. You can afford to behave any way you want.

ANNIE
That's not why I behave the way I do.

JOE
What if you had nothing? Would you die before you would do something you considered immoral?

ANNIE
It wouldn't come to that.

Matt doesn't look up when he speaks.

MATTHEW
What if your child's life was in danger? Would you let her die?

CONTINUED:

ANNIE
I'd figure out a way. That's what humanity is. Humahity is in the compromise.

MATTHEW
What if you couldn't figure out a way? What if the only way open to you was something you used to consider immoral? Would you do it?

ANNIE
Oh, I see why this bothers you --
(to Joe)
Matthew stole a prescription from the pharmacy this morning, and now he feels guilty about it.

MATTHEW
Hey!

JOE
You stole it?! What do you mean you stole it? You mean shoplifted?

MATTHEW
(to Joe)
They didn't have the prescription. Sarah had a hundred and three temperature, when the guy wasn't looking, I took what I needed.

JOE
I rest my case.

MATTHEW
(to Annie)
I thought this was a personal family thing --

JOE
Looter.

MATTHEW
I am not a looter.

JOE
Sure you are. You took advantage of a crisis situation to steal.

MATTHEW
Yeah, but it wasn't looting, I took that penicillin to fill a very specific and immediate need --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

JOE
So'd the guy who took the TV.

MATTHEW
TV is not a necessity.

ANNIE
Well, it is if you sell it for food --

JOE
Got you there, Matt.

MATTHEW
(to Annie)
Hey, everything seemed to be all right with you this afternoon. More than all right, if you know what I mean --

ANNIE
Sure, in a primitive sort of way.

JOE
Okay, so you did what was necessary, and now, when the crisis is over, you can afford morality again, so you feel guilty about it. But the question is, if you found yourself in the same situation again, with the benefit of all this reflection, what would you do?

MATTHEW
I'd take her to the emergency room. I'd find another doctor. Any one of a dozen things I thought of all afternoon.

JOE
I don't think you would. I think you'd do exactly the same thing.

MATTHEW
Well, maybe you don't know me.

JOE
Maybe you don't know you.

There is a furious POUNDING at the front door.

Matt and Annie sit bolt upright, Joe leaps to his feet. They say nothing for a moment, then the POUNDING comes again, followed by a MUFFLED CRY. A woman's voice:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

VOICE (o.s.)
Help! Hello?! Help me!

MATTHEW
Who the hell is that?!

ANNIE
I don't know!

JOE
Both of you wait here.

MATTHEW
I'm going with you.

Joe turns to the fireplace, reaching for the gun, but stops short.

JOE
Where the hell's the gun?!

ANNIE
It's with the box of shells.

JOE
Where?!

ANNIE
(calmly)
At the bottom of the swimming pool.

MATTHEW
What?!

The POUNDING at the door starts again, more intensely, with the CRIES for help.

JOE
Are you out of your fucking mind?

ANNIE
No, I am not out of my fucking mind, okay?! Neither of you paid any attention to my wishes before, so I decided to ignore yours now.

MATTHEW
Jesus Christ, Annie --

JOE
Your wife, man. It's your wife that did this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 4

ANNIE
The gun's gone, it sunk, you feel you need to kill somebody, do it with your bare hands.

JOE
Yeah, that's real high-minded of you, Annie, but we have a problem now, don't we? We have a fucking defense problem and it's your fault!

ANNIE
Don't you talk to me like that.

Matthew is at the door. Joe SHOUTS at him.

JOE
DON'T OPEN THAT!

Matthew looks through the peep hole. He sees the rounded image of a BLACK WOMAN, late twenties, well-dressed. She's breathing hard and is frightened.

WOMAN
PLEASE! A man is chasing me! Will you PLEASE let me in!

Matthew turns back to the others.

MATTHEW
It's a woman! She says a guy's chasing her!

ANNIE
Let me see!

She and Joe crowd around the peephole, straining for a look.

MATTHEW
I think she's telling the truth.

JOE
How can you know that? How can you possibly know that?!

Through the peephole, the Woman pleads again, desperate.

WOMAN
PLEASE!! I can see the candles, I can hear you, please let me in!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 5

JOE
She could be working with someone. They could be waiting in the bushes, that's how they do it!

ANNIE
(angry)
Oh, that's how who does it!

WOMAN (o.s.)
HE TRIED TO KILL ME!

MATTHEW
I'm opening it.

Joe moves in front of him, blocking him.

JOE
You got a wife, you got a six month old child. If you won't protect them, I will.

MATTHEW
It's my house, Joe, it's my decision. Get the fuck out of the way.

JOE
No.
(shouting at the door)
WE CAN'T LET YOU IN! GO AWAY!

MATTHEW
NO! STAY! I'M OPENING THE DOOR!

He lunges around Joe and grabs hold of the lock. Joe grabs his hand, RIPS it off, and holds onto it, tight. It hurts, and Matthew cries out.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Let go of my hand!

ANNIE (o.s.)
Fellas --

JOE
Get away from the door!

MATTHEW
Let me go, you fucking animal!

ANNIE
Guys. Hey!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 6

They stop their struggle and turn to face Annie, who is standing in the hallway from the kitchen. The WOMAN from outside is standing next to her.

ANNIE (cont'd)
This is Elizabeth.

CUT TO:

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

MATTHEW, ANNIE, JOE, and now ELIZABETH are sitting in the living room. Elizabeth and Annie are on the couch, Matt and Joe are off to the side, watching sullenly, like children who know they have misbehaved. Elizabeth sets down a cup of coffee.

ELIZABETH
(to Annie)
Thank you, I feel much better now.

ANNIE
Do you feel up to telling us what happened?

ELIZABETH
I was at a man's house about a half mile up the canyon. He -- we were just -- having a drink and he became -- well, violent.

JOE
What were you doing at his house?

ELIZABETH
I was on a date.

JOE
You went on a date during a blackout?

She looks at him. She doesn't like him.

ELIZABETH
I'm not aware of a law against it.

MATTHEW
Leave her alone.

ELIZABETH
Anyway, he -- he tried to rape me. I managed to get away, but I don't have my car.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
I was going to walk into Hollywood, but -- then I saw him in his car, driving around, up and down the canyon, looking for me and -- shouting things. That's when I knocked on your door.

JOE
Yeah, well, people are freaking out everywhere.

ELIZABETH
Men are freaking out everywhere.

JOE
Give me a break.

ELIZABETH
Anyway, I'm sure he's gone now.
(to Annie)
Thank you very much.
(to Matthew)
Could I ask you to please give me a ride home?

MATTHEW
Sure. Where's that?

She sets down her cup and stands, putting her jacket on.

ELIZABETH
Inglewood.

MATTHEW
Oh. Really?

JOE
I'll go with you, Matt.

ANNIE
I don't want to stay here alone.

MATTHEW
I gotta be honest, I'm not entirely comfortable driving into Inglewood at night, given the current situation.

Elizabeth looks at him for a moment.

ELIZABETH
I drive there every night.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

MATTHEW
You know what I mean.

ELIZABETH
Then what do we do?

CUT TO:

INT GUEST ROOM NIGHT

With a WHOOSH, fresh sheets are put on a fold-out sofa bed in the guest room/office. ELIZABETH sits in a chair, still shell-shocked, while ANNIE makes the bed.

ELIZABETH
This is more than nice of you.

ANNIE
I'm sure you'd do the same thing.

ELIZABETH
Your husband -- he's the smaller one, right?

ANNIE
He'd love that description. Yeah, that's him.

ELIZABETH
Do you mind me asking what he does for a living?

ANNIE
He manages a cash fund for an oil company.

ELIZABETH
I figured something like that. Such a nice house.
(pause)
Why are guys like that?

ANNIE
Like what?

ELIZABETH
Like they are.

ANNIE
Hormones, I guess. The sick part is we like it.

ELIZABETH
So they tell us.

CUT TO:

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

JOE pours himself a shot from the tequila bottle. It's not his first. He offers one to Matthew, who waves it off. Joe drinks the shot and darts a look over his shoulder, toward the bedrooms.

JOE
We're making a major mistake. You know that, right?

MATTHEW
Shut up, Joe.

Now he does pour himself a drink. Joe grunts. He pours himself another.

JOE
(mimicking)
"Shut up, Joe."

CUT TO:

INT HALLWAY NIGHT

All the lights are out now. ELIZABETH opens the door to her room, blinking back sleep. It's JOE. They whisper.

ELIZABETH
What is it?

JOE
I just wanted you to know -- what happened before, it's -- over.

She doesn't answer.

JOE (cont'd)
It was a security thing. You know how it is. You were outside, that's all that mattered at the time. Well, now you're inside. And that's very different. I'm in charge in here.

He glances down, to where she is holding her blouse together with one hand.

JOE (cont'd)
And I want you to know that as long as you're here, I'll protect you.

ELIZABETH
Okay. Thanks.

She starts to close the door. He stops it.

CONTINUED:

JOE
I'm just out on the couch.

ELIZABETH
Okay.

She starts to close it again. He puts his face in the crack, smiling winningly.

JOE
No hard feelings, right?

She pulls the door open again. She looks him right in the eye.

ELIZABETH
I wouldn't fuck you if the lights stayed out the rest of my life.

He just stares at her, surprised.

ELIZABETH (cont'd)
No hard feelings, right?

She closes the door on him.

CUT TO:

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

JOE is asleep on the sofa in the living room. Quiet for a moment, then suddenly his eyes pop open, as he hears a sound we don't. Or maybe we did. The TINKLING of broken glass?

He half sits up. He hears another sound, and this time we do too. It's the slight CREAK --

-- of a door opening. Joe listens, frozen. Now he hears the faint CRUNCH of someone stepping on broken glass, and a SHADOW slides across the living room floor, through the open door to the kitchen.

Joe reaches under the sofa, moving as quietly as he can. He pulls something out.

It's a kitchen knife. A big one.

CUT TO:

INT MATT & ANNIE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

The middle of the night. MATTHEW and ANNIE are asleep in bed, SARAH sleeps between them tonight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE appears, a dim silhouette, and slips through the crack in the door. He has the kitchen knife in one hand.

He moves slowly over to the edge of the bed, bends down, and CLAMPS his free hand down over Matthew's mouth. He awakens, desperate, squirming. Joe sets the knife quickly on the end table, grabs the flashlight that stands there, and CLICKS it on, to show himself.

JOE
Shhhhhh!

Matthew sits up, furious.

MATTHEW
(whispering)
Are you out of your fucking mind?!

Joe moves his lips very close to Matthew's ear and whispers, very deliberately, even more quietly.

JOE
Someone is in the house.

Matthew's face goes white. Joe leans back.

JOE (cont'd)
Get up.

Matthew does, shaking. He's wearing sweat pants already. He pulls the baseball bat from under the bed.

JOE (cont'd)
Shoes.

Matthew slips into a pair of tennis shoes at the foot of the bed. Joe CLICKS off the flashlight, picks up the kitchen knife again, and nods towards the door.

JOE (cont'd)
Are you ready for this?

Matthew nods, terrified. Joe looks at him for a long moment --

JOE (cont'd)
Don't wake the women.

-- and then winks.

He turns and starts moving towards the door. Matthew rolls his eyes and follows.

INT HALLWAY NIGHT

MATTHEW and JOE edge down the hallway, moving as silently as possible. It seems to take forever.

Halfway down, Joe pulls Matthew's ear to him again.

JOE
Kitchen.

He pulls him to one edge of the hallway and they creep along the wall. At the other end of the hallway, the door to the kitchen stands slightly ajar. Through it, into the darkened kitchen, they see --

-- a shape.

They creep, ever more slowly, to the end of the hall. From here, they can hear occasional sounds, as whoever is in the kitchen rummages through their things, as quietly as possible.

Matt and Joe reach one side of the door and pin themselves there. Joe edges forward, leaning around the door for a better look.

With one eye around the edge of the door, he gets a good look into the kitchen.

IN THE KITCHEN,

a PROWLER is in there all right, a smallish guy, wiry, with the desperate, jerky movements of a crackhead.

He's filling his pockets with their batteries, with food, with anything he can find. He opens one drawer in particular and finds --

-- the stack of money.

He holds it up in the moonlight, counting it, then he pockets it. He searches on.

IN THE HALLWAY,

Joe leans back. He tugs on Matthew's ear again. When they speak, it's half whispered words, half gestures.

JOE
Small guy. I'll go around.

He points to the window next to them, next to the front door, through which one can see the kitchen door a few yards away.

JOE (cont'd)
Watch. Jump him -- together.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Matthew shakes his head no, vigorously. He whispers back.

MATTHEW
Let him go.

Joe practically rips Matthew's head off. A fierce whisper this time, right into his ear.

JOE
He has our money.

And before Matt can object again, Joe is off, scampering back down the hallway to the bedroom. Matthew is on the edge of panic. He leans back against the wall for a moment.

He turns his head and looks out the living room windows. Outside, he sees the top of Joe's head as he scurries past outside, low to the ground, headed for the kitchen.

Matthew takes a deep breath. He turns and looks out the window behind him, from which he can see the kitchen door.

Outside, Joe is just coming around the corner of the house, toward the kitchen.

Matthew summons himself and crawls to the edge of the door, to get a look at the guy in the kitchen. In doing so, he inadvertantly TAPS the baseball bat against the door frame. It's a subtle sound, but the Prowler hears it.

IN THE KITCHEN,

he turns his head abruptly.

IN THE FRONT HALL,

Matt freezes, crouching on the ground next to the half-open doorway. He stays completely still.

He hears soft footsteps as the Prowler approaches the door. Matt doesn't budge.

The Prowler stops in the half-closed door, all that separates him from Matt. Still frozen on the other side of the door, Matt dares to turn his head ever so slightly, to look up, into the open space.

He sees a hand in the open space --

-- and the hand is holding a gun.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

Matt's eyes go wide. The Prowler just stares through the half-opened doorway for a moment, then is either convinced he's alone or loses his nerve, but he withdraws, slipping the gun back into his belt.

Matt hears the Prowler move back into the kitchen and resume his search.

Matt spins around to the window to look for Joe.

OUTSIDE,

Joe is now at the outside door to the kitchen. He looks up at it and sees a hole broken in a pane of glass through which the Prowler unlocked the door. He looks over at Matthew, who is gesturing to him frantically.

Joe furrows his brow and stares -- "what?"

Matthew points to the kitchen. He raises one hand slowly, holds it in the shape of a gun, and points it at Joe.

Joe understands. He scurries away from the door and over toward the window where Matt sits.

IN THE KITCHEN,

the Prowler's done. He finds the last thing he was looking for -- a set of car keys.

IN THE HALLWAY,

Joe and Matthew are separated only by glass. Matthew mouths to Joe.

MATTHEW
Let. Him. Go.

Joe shakes his head vehemently. His eyes light up with an idea. He digs in his pocket.

IN THE KITCHEN,

the Prowler opens the kitchen door and slides down the steps to the driveway.

AT THE WINDOW,

Joe pulls his own car keys out of his pocket. The car alarm remote control dangles from them. He points it at his car, the Ford Explorer parked in the driveway.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

MATTHEW
(audible through the glass)
NO!

Joe presses the button and holds it down.

IN THE DRIVEWAY,

the Prowler is halfway across the driveway, heading for Matthew's car, when the truck, parked behind him, erupts to life, lights flashing, horn HONKING, and shrill alarm SCREAMING.

The Prowler freezes. He whirls. He sees Joe, hiding in the bushes near the front window.

PROWLER
TURN IT OFF!!

But Joe scampers away, around the corner of the house.

IN THE HALLWAY,

Matthew rolls away from the window and into the kitchen.

IN THE KITCHEN,

he crabwalks over to the door, pulls it shut, and locks it again.

OUTSIDE,

the Prowler is at Matthew's car, fumbling with the keys, while the other car's alarm continues to SHRIEK behind him. He gets the door to Matt's car unlocked, rips it open --

-- and sets off that alarm as well.

Now all hell is breaking loose in the driveway and the Prowler loses it.

He pulls the gun from his belt and points it randomly.

PROWLER
TURN 'EM OFF, TURN 'EM OFF, TURN 'EM OFF!

Joe SHOUTS from where he is hidden around the corner of the house.

JOE
Leave the stuff and get out of here!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 4

Joe's relatively safe where he's hidden, Matthew is lying low in the kitchen --

-- but Annie appears, in the front door of the house.

ANNIE
Matt?!

The Prowler whirls and aims the gun unsteadily at her.

PROWLER
I'LL SHOOT HER!

IN THE KITCHEN,

Matt's eyes go wide. He leaps to his feet, pulls open the kitchen door, and appears on the step, between the Prowler and Annie.

MATTHEW
Annie, get out of there!

PROWLER
TURN OFF THE ALARM!

MATTHEW
You got the remote, press the button, PRESS THE BUTTON!

The Prowler fumbles with the remote, finds the button, and manages to turn off the alarm on Matthew's car. Joe's is still SCREAMING.

Suddenly, from next door, a brilliant white beam of light switches on.

The Prowler turns his head to face it. The light is blinding. He squints into it, disoriented. He turns his body now, to face the light.

CRACK.

A single GUNSHOT rips the air. The Prowler's body lurches, a slug slams into his chest, and he flies back, off his feet.

He THUDS into the concrete, eyes open, staring up at the sky.

They all watch, dumbfounded. The Prowler lies still on the concrete, the halogen beam held on him, as if checking for further movement.

A moment goes by, the only sound the continued SCREAMING of Joe's car alarm. Realizing, Joe pushes the button again, and with a contented CHIRP, the alarm ceases.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 5

Silence.

From next door --

-- the light shuts off.

As if coming to his senses, Matthew runs down the steps and over to the Prowler. He bends over him.

MATTHEW
Get some light over here!

Joe comes forward, with the flashlight. Annie joins them.

Matthew takes the gun from the Prowler's hand and puts a finger to his neck, feeling for a pulse.

JOE
Is he alive?

MATTHEW
I don't know, I think so, I feel a pulse --

ANNIE
Matt --

He looks up, in the direction she's looking. The halogen beam is on again, and is walking towards them.

It's their NEIGHBOR, the one Matthew met the night before. In one hand he holds the powerful flashlight, in the other a .45.

They just stare at him for a moment. Finally:

NEIGHBOR
You all okay?

They nod.

NEIGHBOR (cont'd)
He pointed that gun at me.

No one quite knows what to say.

MATTHEW
Let's get him inside.

CUT TO:

INT KITCHEN NIGHT

SLAM! ANNIE hangs up the phone, picks it up, and dials 911. Again. Nothing. Again. Nothing. Again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW is with the PROWLER, whom they have propped up in a chair. Matt's running water, pressing wet towels to the Prowler's severely bleeding chest. JOE is across the room, pouring a drink, ELIZABETH now stands off to one side, terrified.

The NEIGHBOR stands in the doorway, still open to the outside, as if not allowed to come all the way in.

NEIGHBOR
We need to talk about something --

ELIZABETH
Oh, my God --

ANNIE
(slamming the phone down)
Damn it, nothing --

MATTHEW
Keep trying!

NEIGHBOR
Before she gets through, we need to talk about something here --

Joe has been staring at Elizabeth, drinking.

JOE
I told you we shouldn't have let her in here.

ELIZABETH
What? This is my fault?

JOE
That's the guy, isn't it? The guy that was chasing you?

ELIZABETH
No! It's not!

MATTHEW
Joe, for Christ's sakes, do something!

JOE
Like what, for example?!

MATTHEW
Hold this! Press hard!

The Neighbor goes to the phone and hangs it up with his finger.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

NEIGHBOR
I said I want to talk about this.

ANNIE
What the hell are you doing?!

NEIGHBOR
I don't want you to call the cops.

MATTHEW
The man is dying!

NEIGHBOR
I saved your lives. You all know that.

He tries to pull the phone away from Annie.

JOE
Hey, you don't touch her!

NEIGHBOR
The guy's a fucking crackhead, look at him!

MATTHEW
What does that have to do with it?!

NEIGHBOR
He had a gun, it was self-defense.

MATTHEW
Then you have nothing to worry about. Annie, keep trying.

She takes the phone back and dials again.

NEIGHBOR
He wasn't on my property. He was on your property. There's a big difference.

JOE
He's conscious!

Matthew hurries over. The Prowler's eyes are open. He looks around, disoriented, in pain, and terrified.

MATTHEW
What's your name?!

NEIGHBOR
I'm trying to talk to you!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

MATTHEW
Come on, you can do it, what's your name?!

NEIGHBOR
Oh, Christ, what the hell does it matter?!

MATTHEW
(turning to the Neighbor)
I want to know the fuckin' guy's name, okay?!

NEIGHBOR
I'm trying to tell you I could have a serious problem because I helped you!

JOE
He's right, it doesn't matter.

Matthew turns back.

JOE (cont'd)
The guy's dead.

And he is. Matthew and Joe straighten up. For a moment, they all just stand there, staring, as the pool of blood around the dead Prowler grows.

Annie suddenly speaks into the phone.

ANNIE
Hello! Yes! I -- I -- uh --

She trails off. The Neighbor looks at her, and at Matthew, threateningly.

NEIGHBOR
Don't do it.

Matthew crosses and takes the phone from Annie.

MATTHEW
Hi, sorry, I --
(pause)
-- I want to report a death. A murder.

CUT TO:

EXT DRIVEWAY NIGHT

The driveway is awash in the flashing red lights of the patrol car and ambulance parked there. ANNIE and JOE watch as the body of the PROWLER is loaded into the back of the ambulance.

MATTHEW and the NEIGHBOR are separated, at opposite sides of the driveway, each with a POLICE OFFICER.

The Officer with Matthew hands him back a small pile of cash.

OFFICER
I think, under the circumstances, we can save you a lot of time and just give this back to you now.

Matt takes it, feeling sickened. He mumbles something and pockets the money.

He looks over at the Neighbor.

MATTHEW
What'll happen to him?

OFFICER
There'll be an investigation. But I gotta tell you -- the guy was breaking into houses -- he was facing your neighbor with a gun in his hand -- and we have bigger problems right now.

MATTHEW
Is it bad out there?

The Officer looks at the puddle of blood on the driveway.

OFFICER
I'd say "out there" is right about here, wouldn't you?

Matthew nods. The Officer flips his notebook shut, turns, and gets into the patrol car as the ambulance pulls away. The other Officer leaves the Neighbor and gets in the driver's side. The first Officer calls over, to near the house.

OFFICER (cont'd)
Ma'am? Still want a ride?

ELIZABETH comes out the front door of the house and heads for the patrol car. She pauses, next to Matthew.

ELIZABETH
Just so you know -- at my place? In Inglewood? Nobody ever got killed in the driveway.

CONTINUED:

He has no response. She turns and gets into the back of the police car. It pulls slowly out of the driveway, leaving Matt, Annie, Joe --

-- and the Neighbor. All alone. The Neighbor stands at the edge of the lot in the darkness, staring at them. He calls out.

NEIGHBOR
Hey.

Matthew looks.

NEIGHBOR (cont'd)
C'mere.

Matthew doesn't move. The Neighbor lightens his tone, he sounds almost friendly.

NEIGHBOR (cont'd)
C'mon, I just want to tell you something.

Matthew and Joe step forward together.

NEIGHBOR (cont'd)
(to Joe)
Not you. Just him.

Joe looks at Matthew. Matt takes a deep breath and walks across the driveway. Joe follows anyway, two steps behind, just to be there.

It's a long walk. Matthew reaches the grass and he and the Neighbor stare at each other, a few feet apart.

The Neighbor gestures for him to lean in closer, so Joe can't hear. Matthew won't.

MATTHEW
What do you have to say to me?

The Neighbor leans in anyway.

NEIGHBOR
(a whisper)
Sleep well.

He turns and walks back into his house, ZINGING the metal security gate closed in front of his door.

CUT TO:

EXT KAY SWIMMING POOL DAY

The morning sun reflects off the surface of the Kays' swimming pool. At the bottom of the water we can just make out the shimmery outline of the submerged twelve gauge and box of shotgun shells, just where Annie said they were.

A legend:

"Sunday."

A figure moves, under the water, swimming toward the gun and shells. It grabs onto them and kicks, heading up.

The figure breaks the surface -- it's JOE, stripped to his shorts. He sets the gun and shells carefully on the brick edge of the pool and looks at them despondently.

He shakes his head.

JOE
Chick's crazy.

CUT TO:

INT HOUSE DAY

JOE has laid out the shotgun shells, one by one, on a towel in the kitchen to dry. He has another towel and is carefully blotting the shotgun dry, bit by bit.

Over this and the following, JOE'S VOICE:

JOE (v.o.)
Okay, the situation as I see it is this. We have no idea when the power's coming back on. We've been broken into and we've been threatened by a well-armed nutbar who happens to live right next door.

INT BEDROOM DAY

ANNIE throws clothes into a suitcase. She holds SARAH on one hip, as she will from now on.

JOE (v.o.)
So we're outta here.

INT GARAGE DAY

The garage door opens, spilling light into the dark, dirty space.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE (v.o.)
We're going to drive to the first place where we can use our credit cards --

MATTHEW hunts through a pile of crap and comes up with a length of plastic tubing.

JOE (v.o.)
-- fly to any city we can get into, and stay in a hotel until the power comes back on.

He SNAPS the tubing out of the pile and cuts one end with a kitchen knife.

INT KITCHEN DAY

JOE finishes drying the gun and starts on the shells, wiping them gently, one by one.

JOE (v.o.)
People have become totally unreliable assholes --

INT KITCHEN DAY

ANNIE is in the kitchen, loading canned food into cardboard boxes. She also has the tap open and is filling several jugs with water.

JOE (v.o.)
-- so we'll take a route through where people aren't. We'll drive Matt's car, it gets the best mileage.

INT DRIVEWAY DAY

MATTHEW is in the driveway now, one end of the plastic hose stuck into the gas tank of Joe's Explorer, the other end in his mouth.

He takes a gentle suck, gets nothing, tries harder --

JOE (v.o.)
We'll bring all the gas we have in case we have trouble finding a station that's open.

-- and spits out a mouthful of gas. He quickly shoves the now-flowing end of the siphon hose into the open top of a five-gallon gas can.

JOE (v.o.)
If worse comes to worst --

EXT YARD DAY

JOE is on the hill behind the house. He carefully slides a few of the now-dried shotgun shells into the belly of the twelve gauge.

JOE (v.o.)
-- we figure out our halfway point and if things don't look promising, we turn around, come back, and ride it out here. I mean --

EXT DRIVEWAY DAY

The trunk of the car is now filled with gas cans, water jugs, boxes of food, and suitcases.

JOE (v.o.)
-- how much longer can it be?

MATTHEW slams the trunk and looks at ANNIE, who holds SARAH.

Their look says a lot.

MATTHEW
Where is he?

ANNIE
Up on the hill.

EXT YARD DAY

MATTHEW climbs up the scrabbly hillside to where JOE stands with the gun.

MATTHEW
Hey, Joe --

Joe FLICKS the safety off, puts the gun to his shoulder, aims it a mound of dirt, and pulls the trigger.

CLICK. Misfire.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Come on, let's get out of here.

Joe RACKS the pump, expelling the useless shell, and pulls the trigger again.

CLICK. Misfire. He racks.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
They're not gonna work, babe, they sat at --

CLICK. Misfire. He racks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW (cont'd)
-- the bottom of the pool for --

KA-BOOM!

Matthew leaps backwards as the pile of dirt explodes into a cloud of dust.

Joe racks the gun, expelling an empty shell casing. He picks it up and holds it out to Matt. It's still smoking.

JOE
Some of 'em work.

EXT DRIVEWAY DAY

JOE wraps the shotgun in a blanket and puts it on the back window ledge, inside the car. ANNIE, sitting in the passenger seat, catches eyes with him.

JOE
Won't do us any good in the trunk, Annie.

MATTHEW is standing over at the house, where he has just locked the front door. Joe goes over to him.

MATTHEW
Think it'll be all right?

JOE
Yeah. It's just stuff, right?

MATTHEW
Right.

Matthew nods. They turn and walk toward the car.

JOE
I'll drive.

Matt looks at him. He hesitates --

-- then flips him the keys.

CUT TO:

EXT L.A. FREEWAY DAY

Only one or two cars drive down the nearly-deserted Hollywood Freeway.

INT MATT'S CAR DAY

JOE drives, ANNIE is in front holding SARAH, MATT is in back. Joe looks at Sarah in Annie's lap.

JOE
You sure you shouldn't put her in the car seat?

ANNIE
(with finality)
I'm holding her.

Matt is looking around, at the vast expanse of unused concrete that whizzes by them.

MATTHEW
So empty. I've never seen it so empty.

JOE
Everybody's probably already gone.

ANNIE
Maybe they never left.

JOE
I wouldn't bet on that.

MATTHEW
(to Annie)
You think we're assholes for leaving?

JOE
What do you want to do, Matt? Stay and make it better? You got that kind of power?

Matt leans forward, over Annie's shoulder.

MATTHEW
How's she doing?

ANNIE
Sleeping a lot.

MATTHEW
Good for her.

CUT TO:

EXT DESERT HIGHWAY DAY

This desert highway marks the official Middle of Nowhere. The car ZOOMS along, its lone occupant.

INT CAR DAY

JOE pulls the car over to the side of the road. MATT and ANNIE look up.

MATTHEW
What are you doing?

JOE
Gonna fill up the tank.

MATTHEW
It's not even down to half yet.

JOE
Gasoline is safer in the tank than in the trunk. Right?

MATTHEW
Yeah, I guess.

The car CRUNCHES to a stop on the gravel shoulder. Joe opens his door.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Need a hand?

JOE
I got it.

He gets out, closing his door behind him. Matt looks up at Annie, in the rear view mirror. A moment goes by.

MATTHEW
Almost seems like he's done this before.

ANNIE
That's one way of putting it.

EXT CAR DAY

JOE takes the five gallon can out of the trunk, opens the car's tank, and upends the can. While he holds it, leaning against the car for support, he looks over the roof.

Out here in the middle of nowhere, he sees a house, set back a ways from the road, at the end of a long driveway. It's a ramshackle thing, quite run down, with two cars parked in the driveway. One of the cars is an ancient pickup truck, battered to hell but probably operable.

The other car is a brand-new Mercedes convertible.

Joe furrows his brow.

INT CAR DAY

MATT and ANNIE are talking in low tones.

MATTHEW
You think it was a mistake to hook up with him?

ANNIE
Well, if it was, it was my mistake.

MATTHEW
Do you feel safer with him than you do with me?

She just looks at him in the rear view.

ANNIE
I love you.

MATTHEW
I didn't ask if you loved me, I asked if you felt safe with me.

ANNIE
(pause)
There's strength in numbers.

That wasn't the answer he was looking for.

MATTHEW
I see.

ANNIE
I respect you, Matt.

MATTHEW
(irritated)
What do you say you call me Matthew?

EXT CAR DAY

MATTHEW gets out of the car, to get out of the conversation. JOE, finishing with the gas, calls to him.

JOE
Hey. Look at this.

Matt joins him. Joe points at the house.

JOE (cont'd)
You live in the middle of nowhere, your house is a pile of shit, there are actual holes in the walls, but instead of fixing them --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He points to the car.

JOE '(cont'd)
-- you buy a brand-new Mercedes convertible.

MATTHEW
So?

JOE
So who would do that?

MATTHEW
This guy, apparently.

JOE
The owner of that car -- is not the owner of that house.

MATTHEW
So he has a visitor.

JOE
Obviously. But was he invited?

MATTHEW
What -- so the guy with the Mercedes broke in?

JOE
He comes running out of the city, like us, like everybody else. He runs low on gas. Suddenly, he realizes he has no food or shelter. He sees this house. He kills the owner, and lives off his stuff.

Matt just looks at him for a moment.

MATTHEW
He's the <u>son</u> of the owners. He moves to the city with nothing, makes millions, and now returns to his roots to care for his frightened parents during this time of trouble.

Joe looks at him and laughs.

JOE
Yeah, right.

CUT TO:

EXT DESERT HIGHWAY DAY

Further down the desert highway, the day is fading. A car sits by the side of the road, abandoned, its hood and trunk opened in a position indicating distress.

A big black crow is perched on top of the car, not a very good vantage point, but it'll do.

In the distance, Matthew's car approaches. As it slows to a stop behind the distressed car, the crow lazily flaps its wings and takes off.

JOE gets out of the car, over objections from within.

JOE
Oh, lighten up, it'll take me two minutes.

He goes to the trunk and takes out the empty five gallon gas can. MATTHEW gets out, complaining.

MATTHEW
For God's sake, Joe, we can't stop every ten minutes -- we have a full tank --

JOE
Yep. And an empty gas can.

He takes the siphon hose out of the trunk as well and goes to the abandoned car.

MATTHEW
We can make it to Vegas easily on the gas we've got in the tank.

JOE
So?

MATTHEW
So even if their power's out, they're bound to have a gas station that's open.

Joe unscrews the abandoned car's gas cap.

JOE
What if they don't?

MATTHEW
Or their airport'll be open.

JOE
What if it isn't?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Matt shakes his head in frustration. Joe stuffs the siphon hose into the tank and sucks lightly on the free end.

MATTHEW
The guy's probably out of gas anyway, that's why he stopped!

Gasoline starts to flow out of the tank and into their gas can.

JOE
Hey, you're wrong, what do you know about that. Matthew, this car's seriously fucked up, not out of gas. Look at that mess under the hood.

Matthew waves him off in disgust and takes a few steps away, kicking a rock. He looks at Annie and Sarah in the car and shrugs.

Joe starts HUMMING to himself as the gas SWISHES from the tank into the can.

Matthew paces. He looks under the hood. It is a steaming, smelly, oil-stained mess. He checks out the rest of the car. It's a pretty nice one, moderately expensive, only two or three years old.

He looks at the back bumper. There is no license plate. That strikes him as odd. He walks around, to the front end of the car.

No plate there either.

MATTHEW
(to Joe)
No license plates.

Joe couldn't care less. He continues to siphon the gas. But Matthew is curious now. He wanders over to the windshield and peers down near the dashboard.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Somebody took the VIN number off, too.

JOE
(uninterested)
The what?

MATTHEW
The vehicle ID number. You know, that little metal plate? Somebody took it off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

But Joe isn't paying any attention. Now he's squinting off into the distance, about a hundred yards away.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
(to himself)
Why would they do that?

JOE
Hey, look.

Matthew turns. A MAN is out in the middle of the sand, walking towards them at a steady pace.

MATTHEW
Where'd he come from?

JOE
I don't know. Behind that rock, I guess.

Matthew waves, one arm over his head. The Man does not wave back. He just keeps walking towards them.

MATTHEW
He's coming this way.

The Man is now about seventy yards away.

JOE
What the hell's he doing out here?

MATTHEW
You think it's his car?

Hearing that, a thought crosses Joe's face. He looks quickly at the back of the car --

-- that has no license plates --

-- at the dashboard, that has had its ID number stripped off --

-- and at the gas from the tank, that is even now spilling into their five gallon can.

His face goes white.

JOE
Uh oh.

He looks up. The Man is now <u>running</u> towards them.

MATTHEW
What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

Joe reaches for the plastic hose, to pull it out of the tank, but just at that moment --

-- CRACK.

A GUNSHOT rips across the desert floor and Joe is blown back, away from the tank and flat on his back in the middle of the road.

In the car, Annie SCREAMS.

In the road, Matthew runs to Joe and bends over him. His chest is a bloody mess, his eyes are wide open, and he's not breathing. There isn't much question about it.

MATTHEW
OH GOD, GOD JESUS, HE KILLED HIM!

He looks up, in shock, in the direction of the Man. The Man is running toward the cars as fast as he can, a pistol in his hand.

Matthew moves.

He scrambles to his feet and rips open the rear door of their car.

ANNIE
IS HE OKAY IS HE OKAY?!?

MATTHEW
GET DOWN!!

ANNIE
WHAT HA-

MATTHEW
ON THE FLOOR!

She does, taking Sarah with her.

CRACK!

Another gunshot, but this one misses. The Man is still running at them, now only twenty yards away.

Matthew grabs the shotgun, which is still rolled up in the blanket on the back shelf, and scrambles through the car with it, and out the opposite door.

He tumbles out the door, lands on the ground, and tugs on one end of the blanket. The shotgun rolls out and CLATTERS to the gravel shoulder --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 4

-- just as the Man comes tearing around the front of the car, aiming a pistol directly at Matthew's head.

MAN
DON'T TOUCH IT!!

Matthew jerks his hand back and looks up at the Man. He's around forty, in a business suit it looks like he's had on for days, but that's the only glimpse Matt will ever get of his face, because:

MAN (cont'd)
DON'T LOOK AT ME!!

Matthew looks at the ground.

MATTHEW
Why, why did you do it, why -- ?!

MAN
PUT YOUR HANDS UP!!

Matthew does. The Man fumbles a handkerchief out of his pocket and picks up the shotgun with it. He flings the gun into the bushes. He turns and points his pistol at Annie, who is on the floor with Sarah.

MAN (cont'd)
GET OUT OF THE CAR!!

MATTHEW
Do it, Annie!

Annie scrambles out of the car, holding Sarah.

MAN
DON'T LOOK AT ME!

She huddles near the ground and stares at it, using as much of her body as possible to cover her baby.

The Man rips open the driver's door and jumps into the car.

MATTHEW
Don't take the car, please, please, wait --

MAN
The fucker was stealing my gas. Remember that.

He punches the gas --

-- and SQUEALS away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 5

Matthew crawls across the concrete to where Annie is huddled over Sarah and grabs onto them. They are all hysterical.

MATTHEW
Are you okay are you okay?!

Annie is crying.

ANNIE
He killed Joe?! Joey got killed?!

Matthew looks up, watching, desperate, as their car recedes into the distance.

As the sun goes down, they are a tableau --

-- the abandoned car by the side of the road --

-- Joe's dead body on the shoulder --

-- and Matthew, Annie, and Sarah, huddled in the middle of the asphalt.

CUT TO:

EXT HIGHWAY NIGHT

It's night now. MATTHEW stands in the middle of the road, his arms wrapped around himself, shivering, staring off into the distance. His eyes look almost artificial, big and empty.

Far away, he sees the pinpoint of light that is the headlights of a car approaching. He runs over to the abandoned car and pulls the back door open.

ANNIE is shivering in the back seat, doing her best to keep SARAH warm.

MATTHEW
There's one coming.

ANNIE
I can't.

MATTHEW
You have to, now come on!

He reaches to take Sarah from her, but Annie objects, violently.

ANNIE
NO!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW
Up, get up!

She struggles out of the car and to the edge of the road. Matthew goes to the center of the road and starts waving his arms madly, well before the car can see him.

ANNIE
This one will stop. This one has to stop.

The car is close enough for them to hear it now. Matthew's waves grow more frantic.

MATTHEW
Hey! Help!

The car draws closer, and it's apparent that it is moving very fast.

Matthew stays exactly where he is.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Stop! Stop!

The car draws closer. Matthew is squarely framed in the headlights. The driver lays on his HORN and holds it down.

Matthew stays rooted in the middle of the road.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
STOP PLEASE STOP!!

It's a matter of split-seconds now, Matthew is right in the middle of the road and the driver obviously has no intention of even slowing down, but Matthew holds his ground --

ANNIE
MATTHEW, MOVE!

-- Matthew just closes his eyes, his feet planted in the center of the road --

-- and the car cuts ever so slightly around him, nailing his with a BLAST of air, but nothing else.

Matthew stands there, still, in the middle of the road, as the car's taillights disappear into the night behind him.

Annie stands at the edge of the road. Neither of them moves for a moment.

ANNIE (cont'd)
No one is going to stop.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

MATTHEW
I know.

Annie gets back into the car with Sarah and closes the door.

CUT TO:

EXT DESERT FLOOR NIGHT

Still night. A cigarette lighter flashes in the desert brush. MATTHEW holds it close to the ground, hunting for something. He finds it.

The twelve gauge.

INT ABANDONED CAR NIGHT

The dome light goes on as MATTHEW opens the back door of the car and gets in, joining ANNIE and SARAH. He has the gun with him.

He holds the door open with his foot, to keep the light on as he really examines the gun for the first time.

Annie watches him, wordless.

He presses down a metal bar in the belly of the gun and empties seven shells from within. He examines them, one by one, and replaces them.

He turns to Annie.

MATTHEW
You see this little metal post here, next to the trigger?

She nods.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
That's the safety. If you push it this way, you can't fire the gun. If you push it the other way, so the red is showing? -- you just have to pull the trigger.

He puts the safety catch back on.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
If you want to fire again, you rack it, like this.

He racks the gun and a shell flies out the side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW (cont'd)
And pull the trigger again.

He carefully replaces the shell in the belly of the gun.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Some of the shells soaked through and won't fire. But some didn't. Just keep racking and pulling the trigger until one works.

ANNIE
What are you going to do?

MATTHEW
There was a house ten or twelve minutes back, when we stopped the first time. There were two cars in the driveway. I'll get them to come back for you two.

He holds the gun out to her.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
You won't need it. But I'll feel better if you have it.

She takes it and holds it awkwardly.

ANNIE
I can't believe we're here.

MATTHEW
It'll take me a couple hours to get there. You might as well try to sleep.

ANNIE
Sarah's freezing.

Matthew takes off his jacket and puts it over Sarah. Now he is only in shirtsleeves, and it's quite cold. He kisses Annie and starts to get out.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Matthew, where's --
(she can't say it)
-- Joe?

MATTHEW
Off the road a ways. Try not to think about it.
(kisses her again)
I'll be right back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

ANNIE
I know you will.

CUT TO:

EXT DESERT HIGHWAY NIGHT

It doesn't seem possible that it could be this dark. MATTHEW jogs down the middle of the highway.

The distance ahead seems forever.

CUT TO:

INT CAR NIGHT

ANNIE cradles SARAH in her arms. The baby isn't crying, exactly, but she's far from happy. Annie sings, her voice shaking from the cold, while she rocks her.

ANNIE
Lullaby. And goodnight. Go to bed now, sleep tight. Close your eyes and -- start to yawn -- dreams until the dawn. When the sun -- lights the sky -- you will wake feeling --

She stops, starting to cry. She forces herself on.

ANNIE (cont'd)
Close your eyes -- and start to yawn -- pleasant dreams until -- the -- dawn.

CUT TO:

EXT HOUSE NIGHT

This is the house Matthew and Joe saw from where they were stopped on the side of the road. Both cars that were in the driveway before are there now, the beat-up pickup truck and the shiny Mercedes.

MATTHEW, exhausted, half-walks, half-jogs along the shoulder of the highway and stops at the foot of the driveway. He bends over, hands on knees, catching his breath. It has been a grueling run.

He summons himself and starts up the driveway. It's a long walk. He tries to catch his breath as he draws closer.

He reaches the front porch.

He climbs it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He pauses --

-- and then RAPS confidently on the door.

A long moment goes by. Matthew reaches out, to knock again, but the door jerks open suddenly, stopped by a chain. It's a MAN in his late twenties. He shows only a sliver of his face through the crack in the door.

The Man has a flashlight, which he holds on Matthew while he speaks.

MAN
Who are you?

Matthew tries to speak clearly, but still hasn't caught his breath. He squints from the probing beam of the flashlight.

MATTHEW
My name -- is Matthew -- Kay. We were -- driving -- we stopped to help someone whose car had broken down -- my friend was shot -- the man stole our car -- my friend is dead.

The Man just stares at him suspiciously, giving away nothing.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
My wife and baby -- we're stranded out on the road, seven or eight miles back. We're freezing. Can we please -- we need -- we need to stay in your house.

MAN
Stay in my house.

MATTHEW
I can give you money -- as much money as you want, once the power's back --

MAN
What did you say your name is?

Matthew fumbles in his pocket for his wallet and shows his driver's license.

MATTHEW
Matthew Kay -- here -- see? You can keep my driver's license. You can keep the whole wallet --

MAN
Just hold it up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

Matthew does, and the man shines the light on it, examining it.

MATTHEW
We're desperate. No one will stop -- the cars just race by -- we don't have any food -- any water --

The Man finishes examining the license and shines the light back in Matthew's face. Matthew squints. Finally --

-- the light CLICKS off.

MAN
I can't help you.

He starts to close the door.

Matthew panics.

MATTHEW
Wait a minute, wait a minute, you have to!

MAN
Somebody got killed? I don't know if you're lying -- I can't risk it.

MATTHEW
I showed you my ID!

MAN
I wish I could believe you. But you know how it is. What if you're not alone? What if I open the door and there's two other guys waiting in the bushes? That's how they work, you know.

MATTHEW
Our friend is dead! He's dead, back there in the road!

MAN
I don't want any trouble in front of this house.

MATTHEW
My wife and baby and I have no food! No -- they could freeze to death!

MAN
I can't help you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

MATTHEW
I'm -- begging you.

MAN
I'm closing the door now.

Matthew lunges forward and stops the door.

MATTHEW
This is inhuman! You can't do this to us!

MAN
I'm not doing anything to you. I just can't help you. That's all. I'm sure someone else can. Now let go of the door.

MATTHEW
This isn't even your house.

MAN
What?

MATTHEW
Where are the people that really live here?

MAN
I'm the people that really live here.

MATTHEW
What did you do to them?

MAN
I want you out of here.

MATTHEW
You're killing us.

MAN
Get away. From the door.

MATTHEW
What if I forced my way in? What would you do then?

INSIDE THE HOUSE,

for the first time, we see the other side of the door. The Man is holding it shut with both hands, his left near the crack and his right in the middle of the door. The right, which Matthew can't see --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- is holding a gun.

MAN
I would stop you.

BACK OUTSIDE,

the two men stare each other down for a long moment.

Finally, Matt turns and walks away, quickly, feet CRUNCHING on the gravel driveway.

After a second, the Man BANGS the door shut. Locks CLICK into place from the other side.

CUT TO:

EXT HIGHWAY DAY

The sun beats down again on the abandoned car by the side of the highway. The hood is still open, but the trunk is closed now and MATTHEW is sitting on it. Staring. ANNIE and SARAH are still in the back seat, Annie's head visible in the back window.

The last legend:

"Monday."

From off in the distance comes the WHINING of engines, cars operating at high speed. It grows rapidly louder as the cars get closer.

Matthew stays seated where he is.

One by one, four cars BLAST by, right on each others' tails, doing at least ninety.

Matthew barely seems to notice them, doesn't even bother trying to get them to stop.

He gets up. He goes to the front seat of the car and climbs in.

INT CAR DAY

The shotgun is on the front seat. Matthew picks it up and starts unloading it. In back, ANNIE is nursing SARAH.

ANNIE
(softly)
Is it time yet?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATTHEW
(checks his watch)
Another hour.

He lines the shells up on the dashboard in front of him, so they're standing on end. There are seven. He counts them.

ANNIE
I'm so thirsty.

MATTHEW
I'll leave earlier, walk the whole way so I won't be as tired when I get there.

He starts reloading the gun, deliberately.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
But I don't want to get there before dark.

He looks up, into the rear view mirror. Annie is looking at him.

ANNIE
Can you get your mind around this?

He looks back, holding her gaze.

MATTHEW
I can do anything.

CUT TO:

EXT HOUSE NIGHT

Night has fallen on the little house in the middle of nowhere, but the streetlight that stands at the side of the highway in front is as dead as can be.

Smoke now curls out of the chimney of the house, firelight is visible through the windows. MATTHEW arrives, stepping up to the foot of the driveway, the very place he stood yesterday --

-- but today he's got the shotgun.

EXT SIDE OF HOUSE NIGHT

From the side, the house looks even smaller. Matthew creeps through the desert brush, moving as low to the ground as he can, and approaches a window.

He reaches the side of the house and leans against it. He turns and raises his head, slowly, to window level.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THROUGH THE WINDOW,

there isn't much to see, just an almost completely darkened bedroom.

EXT LIVING ROOM SIDE NIGHT

Matt creeps around to the front of the house. Here, the light burns brightest in what must be the living room. Slowly, Matt peers around the edge of the living room window frame.

INSIDE,

he can see the MAN from last night, seated cross-legged at a coffee table, drinking a beer and playing solitaire. A fire does indeed burn in the fireplace, throwing exaggerated shadows on the walls.

Behind the Man, there are two doors, one leading to the kitchen, the other to the bedrooms.

Matt moves back.

EXT BEDROOM SIDE NIGHT

Back at the bedroom side, Matt checks out the window again. It's held by a single lock, the kind that twists into a clasp in the middle of the frame.

Matt raises his elbow to the pane of glass in front of the clasp and presses, to test its firmness.

He pulls his arm away, crouches below the window again, and checks his watch. It's 7:22.

CUT TO:

EXT BEDROOM SIDE NIGHT

Now it's 8:05, and Matt is still waiting. He hears a noise inside as the Man gets up. He rises, wincing from the cramps in his legs, and peers over the window ledge again.

INSIDE,

the flame of a candle moves with the Man as he tosses his beer can into the kitchen sink and walks down a short hallway, into another room.

AT THE WINDOW,

Matt takes a deep breath and raises his elbow to the pane of glass again. From the other room, he can hear the faint sound of a stream of water, and then, what he was waiting for --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- a toilet flushes.

Without hesitation, Matt BANGS his elbow into the pane of glass, just hard enough to break it, sending glass TINKLING onto the dresser below.

IN THE BATHROOM,

the Man hears nothing over the ROARING water.

AT THE WINDOW,

Matt stands, frozen, waiting.

INSIDE,

the light moves again as the Man heads back into the living room and starts a new game of solitaire.

AT THE WINDOW,

Matt picks a few ragged pieces of glass out of the window frame, reaches in, and unlocks the window.

INT BEDROOM NIGHT

Matt slides the window open. There is a pile of stuff, a girl's trinkets and makeup accessories, that is piled on the dresser in front of the window. Matt moves it, carefully, piece by piece, clearing a space for himself to climb through.

That done, he passes the shotgun through first, resting it carefully in a chair next to the dresser.

Now his body. Slowly, moving as delicately as he possibly can, he wriggles through the window and over the top of the dresser. One more object, a wooden music box, is in his way and he lifts it, to set it carefully on the other side of the dresser, but as he puts it down --

-- it tinkles. It's only three notes, possibly part of "As Time Goes By," it's hard to tell, but they chime, soft and clear in the quiet room.

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

The Man cocks his head, ever so slightly.

INT BEDROOM NIGHT

Matt keeps moving, even quieter, if possible. He gets both feet on the floor, picks up his shotgun, and starts to tiptoe across the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAM!

A neat, round bullethole BLASTS through the wall just behind him, jabbing candlelight from the other room into the bedroom.

Matt nearly jumps out of his skin. He takes off, across the room, running now.

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM!

Five more shots follow just behind him, tracing a neat line of glowing bulletholes that moves only a half step slower than he does.

From the other room, the gunshots abruptly cease and are replaced by the TINKLING sound of shell casings hitting the wooden floor.

Matt SCREAMS --

INT LIVING ROOM NIGHT

-- and charges into the living room.

The Man is standing now, in the middle of the room, the cylinder of his revolver hanging open as he desperately fumbles with fresh bullets, trying to reload.

Matt raises the shotgun and holds it on him.

MATTHEW
DROP IT!!

His tone is very convincing. The Man drops the gun, terrified, and raises his hands.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
KICK IT OVER HERE!!

The Man does. Matt bends, picks it up, dumps the one or two fresh bullets that were in it onto the floor, and throws the gun into the middle of the roaring fire.

He still holds the shotgun on the guy.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
I ASKED YOU!

MAN
I didn't hurt anybody --

MATTHEW
I BEGGED YOU!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN
It was empty when I got here, I didn't hurt anybody, I just borrowed the place --

MATTHEW
SIT!

He pulls a straight-backed chair out from the dining room table and shoves it into the middle of the floor.

Hands raised, the Man edges over to the chair and sits down. Matt's eyes dart around the room, looking for something.

Not seeing what he needs, he takes off his own belt with his free hand.

MATTHEW (cont'd)
Hands behind your back.

The Man complies. Matt wraps the belt once around them and tries to thread it back through the buckle, but it's awfully hard, one-handed.

MAN
You gonna kill me?

Matt's just not getting the belt tied. And he's getting frustrated.

MAN (cont'd)
'Cause if you are, I have somethin' to say about that.

It is apparent to Matt he cannot tie the Man's hands and hold the gun at the same time. He thinks.

As quietly as he can, he sets the shotgun down, to lean it between his legs and free his hands.

He lowers it slowly. As it touches the floor, the rubber stock makes a soft THUMP.

The Man hears it.

Both hands free now, Matt bends down to make quick work of the belt --

-- but the Man is quicker. He throws his head back, into Matt's face.

Matt SHOUTS and falls back, the shotgun clatters to the floor, the Man tips over in the chair, rips free of the belt, and lands close to the gun.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 2

They both paw frantically for the shotgun, but the Man is closer and was ready for this and he rips it away, rolls clear, struggles to his feet, staggers back five or six steps, aims the gun at Matt, and pulls the trigger.

CLICK.

Distraught, the Man racks the pump, ejecting a full shell. He pulls the trigger again.

CLICK.

Matt gets to his feet.

RACK. CLICK.

Matt strides briskly toward the Man.

RACK. CLICK.

As long as the gun throws off full cartridges, the Man keeps racking, in desperate hope that one will hit, but Matt's only five feet away now --

RACK. CLICK.

-- then three, and now he's reaching out, his hand inches from the gun barrel --

RACK.

-- he touches it --

KA-BOOM!

The ceiling explodes in a shower of plaster dust as the shotgun, deflected by Matt's hand, discharges into the air.

Matt SCREAMS, livid now, tears the gun from the Man's hands, and CRACKS him across the face with the stock.

The Man collapses, holding his freely bleeding face.

But Matt's not done. He raises the gun over his head and brings it down with all his might --

-- on the cement hearth next to where the man collapsed.

Again and again, Matt brings the gun down, GRUNTING with the effort, a man possessed, splintering the stock, denting and finally bending the barrel, rendering it completely unusable as a weapon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 3

He raises it high, for one final blow, the Man's face appears to be his target now, and the Man raises his hand in pathetic self-defense.

Matt freezes for a moment --

-- then turns and flings the gun through the living room window. It CRASHES through the glass and CLATTERS to the ground outside.

Matt stands over the Man, chest heaving. The Man looks up at him, cowering, groggy from the blow to his face, no idea what Matt will do next.

A moment passes.

MATTHEW
Give me your car keys.

Gratefully, the Man digs in his pocket and comes up with his car keys. He holds them out to Matt, who takes them, turns, and walks out of the house.

EXT HOUSE NIGHT

Matt staggers out of the house and down the driveway, to the Man's Mercedes. He reaches the door but is too drained to open it and slumps over the top of the car.

Even that isn't good enough, and he turns and sags to the driveway, sits cross-legged in the gravel, and buries his face in his hands.

He sobs.

For a moment, that's the only sound or sight. In front of him, the highway, behind him, the darkened house, around him, the darker night.

And then --

-- the streetlight at the foot of the driveway SIZZLES --

-- and switches on.

Matt looks up, uncomprehending at first, but then the lights in the house behind him switch on, all of them, golden light pouring from every window as power is restored.

The audible BUZZ of electricity fills the air around him.

Matt drops his head back into his hands.

CUT TO:

EXT HIGHWAY NIGHT

The abandoned car is still at the side of the highway, but ANNIE and SARAH are now standing in the middle of the road, staring at the lights of a medium-sized town that glow in the distance, about twenty miles down the road, ahead of them.

MATT pulls up in the Mercedes and parks behind the abandoned car.

He gets out. He goes to them. They embrace.

CUT TO:

INT CAR NIGHT

As MATT, ANNIE, and SARAH drive back into town, Matt flips around on the radio. It's still static, but then one station seems to want to come through. A VOICE comes over the radio, as tentative as they are:

VOICE (o.s.)
Are we on? Are we on? We are. Okay, we're back.
(a more official reading)
As abruptly as it started, whatever was generating the powerful electromagnetic pulse that crippled the Southwest has ceased, and power and communications are rapidly being restored to all areas. Authorities are looking to the Big Bear area, where the raging forest fire is now believed to have been caused by a meteor that may be responsible for the EMF surge as well. Thankfully, though there was much concern, there were few, if any, reports of looting here in Los Angeles --

Matthew and Annie look at each other.

VOICE (o.s.)
-- no official reports of rioting, and what will probably turn out to be only a slight increase in L.A.'s average weekend murder rate.

Matthew takes Annie's hand. The radio announcer's voice falters a bit, tinged with strain and emotion.

VOICE (o.s.)
Which, I suppose -- is the best we could expect.

EXT LOS ANGELES NIGHT

The city twinkles again, its power fully restored.

VOICE (o.s.)
Still, if there is a next time --
maybe we can do better.

INT CAR NIGHT

MATTHEW, ANNIE, and SARAH are heading up the canyon road to their home when suddenly Matthew slams on the brakes and the car SCREECHES to a halt.

ANNIE
What?!

She follows his gaze out the windshield.

A deer stands in front of them, frozen in their headlights at the foot of their driveway. It looks at them, and it's a big one, a male, with impressive antlers.

It stares, for a long moment, and they stare back, all of them too stunned to move.

And then the deer turns and trots away slowly, possessively, up the canyon road.

ON THE ROAD,

the deer moves serenely through the misty pool of light from a streetlamp near the crest of the hill and continues up, disappearing into the black.

Slowly, the car moves again too, up the driveway, and parks near the front door.

Matt, Annie, and Sarah get out and go into the darkened house.

One by one, the lights flick on inside.

FADE OUT.