

TWISTER

by

Michael Crichton
&
Anne-Marie Martin

"TWISTER"

FADE IN:

EXT. RURAL OKLAHOMA - STORMY DAY

CLOSE ON TALL GRASS, blowing in the wind.

A GIRL of ten runs through the grass toward us. Wind whips her dress and hair.

GIRL
Mommy! Mommy!

She passes us, and continues toward her farmhouse. Black and menacing skies behind. The wind builds fast. Trees are bent over.

NEAR HER HOUSE

HER FATHER stands by the open storm cellar, waving to her as the girl runs up. The wind is very strong.

FATHER
Come on!

He hurries down into the cellar, handing the girl to the mother below. With a final worried look, the father closes the cellar doors, tugging them shut against the wind.

TIGHT ON THE DOORS

They begin to rattle, then to vibrate, as the unseen hand of the wind tries to rip them away.

TRACK SIDEWAYS from the doors, past windows-as they rattle, then explode-to the corner of the house. We see the house squeak and twist on its foundations. The whole house is being twisted, like a cap off a jar. Then the house lifts and moves off the foundation-we see the concrete slab-the wind builds to a scream-and suddenly THE HOUSE IS GONE, just lifted up, gone.

Blackness envelops everything.

A TV NEWS REPORT

A HOME VIDEO IMAGE with REC in the corner, it shows a more distant view of the house we just saw, being hit by a tornado and the house carried away.

NEWSCASTER
(over)
This was the scene just a few
minutes ago as a twister touched
(MORE)

NEWSCASTER (CONT'D)
 down near Lancaster. This is the
 peak season for tornadoes, and it's
 why Oklahoma is known as "Tornado
 Alley".

IN THE NEWSROOM

The NEWSCASTER sits in front of a chromakey map of Oklahoma,
 with superimposed weather fronts.

NEWSCASTER
 National Weather Service is calling
 this the biggest Storm front since
 1922. It's brought teams of storm
 researchers from all over the
 country. Many more tornadoes are
 expected in the next twenty-four
 hours.

As the newscaster speaks, white letters slide across the
 bottom of the screen: TORNADO WATCH FOR THE COUNTIES OF...

EXT. OKLAHOMA COUNTRYSIDE - STORMY DAY

A THREATENING black sky hangs low flat over green fields, a
 lone white farmhouse. Lighting CRACKLES SHARPLY DOWN.

A CAR drives by in the foreground.

EXT. THROUGH A CAR WINDSHEILD

Drops of water spatter the windsheild. The road stretches
 ahead.

INT. THE CAR

BILL HARDING, 35, cowboy-rugged in jeans and a work shirt,
 squints at the road ahead as he drives.

Beside him, MELISSA HUNTLEY is 30, pretty in a patrician,
 buttoned-down way. Tailored pants and a white shirt.
 Looking out the window.

MELISSA
 (concerned)
 Do you think we'll get there in
 time?

BILL
 Yeah, Almont's a hundred miles
 north of here. No problem-we'll be
 in Phoenix by nightfall.

MELISSA
 (kisses him)
 I can't wait.

He's reluctant to stop the kissing, kisses her back.

MELISSA
 (happy)
 It's finally happening. . .

BILL
 Yeah. Just one more problem. . .

MELISSA
 You want to go over it again?

BILL
 Maybe we better.

MELISSA
 Okay. When you see her, you're
 going to say. . .

BILL
 (very calm, reciting)
 Jo, nice to see you again. I'm
 sure you know why I'm here today.
 The truth is, it's time we
 acknowledge-

MELISSA
 Both acknowledge. . .

BILL
 (continuing recitation)
 Yeah, right, it's time we both
 acknowledge that our marriage is
 over. We both need to go on with
 our lives now.

MELISSA
 Good, good.
 (prompting)
 And. . .

BILL
 And I want you to sign these
 stipulations and waivers for the
 divorce, Jo.

MELISSA
 And you have your pen ready. . .

Bill pulls his pen out, holding it like a knife.

BILL
It's ready!

MELISSA
And no anger. . .

BILL
No anger. No.

MELISSA
Good. Want to go over it again?

BILL
(like a boxer)
No. I got it. I'm ready. I am.
I feel good.

EXT. THE ROAD AHEAD

Drops of water spatter the windshield. The road stretches straight. We're beyond the town, now. Open country. Thunder rumbles. Bill studies the sky.

BILL
Tower's building. Nice base forming up. She'll be around here somewhere. . .

As they drive on, bill looks out the window, scanning.

BILL
There!

IN THE DISTANCE

Across the field, a STORM CHASE TEAM: four dusty vehicles, parked in disarray along a dirt road.

BY THE PARKED CARS

Bill slams on the brakes. As he starts to get out, he takes a LEGAL FILE with black ribbon with him.

MELISSA
I'd like to come with you.

BILL
No, honey, I should do this alone.

MELISSA
I know you'll be great.

She gives him a big, toe-curling kiss. Time stops; there's real passion here. They break; Bill looks into her eyes.

BILL

Thanks.

Bill gets out, shuts the door, and walks calmly toward the parked cars, which are old and battered.

THE CHASE TEAM

All young graduate students in their 20s, dressed casually in shorts and T-shirts. Their equipment, like their vehicles, has seen better days. TIMMY lies beneath a pickup truck, working on the suspension; DUSTY sits inside another truck, receiving a fax from a cracked portable machine held together by gaffer's tape; RICK, a doughnut in his mouth, tightens a spindly antenna to the roof of a station wagon; a tangle of wires runs down inside. They look up, smile as they recognize Bill, and greet him warmly.

RICK

Hey, Bill.

BILL

Hi, Ricky.

Dusty falls in step with Bill, walking with him.

BILL

Hey, Dusty. How's that old fax?

DUSTY

Holding together. Barely.
(sees folder with ribbon)
This an official visit?

BILL

Just tying up the loose ends . . .

DUSTY

She's having a real bad day.

BILL

Sorry to hear that.

Dusty drops back as Bill walks on. Timmy slides out from beneath the truck, wipes greasy hands on a rag.

TIMMY

(nervous swallow)
Ooh boy . . .

JO WILDER

She's bent over, working in the trunk of a car. She wears dirty khaki shorts and a faded T-shirt with a rip in it.

She yells at her tense assistant, LARRY, as she brings out a big outmoded VHS video camera with a bulky, weatherproof housing, now open. In front of the housing is a rod and marked plastic plate, with crosshairs.

JO

You *idiots!* There's *grass* in the autofocus mount, that's why it jammed. Damn it, Larry, didn't you clean it yesterday?

Bill arrives. Larry tries to signal this to Jo, whose back is turned.

LARRY

I'm sorry, Jo, but . . .

Jo turns the housing upside down, shakes out grass.

JO

Sorry? What good does *sorry* do? You jam the driveboard, you blow the photogrammetry to hell, particle velocities aren't worth a damn, vectors can't be read, the sigma-K point's beyond three-SDs, we might as well be out there with a goddamn Brownie! Go seal this now. I don't want to miss the next one for something as stupid as this!

She slams the trunk of the car, still furious then notices Larry's expression. Still angry:

JO

What?!

LARRY

Bill.

She turns. She's 35, with a grease smudge on her face, hair in disarray; she'd be pretty if she gave a damn.

She looks at Bill as if she'd like to hit him. Larry steps back. Suddenly, to the amazement of all, she puts on a big smile.

JO

Bill! Well . . .
(searching for words)
Welcome back.

BILL
 (controlled, stiff)
 Hello, Jo. Nice to see you again.

JO
 (notes his manner)
 Nice to see you too, Bill.

Larry stands there, grinning. In this tense moment, focus turns from Jo, to him.

LARRY
 Hi, Bill.

BILL
 Hiya, Larry. How're things?

LARRY
 Pretty good. Got a big storm front today.

BILL
 Yeah, I'd say.

As she speaks, Jo tucks in her T-shirt, tidying up.

JO
 Biggest in forty years! We got LP contours, good overhangs, clean updraft arc-This is it! I'm glad you stopped pouting and decided to come back.

BILL
Pouting?

JO
 What would you call it?

BILL
 (gets hold of temper)
 Jo, I'm sure you know why I'm here today. I've come here because -

JO
 (pointing to folder)
 What's that? Somebody die?

BILL
 (reciting)
 I've come here because it's time we both acknowledge that our marriage is over -

JO
Yeah, we made a mess. I know.

BILL
And we both need to get on with our
lives . . .

JO
Yes. Right.

BILL
I'm sure you agree.

JO
(amused by his stiffness)
I do . . .

BILL
(opening folder)
Good. Then I just need your
signature on these stipulations and
waivers. And then the divorce will
be final.

Jo abruptly walks away, suddenly busy with her equipment.
She moves around the car.

JO
I already signed those.

BILL
(chasing her)
No, you didn't.

JO
Well, I signed something.

BILL
Well, it wasn't these.

JO
Well then, what'd I sign?

BILL
(frustrated)
I don't know!

JO
Look, do we have to do this now?

BILL
Yes, we do.

JO
 Because we have a monster LP cell
 here, and you and I have a lot of
 work to do, in fact you could -

BILL
 I'm not staying.

JO
 (disbelief)
 Bill, this is the one we've been
 waiting for! The biggest storm
 since '49, and -

BILL
 Jo . . .

JO
 (joking)
 What's the rush? You getting
 married or something?

BILL
 Yes. I am.

A dozen emotions cross her face.

JO
 Oh. When?

BILL
 Next week.

JO
 Oh . . . Okay . . .

She turns away, to hide her feelings. She sees a portable
 thermal-paper fax machine on the roof of her car. Like
 everything else in her team, it's beat-up. It is printing
 out an image of the big storm.

JO
 I guess you really need the papers
 signed, then . . .

BILL
 Yeah, I do.

CLOSE ON JO, thinking. Staring at the fax.

CLOSE ON THE FAX, spitting out the storm image, on curling
 paper.

Jo turns back to Bill.

JO
Well, sure. Of course I'll sign,
Bill.

BILL
(amazed)
You will?

JO
Of course. What do you think, I'd
stand in your way? Who are you
marrying?
(looking)
Is that her?

BILL
Yes.

JO
I've got to meet her. What does
she do?

BILL
She's a psychologist.

JO
Good! I'm glad you're professional
help.

Jo strides toward the car, where Melissa stands waiting.
Bill chases after her.

JO
She doesn't look like a shrink.
What's her name?

BILL
Melissa.

They've reached the car. Jo reaches out both hands, shakes
Melissa's hand vigorously.

JO
Melissa. So nice to meet you. I'm
Jo.

MELISSA
(friendly-cautious)
Hello . . .

JO
Congratulations on your marriage.
I'm sure you'll be very happy.

MELISSA

Thank you . . .

BILL

Jo . . . You gonna sign the papers?

JO

Of course. Got a pen?

Bill's pen is whipped out so close to her face, she has to pull back. She takes the stack of divorce papers and puts them on the roof of the car, starts to sign. The papers bristle with red tags.

BILL

Where they're marked . . .

JO

Lots of places . . . Okay . . .

As she signs, Jo glance at Melissa; the two women appraise each other, beneath superficial smiles.

JO

To tell you the truth, I'm glad this is happening. It's a relief, it's finally over . . .
(still signing)
Here, too?

BILL

Just initials.

Jo continues to sign steadily, one page after another. Bill and Melissa exchange glances - it's working!

JO

(still signing)
I'm sorry you had to go out of your way for this . . . Where do you two go from here?

MELISSA

Phoenix.

JO

What takes you to Phoenix?

MELISSA

That's where we're going to live.

Jo is almost at the end of the documents. She comes to the last page, pauses.

JO
 Oh . . . I'd love to hear all your
 plans.

Her pen is poised over the final signature. Bill and Melissa
 holding their breath.

MELISSA
 Well . . . I'm sure, but you see -

JO
 (pouncing)
 Great! Let's talk about it over
 lunch!
 (closes papers)
 We can finish it all up then.

Bill and Melissa just stare. They have no choice.

INT. CATTLEMAN'S LUNGE - DAY

A honky-tonk joint but it's the best place to eat in Winslow,
 Oklahoma. Outside the window, storm clouds are dark.

At the table, Jo's elbow leans on the still unsigned
 documents, pinning them down. Over coffee:

MELISSA
 So we'll be in Phoenix, because
 Bill is going to work at the
 television station there.

JO
 (impressed)
 Television . . .

MELISSA
 Yes, he'll be reporting on camera.
 Starting next week.

JO
 (looking at Bill)
 What will he be reporting?

BILL
 I'll be -

MELISSA
 He'll be doing the weather.

JO
 (sincere)
 Weatherman in Phoenix! Great.
 Steady work . . .

MELISSA

Well, Bill spent so many years teaching meteorology at the university, we thought weatherman's a natural . . .

JO

Weatherman's perfect for Bill. And what about you, Melissa?

MELISSA

I have my clinical practice. I specialize in the psychological care of people with reproductive difficulties.

JO

(looking at Bill)

Very challenging.

MELISSA

Yes, it is. I'll be sorry to give it up, but . . . Bill and I plan to start a family right away.

JO

Wonderful. I'm glad you're going to give him all the things I never could . . .

As she talks, Jo opens the papers to the last page.

MELISSA

Thank you. I appreciate how you're handling this.

JO

Oh, it's time for everybody to move on.

(picks up pen)

What's past is past.

(before signing)

The only thing I regret is that Bill's leaving, right at the moment that his research is finally going to pay off.

BILL

I couldn't care less.

JO

(to Melissa)

There are six hundred tornadoes
(MORE)

JO (CONT'D)

every year, and they destroy a lot.
Mostly here in the farmbelt. I
grew up here, and I can tell you -
when you see a farm destroyed,
you see a poor family lose
everything . . .

BILL

Jo, don't do this.

MELISSA

But there are warnings, aren't
there?

JO

The warning time's too short.
These storms are huge - that front
(pointing out window)
covers a hundred thousand square
miles. It'll drop a lot of
tornadoes today - but nobody knows
where, because nobody knows what
makes a cell drop a tornado in a
particular place.

(emphatic)

We'll never understand the internal
structure of a tornado unless we
get right inside it.

MELISSA

You want to go inside a tornado?

JO

I want to put an instrument package
inside it. That was Bill's idea
- to put instruments right into the
vortex.

EXT. THE RESTAURANT - BY JO'S PICKUP

A tarp pulled down the back of a pickup, revealing THREE
WHITE INSTRUMENT PACKS, laid out side by side. They're the
size of garbage cans, they bristle with dials and antennas.
But they have a distinctly homemade look.

JO

Bill put five years of his life
into this . . .

Bill inspects the packs, lifts one out, sets it upright on
the ground.

JO

They're designed to be placed in the damage path, so they get sucked up in the funnel, where they break open, releasing a hundred little transmitters . . .

Bill has lifted off the lid of the pack, and we see it is stuffed with multicolored clear plastic balls, each ball containing electronic instrumentation.

JO

. . . That measure all parts of the tornado simultaneously.

BILL

You fixed the multiplexing?

JO

Wider frequency spectrum. And new shear and static sensors.

BILL

(impressed)

Pretty good . . .

Melissa notices Bill's interest.

JO

(to Melissa)

We get one of those in the damage path, we'll get a complete vortex profile for the first time in history - enough to predict where a cloud will drop a tornado. The warning will go from five minutes to fifteen. It'll save hundreds of lives.

MELISSA

But how can you get one of these inside a tornado?

BILL

That's the problem. Nobody's managed to get one in the damage path. Howie Bluestein tried for years.

JO

(meaningfully)

And Jonas has come close.

BILL
(contemptuous)
Jonas.

MELISSA
Who's Jonas.

JO
We both used to work for a guy
named Jonas Miller. Until he went
and -

BILL
Forget it, Jo.

JO
No, this is important -

BILL
Not anymore.

MELISSA
Jonas has packs like this?

JO
Yes, but Jonas's never done it,
either. Because you need perfect
conditions - and we have them
today.

(points to the sky)
The biggest spawning supercell in
half a century. Lifted index minus
five - it'll drop major vortices
all around here; F-4s, maybe even
an F-5. No one's ever gotten close
enough to an F-5. And lived to
tell about it.

MELISSA
F-5?

JO
Fujita scale, zero to five. Bill's
only seen an F-3.

Bill still examines the pack. Without looking up:

BILL
Four.

JO
Three.

BILL

It was an F-4 in Ambrose.

JO

And you got pretty close to that one.

BILL

Damn close.

(remembering)

I was a hundred yards from the laterals, so close you could -

Then he realizes what he's saying, breaks off.

JO

Bill's the best vortex trackhound I ever saw. Got an instinct for what they're gonna do.

Bill puts the instrument pack back in the truck.

BILL

Sign the papers, Jo.

JO

(gives up, big sigh)

Okay. I'll take you back to your car, and you can be on your way.

BILL

And sign the papers.

JO

Sure. Let's go.

They get into Jo's truck.

EXT. DRIVING ON THE ROAD - STORMY DAY

All three together in the pickup truck. Uncomfortable silence. Spotter CB radios crackle, talking from all around the cell and where the cap will break. Light rain starts. As she drives, Jo glances up at the sky. Bill does, too. When Jo notices his interest, he ducks back, pretends indifference.

Melissa watches this without comment.

Now Jo is glancing along the side of the road, as if she's looking for something. She sees a piece of rusty old fender up ahead up ahead, smiles to herself. She swerves slightly, drives over the metal.

There is a loud BANG! and the truck begins to wobble. Jo pulls off the road.

EXT. AT THE SIDE OF THE ROAD - LIGHT RAIN

They all get out and survey the blowout.

JO

Ah hell.

Bill looks under the truck.

BILL

Where's the spare? There's no spare.

Bill rolls his eyes. Jo ignores the look, goes to the cab, picks up the radio. A pause - then with a glance over her shoulder, she flips the dial to another frequency, with a taped marker: SCUMBAG.

JO

(on CB)

Dusty? You reading? This is Jo. I've got a blowout on highway 9, four miles north of town. Dusty? Come and get us. We need help.

She slams the door in apparent rage, leans against the truck. Looks at Bill.

Bill just shakes his head at her.

Their pickup is alone on an empty road. The road stretches away, disappearing in a cloud of fog and rain.

Then we hear A DEEP RUMBLING SOUND, from down the road. Bill frowns.

Jo turns to look.

Melissa comes to stand beside Bill.

The sound builds. Lightning cracks down.

THEIR VIEW OF THE ROAD - RAINY DAY

From out of the rain at the far end of the road, taking up all lanes, come FOUR SILVER WINDSTAR VANS. Once in the clear, they shift with military precision: two vans move to the front, two stay behind.

A moment later, another shift, two dropping back into waiting spaces, so all four are now in single file, boring down the road toward us. It's the Blue Angles, but on the ground.

JO

Ah hell.

MELISSA

Who is that?

BILL

That . . . is Jonas.

The four vans come right up to us, and then pull over at an angle onto the opposite side of the road, one after another, matching angles exactly. Then, in a group, they all back up, swinging around in a 180 so they face outward, ready to go again.

The silver vehicles are sleek. Stenciled on the side of each vehicle is NSSL ATMOSPHERIC RESEARCH TEAM.

Out of each van, TEAM MEMBERS leap athletically out, in identical crisp clothes - white T-shirts and black shorts. They stand at attention by the vans.

Stepping out of the lead van is JONAS MILLER, 40, bearded, and tough. He wears a bomber jacket and a tie, conveying a vaguely military bearing.

The minute Bill sees him he hunches his fists, trying to control himself. Bad blood here. Jonas comes over, all charm and graciousness.

JONAS

Happened to hear your transmission,
Jo . . .

JO

Of course you did, you listen all
the time.

JONAS

You look beautiful today. We all
really miss you at the lab.
(glances at truck)
Men! Firestone 325! The clock is
running!
(hits stopwatch)

Across the road, the men scramble. Open the back of one van, which contains a complete traveling workshop and repair area. Spare tires, spare everything.

JONAS
 (to Melissa)
 Ma'am, Dr. Jonas miller, director
 of the Atmospheric Science Lab,
 Oklahoma Polytechnic University.

MELISSA
 Melissa Huntley . . .

Jonas gives a charming smile, turns. Now all business.

JONAS
 Bill. Thought you might come back
 sooner or later.
 (extends hand)
 No hard feelings.

Bill doesn't shake it. His gaze is cold, furious. He forces
 his hands at his sides.

BILL
 Yeah, there are.

Jonas seems amused by how barely controlled Bill is.

Around them, Jonas's men move in balletic coordination, like
 a pit-stop crew.

JONAS
 Twenty-seven seconds!
 (to Jo)
 We drill in the off-season for
 time. I always say that's the
 difference between the
 professionals and amateurs.
 (back to Bill)
 You're not still angry about that
 old instrument-pack business, are
 you? After all, it was my lab.

BILL
 You stole our idea.

JONAS
 An idea's not worth much unless you
 can execute it. You've got to put
 the pack in the tornado. You're
 never gonna do it, because you
 can't. That's a five-hundred-mile
 dry line running from Kansas to
 Texas, average tornado track is
 four point three miles, average
 duration on the ground two point
 (MORE)

JONAS (CONT'D)

five minutes - how're you going to get there, and get a pack in? You can't. You've already tried.

Bill's furious. Jo's watchful. Jonas's cold, laying out the truth.

JONAS

How many years did you try, Bill? Running around the countryside, never quite doing it . . . You wasted your chance with the technology, just like you wasted your chance with everything else.
(lets it hang)

We have satellite comlink, we have NEXRAD real time, we have on-board pulsed Doppler, and we're going to get this *done*. The days of sniffing the dirt are over, Bill.

The tire is changed. Jonas's men leap back, at attention.

TEAM IN UNISON

Time!

JONAS

Thirty-nine seconds. Nice work!

They jog back to the vans. Lightning crackles from the sky. Jonas glances up.

JONAS

Well, nice to see you all again and catch up. You take care out there. It's risky when you're unprepared.
(turns)
Jo, always a pleasure.

And he kisses he hand, and heads back to the van. His cars are already pulling out in formation. Jonas jumps lithely in the lead van while it's moving. And they all streak off, down the road.

Jo swears, and they all get back into the truck, slam doors.

JO

You know what this is all about? There's a big NSF grant to the first team that gets a package inside a twister. Big grant means big lab, and big lab means big influence over the new storm-warning system.

They start down the road.

JO

We get the grant, we'll build the warning system in six months. Jonas gets it, it'll take six years. We want to use the existing network, which is perfectly fine, but Jonas'll start from scratch. His corporate sponsors see this as a two-billion dollar government project. You don't think they contributed those fancy vans just for the sake of science, do you? Jonas doesn't care if people die in the meantime.

Silence in the truck. Judiciously:

MELISSA

Can you beat him?

JO

I could beat him if I had Bill.

All eyes turn to Bill. He shrugs, apparently indifferent.

BILL

Not my problem anymore.

JO

I don't know how you can walk away from this.

BILL

Well I am.

BACK AT JO'S TEAM IN THE FIELD - AFTERNOON

There is light rain. Thunder rumbles ominously; the sky is darker, as Jo's pickup pulls up beside Bill's rental car. There is a sense of impending menace - a tornado anytime now.

They all get out. Bill slams the door, furious.

BILL

I *knew* this was going to happen -

Jo and Melissa get out. Bill is heading for his car.

JO

Just one day.

(to Melissa)

All I'm asking for is one day.

BILL

No, Jo.

JO

I'll sign tomorrow.

BILL

No! That's it! We're leaving!

MELISSA

Now, wait a minute, Bill . . .

BILL

(furious)

No. No!

They both get in the car, slam doors. Melissa is soothing.

MELISSA

Bill: remember our goal.

BILL

(furious)

The hell with the goal! I'm not giving in to her. The hell with her!

MELISSA

You're right.

(soothing)

You're right.

BILL

The hell with her!

MELISSA

You're right, you're right . . .
But she could tie up this divorce
for years. She can put our lives
on hold. I don't want this to drag
on . . . And you know it will.

Bill is shaking his head no, but he knows it's true. Her arguments are working on him.

And, also, he's looking at the sky. The growing supercell.

MELISSA

Honey, stay for a day and get it over with.

BILL

I just want to get rid of her!

MELISSA

I do, too. One day. Do it for us,
and we'll be rid of her.

(kisses his cheek)

We can handle anything for one day.

Bill nods, gets out of the car, turns to Jo, holds up one
finger pointing to the sky, shouts:

BILL

One day!

Jo grins.

THE SUPERCELL ABOVE

The roiling supercell makes a HUGE RUMBLING and TWO BOLTS OF
LIGHTNING crack down in rapid succession. A reply from the
sky. The challenge accepted.

ON THE GROUND

The wind picks up, ruffling the divorce papers in Jo's hand.
She clutches them tightly.

THE REST OF HER TEAM

Looking up at the sky. Sitting in their cars, hearing the CB
voices, which are getting excited.

RADIO OVER

A tristate tornado alert continues
for the rest of the day with four
reported sighting from Kansas to as
far south as Odessa, Texas.
National Weather Service emphasizes
that conditions remain extremely
dangerous . . .
(etc.)

JO TO ONE SIDE

Dusty works with Jo, loading the instrument packs from her
truck into the van. They look at melissa, standing beside
Bill. Obviously in love. Rick crosses, carrying a camera.

RICK

Your mom called, Jo.

JO

(distracted)

Okay . . .

Jo can't take her eyes off Bill.

DUSTY

Why're you doing this, Jo? Let him go.

JO

All I want is an instrument reading.

DUSTY

Uh-huh . . .

JO

Hey. Bill places the instruments, we get our readings, and he's out of here. Everybody's happy. Okay?

DUSTY

(not believing)

Okay, Jo . . .

MELISSA AND BILL

A nearby RINGING of a phone. Bill pays no attention. He's preoccupied, looking at the sky.

Melissa looks over, opens the car door, sits in the front seat, opens her purse. She takes out a phone.

MELISSA

Dr. Huntley. Yes, well, I'm off duty right now . . . Uh-huh . . . Well, if it's that serious, all right. Put her on . . . I thought she was going to start Clomed next month.

Melissa sees everybody begin to shout, and start running at once toward their cars.

MELISSA

(hand over phone)

What's happening?

RICK AT A CAR

With the door open, he sits, listens to a radio, headset to his ear.

RICK

Tornado! On the ground! It's on the ground! Looks like five miles west near R forty-five . . .

BILL

He squints as he sees:

A TORNADO - AFTERNOON

A long, narrow funnel has dropped down from the black sky, several miles away. It is everyone's image of a tornado: narrow, classic funnel, pale gray color, touching the ground with a fine tip. Seen from a distance, it is graceful, mysterious, and makes us want to see more.

MELISSA

She stares, mesmerized.

JO

Jumps in her truck, turns on the ignition.

TIMMY IN THE STATION WAGON

As he starts the engine, Rick leaps in. Dusty in another truck. All the cars getting ready to peel out.

DUSTY DRIVING OVER TO MELISSA

He reaches out, hands her a radio.

DUSTY

Follow us. Stay two miles behind.

Still on the phone, Melissa slides behind the steering wheel, starts the engine.

MELISSA

(on phone)

Uh, something's come up, I got to call back . . .

JO'S TRUCK

As bill opens the driver's door. She smiles.

BILL

Move over.

He half pushes her to the passenger side, gets in, slams the door, guns the engine.

JO

You're so butch.

Bill floors it. All around them, cars are driving off, squealing tires, plumes of dust. A scene of frantic chaos.

MELISSA

Waving as Bill drives off. Then, worried, she starts after them.

IN JO'S TRUCK

Jo looks back. In a voice imitating a newscaster:

JO

Well, the weekend weather here in Phoenix is going to be gorgeous! Get zinc on that nose! Get some umbrella drinks! Here are the numbers, a high of a hundred and seventeen, a low of a hundred and one, and of course zero percent relative humidity! Perfect!

As they drive, we barely hear superimposed the weather service announcing a tornado warning, and the constant crackle of CB radio voices, intense, active, everybody trying to get to the tornado. (We always hear this whenever we chase)

EXT. THE TRUCK ON THE ROAD

Bill races at eighty, toward pitch-black skies.

Cars come in the opposite direction, their drivers often glancing over their shoulders, veering toward Bill. He swerves. Dodges.

IN JO'S TRUCK

Jo is looking at Bill as he drives.

JO

That subtropical moisture moving in from Texas is causing some thunderstorms in the central United States but as usual, absolutely nothing here in the skies over Phoenix. We might even pop a hundred and twenty today, so it's a fabulous day to stay inside in a dark room with your air conditioner on full!

DUSTY
 (on CB)
 Jo? Over.

JO
 (serious now)
 You stay in Phoenix, Melissa's
 pretty skin's going to look like an
 ostrich wallet.

DUSTY
 (on CB)
 Jo, it's Dusty, over.

JO
 Weatherman? Are you kidding me?

DUSTY
 (on CB)
 Jo, over.

BILL
 (trying to keep his
 temper)
 Are you going to talk to Dusty?

Jo picks up the CB mike.

JO
 (to CB)
 Here, Dusty.

DUSTY
 (on CB)
 We're on highway 40 going south.
 Where are you?

JO
 Where are we? I don't know, wait a
 minute.

She looks at a map.

Bill takes the CB mike as he drives.

BILL
 Dusty, we're on 424 going east.

JO
 West!

BILL
 East!

JO
No, Bill, it's -

BILL
East! Read the map! You still
can't read a map.

JO
I can read the goddamn map!
(furious, looks at map)
Maybe *northeast* . . .

BILL
East!

JO
Okay . . .
(sigh)
Why are we fighting. Look, it's
only for a day. Let's try to get
along.

BILL
Fine with me.

She looks at him, offers her hand. He reaches over and
shakes it.

JO
Friends?

BILL
Friends.

JO
Good. I'm glad.

They both stare at the road.

JO
Because I've been thinking about
our marriage, Bill. And the truth
is, it wasn't all your fault.

BILL
All *my* fault -

JO
You weren't great. And, I wasn't a
perfect wife. I admit it.

BILL
You weren't a wife at all!

JO
 (tighter)
 Look: everything would have been fine, except you had a problem with my career.

BILL
 Your career? It had nothing to do with your career.

JO
 I don't know what else to call it -

BILL
 We were going to buy a house, and you took the down payment and spent it on a new Doppler radar -

JO
 Because we needed a new Doppler, ours was outmoded, even you said - so -

BILL
 But that money was for our house!

JO
 Bill: I'm sorry, but a house just didn't seem that important.

BILL
 I know!

JO
 Well, it didn't!

BILL
 I know! That's the problem! It wasn't a relationship! You just did whatever you wanted to do!

JO
 (throwing her hands up)
 This is ridiculous.

Bill is looking across the field, at the tornado.

BILL
 (no longer listening)
 That's right.

THE TORNADO

Churning in the distance. We hear a low, faraway rumble.

BACK IN THE TRUCK

As they chase it, hearing the mixed voices on the CB.

VOICE ONE

(on CB)

It's an F-1 going west, vortex
looks

(crackle)

fifty meters diameter.

VOICE TWO

(on CB)

- route on 424, we're miles from
it. Is it turning?

DUSTY

(on CB)

Looks like it's crossing the road
about five miles from here, going -

(crackle)

JO

(grabbing mike back)

Say again, Dusty?

DUSTY

(on CB)

Going east . . .

JO

East. Hey!

Bill steps on the gas.

THE TORNADO

It's closer, a mile ahead on their left, moving over a flat alfalfa field. It's running parallel to the road. We can see where the funnel touches the ground, swirling up dust powerfully. We hear the DEEP RUMBLING ROAR that sounds like an express train.

BACK INSIDE THE TRUCK

They stare in silence as they drive.

THE TORNADO

It's still ahead of us, approaching a barn near the side of the highway. It HITS THE BARN - THE TIMBERS BLOW APART like pick up sticks.

BACK IN THE TRUCK

They swerve to avoid the timbers lying in the road, and keep going. They are pulling alongside the tornado, then ahead of it.

JO

You have to get further ahead.

BILL

I know it.

Soon he's about half a mile ahead of the tornado, which we now see out the back window.

JO

You're gonna have to go into the field.

BILL

(scanning roadside)

I'm trying.

He's going ninety down the road, and he has to pull left into the field to intercept it. There's a sloping grass embankment, leading down to a four-foot wide irrigation ditch running parallel to the road.

JO

Go down here. Now. Now!

BILL

Wait a minute, just a minute . . .

JO

Lost your nerve?

That's it. Bill swerves left, the truck tilts onto the embankment, it's hairy at a hundred miles an hour, then he drops down into the ditch. Feeling his way, the truck roaring along. He's in the ditch. The truck vibrating like a washboard. He gets his left wheels up, out of the ditch.

Jo looks back at the tornado, now behind them and about a half mile across the field. She swings forward.

JO

Come on, let's go.

Bill's having trouble controlling the truck in the ditch at this speed. The steering wheel shakes like a jackhammer. The truck swerves, and then both wheels are back inside the ditch.

JO
Bill . . .

Half a mile ahead, a concrete irrigation crossing blocks the ditch. They're roaring towards it.

Bill jerks the wheel left, trying to jump the wheels out of the ditch. But the ditch is slowly getting deeper. Soon it's almost three feet deep. He can't possibly get the truck out now.

The concrete bridge rushes closer.

BILL
I'm trying.

BILL
(sarcastic)
This was a good idea . . .

There's only one thing to do. He slams on the brakes, the truck fishtails, the dust and chunks of dried mud fly, the truck squeals and races forward to the bridge.

And stops, twenty feet before decapitation. They both jump out of the truck. Jo goes to get the instrument pack.

BILL
Jo!

He grabs her and they run for cover.

BENEATH THE IRRIGATION DITCH COVER

They're squeezed together, huddled inside the covered drainage ditch overpass. Turning back, they can see their truck, the wheels and headlights. Jo stares at the landscape beyond.

The tall grasses on the embankment whip, wilder and wilder, and then finally flatten. The roar of the tornado increases in fury, building unbelievably. The truck begins to shiver.

BILL
Get back.

He pulls her deeper into the hole. She shakes him off, annoyed.

JO
I know what I'm doing.

JO'S TRUCK

Suddenly it speeds forward as if shoved by a giant hand, and it slams into the embankment, the crumbled bumper inches from their faces.

And in the next moment, the truck is gone.

They are staring at an empty irrigation ditch.

MELISSA DRIVING

Looking forward, worried, trying to find Bill. On the road beside her, the truck falls out of the sky, smashing down and falling apart.

MELISSA
(screaming)
Bill!

She stops, jumps out of her car, runs to the wreckage.

MELISSA
Bill! Oh, Bill . . .

BILL
What?!

She turns. Bill and Jo are running flat-out up the embankment, toward her. Jo clutching the pack.

MELISSA
Bill!

BILL
I'm fine! Get in the car!

He signals her to go around to the passenger seat. He jumps in behind the wheel.

Bill guns the car, Jo climbs in the backseat. Jo is concerned about the pack, is checking it carefully.

MELISSA
Bill, I thought you were dead, that was just the most awful feeling,
Bill . . .

BILL
(full of adrenaline,
focused)
Sorry, honey. It's fine.

JO
 (referring to the pack)
 Everything's fine! Gamma V is
 twelve and holding. Go!

ON THE ROADWAY ABOVE

Jonas's sleek convoy rushes past, pursuing the tornado. They swerve around the wreckage and the parked car as if they weren't there.

JO
 Shit!

Melissa stares. Bill floors it.

THE TORNADO AHEAD

Still moving parallel to the road, it's now about a mile ahead of them.

WIDE ON THE CAR

As it chases the tornado. Ahead in the distance are Jonas's vans.

INT. JONAS'S VAN

In the lead van, Jonas wears a headset, sits with a monitor in the dashboard. He looks from the monitor to the tornado and back again.

ON THE MONITOR, the tornado is shown in false colors, swirling. Little vector arrows flash, data overlaid on the image.

JONAS
 Have we got a DD oh four on this?
 The column's starting to look
 unstable. Is the path moving, or
 do we have asymmetry?

IN THE SECOND VAN

Windowless, low light, crammed with electronics. TWO AIDES work among the monitors, which are analyzing satellite imagery, local video imagery, laying out damage paths, calculating wind velocities.

AIDE ONE
 Dr. Miller, NEXRAD calls it firm.
 The 700 jet max is stable. That
 path should hold.

JONAS
Okay, let's go for it.

AIDE TWO
Ready, Dr. Miller.

They get out their version of the instrument packs: black and chrome, ultra-high-tech, glowing with dials and lights, clearly expensive and sophisticated.

BACK IN JONAS'S CAB

Jonas sits forward, facing the tornado ahead.

DRIVER
Jonas, we have fleas.

Jonas looks in the side mirror. Behind them, he sees Bill's car trying to catch up.

Jonas gives a dismissing wave. Forget it.

INT. BILL'S CAR

He's catching up to Jonas. Radio voices. But he's frowning, looking at the tornado. He seems worried.

BILL
I don't like this . . .

JO
Just go!

He pulls out to pass the vans. Water spray from the vans hits the windshield. Everybody's going a hundred.

THE ROAD

They are running parallel, Bill passes one van after another.

IN JONAS'S VAN

DRIVER
Jonas? Look at this.

Jonas looks over. Bill's car is now neck and neck. Jo looks out her window, and smiles at Jonas. She raises both hands in fists, and then flips him the double bird.

JONAS
(amused)
She's got a lot of spirit, doesn't she?

Abruptly, Bill's car loses speed, and drops back abruptly. Jo looks stricken, turns away from the window.

Jonas and driver watch in the rearview mirrors. Bill's car falls back, then makes a U-turn, goes the other way.

DRIVER

They're turning around.

JONAS

Probably forgot something.

INSIDE BILL'S CAR

Jo's furious.

JO

What the hell are you doing?

BILL

The midlevel's disorganized. It's gonna shift its track.

JO

Jonas doesn't think so.

BILL

Jonas has no instincts.

JO

Yeah, but he's direct-linked to the storm center, bill. And he's going for it.

BILL

Look at the column. Look at the angle. Look at it!

Jo looks, studies it, frowns:

JO

Maybe . . . You think it's -

BILL

Yeah. I do.

MELISSA

What?

JO

It's gonna turn.

BILL

Wasn't there a road back here . . .

JO
Yeah, there was . . .

BILL
There!

THE FARM FIELD TO THEIR RIGHT

A dirt road goes straightaway from the highway. Bill turns onto it, the car bouncing on the rougher road.

GOING DOWN THE ROAD

The tornado is diminishing, off to their right. Still going away from us. We no longer really feel its power.

The phone rings; Melissa answers it.

MELISSA
Dr. Huntley. No, I'm off duty - well. If it's really an emergency . . .
(covers phone with hand)
This'll be quick.
(into phone)
Louise? Now, honey, just calm down. There's nothing to cry about. Louise: didn't we already talk about the penis issue? . . .
(covers phone)
Looks to me like it's still going the other way.

BILL
Wait.

THE TORNADO

Rumbling, churning up the dirt of the field. It's going right for a FARMHOUSE, some distance back from the road.

THE TORNADO ON A COMPUTER SCREEN

In false colors. Jonas is looking at the monitor.

JONAS
Looking good, looking very good . . .

THE TORNADO

It doesn't hit the farmhouse, but veers off to the left. It's making a slow curve, turning away from the road.

DRIVER

Uh, Jonas . . .

Jonas looks up from his monitor, sees the tornado going away.

JONAS

No! No!

He looks back over his shoulder, and sees the tiny shape of Bill's car, driving across the field.

JONAS

He's in position to intercept.

INT. BILL'S CAR

As they drive, Melissa is bent over, head down, concentrating on her call. Trying to block out all the radio sounds in the car.

MELISSA

Yes, it *is* unnatural . . . but we don't have a choice here, with his motility, a penis is just not gonna do the job. Why are crying? How much progesterone have you had today? Let's face reality here.

As she speaks, she looks up, sees the tornado.

THE TORNADO

Rumbling, much closer now. Looking powerful and churning, a primordial force. It is much more frightening up close.

INSIDE THE CAR

Melissa gets off fast:

MELISSA

Louise? I'll call you back.

Hangs up. Car is filled with a mixture of excited radio voices.

VOICE ONE

(on CB)

East southeast, shifting due south - it's going south! Estimate Fujita two, large wedge on the ground, and it's very unstable . . .

DUSTY
 (on CB)
 Jo, it's looking really unstable.

JO
 (on CB)
 Yeah, we can see it.

They drive beneath the inky black cloud. The tornado spinning toward them. Farmland, flat.

VOICE ONE
 (on CB)
 Wedge is eighty meters on the ground,
 lateral columns unstable . . .

Melissa finally realizes it's coming toward them.

MELISSA
 Oh my God . . .

Out the window, lightning cracks down. The storm gains power.

They are closing in on the tornado.

OUTSIDE THE CAR

Rocketing toward the tornado at ninety miles an hour, we hear a melange of tense voices over.

VOICE ONE
 (on CB)
 Rapid condensation! It's happening!
 Rapid condensation!

VOICE TWO
 (on CB)
 Very large
 (crackle)
 Dust picking up on the front
 leading wedge! I have upflow!

BACK IN THE CAR

A conversation against a constant radio chatter. Melissa stares at the tornado. She rubs her hands on her knees.

MELISSA
 (tense)
 Are we going to be okay?

BILL
 Sure. We know what we're doing.

The car driving at eighty miles an hour toward the tornado.

JO

Yeah, we've never had a problem . . .
Except for, well, there was Ted.

BILL

Ted was a jerk.

JO

What happened was his own fault.

MELISSA

What happened?

JO

He ran out of gas. And got tossed.

She cranes her neck over, looks at the gas gauge.

MELISSA

Tossed?

The question hangs in the air. The car drives forward,
toward the tornado. No one answers her.

BILL

He pushed too hard.

VOICE THREE

(on CB)

Doppler estimate winds at one
hundred eighty miles an hour, so
stay back . . .

MELISSA

(having doubts)

Listen, uh . . .

BILL

(to Jo)

Sounds like an F-2 or -

JO

Maybe F-3.

(turning on the instrument
pack)

What do you figure, another minute?

BILL

Yeah. Here's rain.

Rain spatters the windshield. Bill turns on the wipers.

BILL
 (explaining to Melissa)
 First you see rain, maybe hail.
 Then the wind picks up. Then you
 see debris in the air, and you know
 you're close.

Melissa is squeezing her knees so tight her fingers are white. She is trying to keep it together, and asks as calmly as she can:

MELISSA
 When do you know you're too close?

The tornado is off to the right, on Melissa's side, dark and swirling fast. Melissa stares in horror.

MELISSA
 I'm getting a really bad feeling
 here . . . You're gonna have to
 stop . . .

Bill doesn't hear her, he's squinting at the tornado with a professional eye. He's totally focused now: this close, it's dangerous.

Melissa is tense. Her phone rings again. She snatches it up furiously.

MELISSA
 (very edgy)
 What! What's it about! Look: I
 don't care if he doesn't like boxer
 shorts, you tell him that those
 tight little bunhuggers are cooking
 his balls like a baked potato.
 Tell him!

Hangs up. Fumbling with the phone, so nervous she can't turn it off properly.

The tornado is now developing a distinct sharp W-bend, a kink in the funnel.

BILL
 (worried)
 We got helical precession . . .

JO
 Let's go anyway.

MELISSA
 Let's not. This seems very
 unwise . . .

BILL

The vortex is breaking down. We may never get multiples.

MELISSA

Multiples?

JO

(looking up)

Or we may not.

BILL

(dead serious)

Jo . . . You're pushing.

JO

Do it!

A SECOND TORNADO FUNNELS DOWN on their left, touches ground on the other side of the road. There're now tornadoes out both windows.

BILL

We're getting out.

Thick dust everywhere. A few yards ahead of them, a COW FLIES SIDEWAYS across the road, literally carried through the air four feet above the ground, blown to the left by the tornado.

DUSTY

(on CB)

Jo? Get out of there. You're going right into a big suction vortex and you can't see it.

MELISSA

Oh my God we're gonna die! Bill!

From the left, out of the other tornado, THE COW COMES FLYING BACK the other way, and Bill swerves to miss it, brakes squealing, and the cow is blown into the field to the right, instantly gone.

Directly ahead, A THIRD VORTEX spirals down, 100 yards in front of them. It's lacy, almost see-through . . .

And Bill immediately turns away, but the wind spins their car 180 degrees, it's lifted and swung around like an amusement-park ride, and melissa screams - she just loses it, throws her hands over her face - as Bill struggles for control, the car sliding wildly in his hands, as if it's on ice. They are enveloped in dust.

Suddenly there is a loud whump! and two tornadoes suck back up into the clouds above.

And then whump! the third goes.

Abruptly, it's over: the car is driving on an empty road. Clear air between the black clouds overhead and the ground.

The CB squawkers very active. Bill now driving in calm. He immediately puts his arm around Melissa.

BILL
Everything's fine. Are you okay,
honey?

MELISSA
(stunned, shaky)
What happened?

BILL
(kisses her forehead)
Multiple vortices are unstable.
Everything's fine now . . .

Jo watches this. She turns off the power on the pack beside her. Suddenly:

MELISSA
Stop the car!

Bill pulls over, and she flings open the door, leans out, and throws up.

As she retches, Jo smiles slightly. Bill sees it, gets out of the car.

EXT. THE CAR - DESERTED FIELD

Melissa is walking away. Bill goes over to her, hugs her. Jo watches from inside the car. As Bill hugs her, he looks up at the sky.

THE SUPERCELL ABOVE HIM

It rumbles, and flashes with inner lightning. It might be laughing at him. He lost this round.

EXT. ROADSIDE TRUCK STOP - AFTERNOON

The sky is turning pink and gold as Jo's team pulls over to the side of the road. They all get out. Melissa gets out on her side of the car, and Jo gets out of the backseat.

MELISSA AT THE DOOR

She closes her door, looks stunned. Puncturing the metal side of her door is a delicate twig, with leaves at the end. It's slammed into the door like a missile. Jo pulls the twig out.

JO
I'm thirsty.

Melissa looks at the punctured door and shudders.

AT THE TRUCK STOP - LATER

Jo's team parked in sunlight, with dark skies behind them. Larry on the telephone. Faxes coming in to Tim in one vehicle. Over by the soft-drink machine, melissa and Jo are talking.

Bill and Dusty carry the instrument pack from the sedan to the pickup. They strap the pack down in the back of the pickup; Bill glances toward the two woman.

DUSTY
Is Melissa okay?

BILL
Yeah, sure.

DUSTY
On the radio, she sounded pretty upset.

BILL
(squinting)
I think she's okay.

JO AND MELISSA TALKING

By the Coke machine. Jo gives Melissa a Coke. Melissa's hand trembles as she takes it.

JO
(sits behind her)
The first time you see one of these things, it can be pretty upsetting. I grew up around here, so I've see a lot of 'em.

Melissa just looks at her.

JO
Every spring, they start up. You get used to 'em after a while.

MELISSA

I don't think so . . .

JO

First one I ever saw, was in first grade. We all had to go into the school hallway and lie down, holding hands. It blew all the windows out. And our teacher peed in her pants. So, don't be embarrassed, it's normal to be scared.

MELISSA

I'm not embarrassed . . .

JO

Good.

MELISSA

(getting offended)

Why should I be, embarrassed?

JO

You shouldn't be, that's what I'm saying.

MELISSA

Well, I'm not.

JO

It takes a special kind of person to do this.

MELISSA

(not saying all she could)

That's clear . . .

JO

(continuing her thought)

You can see how much Bill loves it. He doesn't even think about it, he just goes -

MELISSA

Look, let's get one thing straight. The only reason we're here is to get that paper signed.

JO

You think if I signed that paper, he'll just walk away from here?

MELISSA

Yes, I do.

JO

It's not that simple.

MELISSA

Why don't you sign the paper, and we'll find out.

JO

Let me tell you something about Bill. He's not going to be able to walk away from this storm. I know him.

MELISSA

You used to know him.

JO

If you make him leave now, it'll always be unfinished business in your life. Because he doesn't want to leave.

MELISSA

Then sign. And we'll see if he wants to leave.

JO

It's not about the papers -

MELISSA

Yes it is. You just won't admit it. Your relationship's over and you can't accept that he loves somebody else now. So you refuse to sign. Classic.

JO

Save it for your patients.

MELISSA

He doesn't care anymore.

Melissa swigs Coke, looks at Jo with barely concealed contempt. As if she's tired of this game.

MELISSA

If you're so sure of yourself, then sign.

Jo stares at Melissa. The two women stare each other down.

JO
 Maybe I will.

Jo gets up, walks away. She looks over at Bill, standing to one side, watching the storm with dusty. Jo squints. Then she turns away.

AT THE SIDE OF THE TRUCK STOP

Jo on the pay phone, making a call. In the background, a flatbed truck brings in Jo's wrecked car.

JO
 Mom? Hi, it's me. We're fine . . .
 In Seward. Yes, it's only twenty
 miles, but - you sure it's not too
 much trouble? Dinner would be
 great, Mom. The guys'd love it.
 Oh, Bill's here, too. Uh-huh.
 Well. I don't know, it's
 complicated. He's, uh, kinda got
 somebody with him. No, uh, I think
 we gotta bring her. Okay, see you
 soon.

She hangs up. Walks over to the car, where the team is stripping out the scanner, seeing if it still works.

JO
 Hey guys, steak tonight!

RICK
 All right! Real food!
 (lower)
 You think it's a good idea?

JO
 I think it's a great idea.

Jo glances back at Melissa, then:

JO
 Now, who's gonna rent a car?

The team in unison turns away from her.

TEAM
 Aw, Jo.
 (etc.)

JO
 Who hasn't done it yet?
 (choosing)
 Larry? Larry, let's go.

INT. RENTAL CAR AGENCY - AFTERNOON

A stern-looking rental agent fills out the forms.

AGENT
How long will you be keeping the
car?

LARRY
(very tense)
Uh . . . a day.

AGENT
And you will be taking our added
collision and damage coverage?

LARRY
Yes.

RENTAL AGENT
Is that the two-hundred-fifty-
dollar deductible or do you want -

LARRY
I want all the coverage. All the
coverage. Everything you got.

EXT. RENTAL CAR AGENCY - AFTERNOON

As Jo gets behind the wheel of a new pickup, squeals out in a
cloud of dust, goes down the road.

Above, the storm cloud rumbles.

INT. SEVERE STORM CENTER LAB - AFTERNOON

Beneath fluorescent lights, intense activity, people
hurrying, scientists at monitors. Move past big swirling
images of the storm front, which covers several midwestern
states. A scientist talks on the phone.

FIRST SCIENTIST
We've got tristate watch advisories
from texas to Kansas, the jest max
is still above three hundred
millibars and we should see more
tornado activity in all three
sectors . . . Conditions remain very
hazardous going into the night . . .

SECOND SCIENTIST
Jonas for you on two . . .

FIRST SCIENTIST
 (punches button)
 Yeah, Jonas. You're where?

As he listens, he moves his cursor over the huge cloud front. He clicks near the center of the cloud. A little tag onscreen: JONAS MILLER.

He punches buttons, and the storm colors change to artificial reds and blues and greens.

FIRST SCIENTIST
 I'm looking at the radar now. I've got no TVCs at the moment but they seem to be developing all around you . . . Yeah . . . Watch yourself out there, Jonas.

WIDE ON THE TRUCK STOP - AFTERNOON

In a cloud of dust, Jonas and his team pull in, parking their vans in formation side by side. Jonas gets out, acts concerned.

JONAS
 You okay in that last one, Jo?

JO
 Yeah, it was nothing. Dropped a pair of sisters and roped out.

JONAS
 (nodding)
 The core was weak on Doppler. That's why we didn't chase it.

JO
 Uh-huh. Well, we have to try harder.

JONAS
 I'm just glad you're all right.

His tone says: You were a fool to chase it. Jo doesn't answer. Jonas looks judiciously at the sky.

JONAS
 Well . . . looks like we'll get more touchdowns before the day is over. NSSL's got mesocyclones north near the Kansas border, and more in the south, too. Hard to know which direction to head.

JO

Uh-huh . . . So: which way you
going to head, Jonas?

JONAS

(smiling)

I'm going to have a cup of coffee
and consider the data.

(turns to one of his team)

Watch the cars, Eddie.

Still smiling, Jonas goes into the truck stop with his crew.

JO

That son of a bitch is going to
wait to see what Bill does.

THEIR POV - BILL

Standing with Dusty, staring at the sky, hands in his
pockets. Kicking the dirt, watching the wind puff it.
Staring up again.

INT. THE CAFE

Jonas and his team slide into a Naugahyde booth. Everybody
pops open their laptops in front of them: pow-pow-pow! It's
an IBM convention. Then they turn

BACK TO JO AND TIMMY

Jo sees Jonas and his boys, sitting in a booth, staring out
at Bill.

JO

What a bunch of vultures.

Jo takes out a pack of gum, unwraps a stick, offers some to
Timmy, who shakes his head.

TIMMY

You really think Jonas'll just wait
and follow us?

JONAS

No law against it.

Jo unwraps another piece of gum, and pops it in her mouth.
Timmy looks at her as she takes out a third stick of gum,
chews it, too. Her mouth is now a little bulging. Timmy
looks bewildered.

JO

Would you excuse me?

She strides past melissa, who stands to one side, talking on her cellular phone.

MELISSA

Yes, I understand it's a problem . . .
Well, we just have to get through
these bad days . . .

BY JONAS'S VANS - AFTERNOON

As Jo comes up, chewing. EDDIE, a fresh-faced college boy, stands by the van, looking up at the big thunderhead.

JO

Hey, Eddie.

EDDIE

Hiya, Jo.

JO

Hell of a cloud . . .

EDDIE

Yeah, sure is . . .
(as Jo comes closer)
What're you doing here, Jo?

Jo casually leans back against the van on the driver's side, standing beside Eddie.

JO

Oh, I'd just like to look at your
new FA scanner.

EDDIE

You know I can't show you that, Jo.
Jonas'd kill me.

JO

Yeah, he would. Want some gum?

EDDIE

Sure.

As he opens the gum, Jo turns her attention skyward, to the thunderhead.

JO

I think we're getting a bigger
anvil. The dry line may be
widening.

EDDIE
Yeah. It looks like we're getting
more updraft.

JO
No beavertail yet.

EDDIE
(pointing)
I was wondering if that could be
one starting there.

JO
Where?

As they talk, her hand slips inside the open driver's window.

EDDIE
(pointing)
There. See along there/ maybe
some early striations . . .

JO
I think you're right. That could
very well be the start of a
beavertail.

EDDIE
That's what I think, yes.

JO
Then that cloud could be dropping a
tornado any minute now.

EDDIE
I don't think so, Jo.

JO
Why not?

EDDIE
'Cause you're standing around here
like nothing was happening.

JO
(punching his shoulder)
Not for long, Eddie.
(walking away)
You ever want a decent job, come
and see me.

Jo heads across the parking lot, to where Bill stands with
Dusty.

BILL AND DUSTY - AFTERNOON

Backs to us, they stare at the gigantic thunderhead rising five miles into the sky, beautiful in the afternoon light. They are dwarfed by the huge cloud formation as they study it.

BILL
Wind's dropped.

DUSTY
Yeah.

Lightning crackles down from the base of the cloud.

INT. THE CAFE - AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON A COMPUTER SCREEN showing overlapping windows: Doppler radar in false colors, millibar contour diagrams, velocity fields, etc. These are abstractions of the storm outside.

JONAS
Looks like rapid gusts fronting away from the main up draft. You got this curve at three hundred millibars where the low-level vorticity isn't exceeding point oh two.

WIDEN to see Jonas and his team ignoring the sky and looking at screens on a table cluttered with coffee cups and portable computers, cellular modems, and cellular faxes.

JONAS
The meso is never going to develop this low, but . . . do we have any data higher up?
(aides shuffling papers)
Find me some data on what's happening at higher levels . . .

EXT. HIGH LEVELS OF THE STORM CLOUD - AFTERNOON

The thunderhead roiling, an anvil cloud cutting horizontally. Thunder rumbles. PAN DOWN the giant cloud to Bill and Dusty, their backs to us, still watching the sky. The cloud is now a distinct purple-green.

BILL
Going green.

DUSTY
Yeah.

Bill holds out his hand. Dusty drops car keys into it. They continue to stare up.

BACK INSIDE THE CAFE

Jonas and his team nose to nose with their screens.

JONAS

In the absence of a mechanism to generate low-level rotation, I don't think we'll have a tornado, no -

ANOTHER AIDE

Hey, Jonas, look!

They turn to look out the window - where they see Jo and her team climbing into their vehicles, getting ready to pull out of the parking lot. Melissa is still talking on her cellular phone, Dusty grabs her and pulls her into his car.

The booth empties as Jonas and his team clamber over each other and rush outside.

EXT. THE TRUCK STOP - AFTERNOON

As Jonas and his team come out. The sun is setting, everything is red around the ugly purple-green cloud. They are just in time to see Jo's vehicles pulling away.

JONAS

Go!

His team sprints for their cars. Jonas gets in the passenger side of the van; Eddie is driving.

INT. JONAS'S VAN

Jonas stares down the highway, focused only on the departing cars. Eddie's putting the key in the ignition.

JONAS

Move it, Eddie!

EDDIE

What the . . .

Eddie Bends around the wheel to look. The steering wheel has A HUGE GOB OF GUM COVERING THE IGNITION, stuck into the lock.

EDDIE

Where's the keys . . .

JONAS
 (on intercom)
 Nitrogen! Nitrogen! I need spare
 keys for van one! Now!
 (accusing)
 You were talking to her. How many
 times have I told you -

From the backseat, he's handed a small spray can with a long plastic tube. Jonas sprays the steering column. It turns frosty white around the gum.

JONAS
 Jo is not to be trusted.

The frozen gum pulls away in a lump, unclogging the ignition. Meanwhile, a van pulls alongside, Jonas opens his door, catches tossed keys, gives them to Eddie.

JONAS
 Go!

WIDE ON THE PARKING LOT

As Jonas's team peels out, in clouds of dust.

INSIDE JONAS'S VAN

Ahead, the road is deserted. They zoom down it.

JONAS
 Get on the frequencies, monitor
 them!

TECH VOICE
 (on intercom)
 We already got 'em, Jonas.

Eddie punches a dashboard button.

MELISSA
 (on radio)
 Are you between eleven and
 fourteen? And it still hasn't
 turned blue?

EDDIE
 Must be some kind of code . . .

MELISSA
 (on radio)
 Well, if your nipples are that
 sensitive - have you been having
 sex every day?

Jonas frowns as he listens.

MELISSA

(on radio)

Remember, lie on your back
afterward for fifteen minutes. No,
no, oral sex would be a waste of
time . . .

JONAS

Turn that off.

EDDIE

But . . .

JONAS

Off!

Eddie turns it off. Jonas stares out the window.

EDDIE

(resentfully)

There might have been some good
information there . . .

JONAS

(staring out window)

They'll have to quit for the night
pretty soon. It's getting too dark
for them.

(opening panel)

But we can keep going all night,
right men?

INT. THE BACK OF THE VAN

Illuminated by a red nightlight, it is crammed floor to
ceiling with electronic equipment.

TECHNICIAN ONE

Right, Jonas. Go all night if you
want.

INT. BILL'S (REALLY DUSTY'S) PICKUP TRUCK - DARK AFTERNOON

Jo and Bill driving along.

BILL

Getting dark . . . We're going to
have to stop soon.

JO

Unless you want to keep going.

BILL
Night tornadoes? We don't have the
equipment, it's much too dangerous.

JO
(incredulous)
Too dangerous!

BILL
I'm on my way to Phoenix tomorrow.

JO
And you don't want to hurt
yourself. You have a goal in life,
now. You're going to Phoenix to
get domesticated.

BILL
I'm going to settle down, yes.

JO
Have a steady life.

BILL
Right.

JO
Going to the TV station every day,
wearing makeup . . . playing golf
with the station manager . . .
getting ahead in your career as a
weatherman . . .

BILL
Sounds pretty good to me.

Lightning cracks down, sharp and close. It starts to rain.
Bill flicks on the wipers.

JO
I sure never thought I'd see you
with a leash around your neck,
eating out of a dish with your name
on it.

BILL
The trouble with you is, you think
you know everything about me, and
you don't.

JO
Yeah?

BILL

Yeah.

JO

What's going to keep you from running away from her, the way you ran away from me?

BILL

Ran away?

JO

Hey. I came home one day and all your stuff was gone. You didn't even leave a note on the pillow.

BILL

What's the difference? You never talked to me.

JO

Well, Mr. Communication, neither did you. You just hit the road.

BILL

I got tired of trying to talk to you.

JO

And you'll get tired again.

A beat of silence.

JO

You don't know what trying is.

EXT. THEIR TRUCK ON THE ROAD - SECOND TORNADO

Passing a row of tall trees along the side of the road, a windbreak for a farm. As their truck passes the trees, we see off to the right ANOTHER TORNADO. It's black against dark green sky, and distinctly bigger than the last one.

INT. THEIR TRUCK

Bill and Jo are entirely focused on the tornado.

VOICE ONE

(on CB)

(going crazy)

On the ground! Tornado on the ground!

JO
 (on CB)
 Dusty? You see it?

DUSTY
 (on CB)
 We see it, Jo. Looks like a
 hundred meter wedge.

BILL
 Maybe more. Good shape, F-2 . . .

JO
 Vertical columns . . .

BILL AND JO
 (in unison, the same
 thought)
 . . . should hold.

BILL
 Yeah, it should . . .

CB VOICE FOUR
 Large wedge, going north northeast,
 I'm seeing it from highway 44 . . .
 moving about thirty miles an hour . . .

They're both looking at the tornado. Judging it.

BILL
 This might be the one . . .

HIS POV - THE TORNADO

Churning toward them, it will intersect their road a few
 miles ahead.

BACK INSIDE THE PICKUP

BILL
 (talking to tornado)
 You gonna cross that road? Go on,
 do it . . . I'll be there . . .

JO
 (on CB)
 Dusty? Get ready to set up.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR

Driving along, across from the farmhouse with the windbreak
 we just saw - they're a few miles behind Jo and Bill, on a

parallel road. Beside Dusty, Melissa sits tensely. The tornado is off to their left.

DUSTY
(on CB)
You gonna go for this one?

BILL
(on CB)
Yeah. We are.

Melissa reacts with concern. But Dusty's businesslike:

DUSTY
(on CB)
Where are you now?

JO
(on CB)
We're about two miles from it . . .
and we have hail.

INT. BILL'S TRUCK

Outside, hail starts to fall, rattling on the truck, bouncing on the road ahead. It's small - golf ball-size.

DUSTY
(on CB)
When should I set up?

JO
Set up now.

Bill watches the sky, choosing the moment.

JO
(on CB)
We have upflow! Dusty! Upflow!

BILL
I'll untie the pack.

He pulls over, jumps out, climbs into the back. Simultaneously, Jo gets behind the wheel, floors it.

In the open back of the pickup, Bill bends over the instrument pack, and starts unstrapping the buckles. The tornado is still a distance away, but the wind is howling around him, flattening the prairie grass, whipping his hair around his face. The hail hammers him. Hitting his hands, making it difficult to work.

JO
 (leans out of cab)
 You okay?

BILL
 DRIVE!

Jo is driving at eighty miles an hour toward a black sky and a blacker tornado, which has an ugly greenish-purple tinge.

Bill is in the back of the pickup, fumbling with the knotted ropes that hold down the instrument pack, trying to get them open in this whirlwind.

Inside, Jo is concerned.

JO
 We have debris.

Inside the cab, clods of earth and tree branches thump against the windshield, the side of the truck.

Bill in the back, debris flying around his head. It's all getting slowly worse . . .

EXT. DUSTY'S CAR - SIDE OF THE ROAD

His trunk is up; he and Timmy hastily take out tripods, video cameras, computers, radio receivers, while listening to the CB radio.

VOICE FIVE
 (on CB)
 Getting really wild
 (crackle)

VOICE SIX
 (on CB)
 I don't believe this. I just saw a
 red pickup truck driving right into
 the core
 (crackle)
 guy standing up in the back!

MELISSA
 Is that Bill?

DUSTY
 Probably.
 (on CB)
 Rick?

RICK
 (on CB)
 Setting up now.

DUSTY
 (to Melissa)
 Take this.

He hands her a video camera with etched plastic panels mounted in front of the lens.

Dusty moves away from the car toward the field, where he sets up the tripod. Melissa hurries after him. By the time she gets there, Timmy takes the camera and places it on the tripod. Meanwhile, Dusty is hurriedly setting up the radio receivers and connecting them to the portable computers.

DUSTY
 Bill's putting the pack in the path. We'll record the data.
 (working fast)
 Video, for photogrammetry. And over there, telemetry data.
 (points)
 Rick's over there.

Rick is across the field, about half a mile away, also setting up.

ACROSS THE FIELD

Rick and Larry are setting up. They work fast.

LARRY
 (with tripod)
 Gimme that mount . . .

RICK
 I'm getting hungry.

LARRY
 And the calibrator . . .

Rick hands him more equipment. They can see Dusty and Melissa in the distance.

BACK TO MELISSA AND DUSTY

MELISSA
 You're triangulating?

DUSTY
 Yeah.

He sights through the video camera. Through the camera, with the REC buttons and day-timers lit, we see the powerful twisting cloud.

Beside him, Melissa is worried. The sky is dark and low. She looks at the tornado in the distance.

MELISSA

This is dangerous, why do you people do this, when you think about it, it's kind of crazy, it really is . . .

BACK TO BILL'S PICKUP

The hail is denting the surface of the hood like a thousand hammer blows. The whole car starting to look lumpy.

In the back, Bill's hands are cut by debris and hail as he struggles to untie the wet cords. The wind is a continuous high-pitched scream, and we hear underneath it the deep ominous rumble of a gigantic freight train. He looks up at the tornado.

THE TORNADO

Harsh and roaring, a gangrenous green. This is the closet we have ever been. The deepening green sky is illuminated by sudden flashes of lightning. It's a nightmarish scene.

The tornado hits the power lines across the field, causing a series of FLASHING EXPLOSIONS.

BACK ON THE ROAD

It's clearly dangerous here: a whole tree flies through the air, and sheets of metal siding spin like giant Frisbees. The entire wall of a house, with a window and door, comes tumbling end over end down the road. The air is dense with dust.

JO DRIVING

Grim as she goes down the road. Debris bangs constantly against the truck and windows. Suddenly something shatters the side window by her face. She slams on the brakes, twists the wheel.

JO

That's it!

EXT. THE TRUCK

It comes to a stop, Bill still in the back. Jo gets out of the truck and heads for the tailgate. They shout in the wind, hardly able to hear each other:

BILL
Get back in the truck!

She throws down the tailgate, and starts to pull at the instrument pack. Bill is up by the cab, near the top of the pack.

There's still one cord tied.

JO
Come on!

BILL
Jo, don't! I haven't -

She pulls hard, and the breakaway lid of the instrument pack pops off, and Jo falls back, pulling the rest of the pack with her.

That releases the contents of the pack - dozens of round plastic balls tumble out of the pack, bounce around her on the pavement, and spin away in all directions as the wind catches them.

Jo looks stunned, turns to Bill. She climbs up on the truck.

JO
(coming closer, shouting)
What happened?

BILL
It was still tied!

He turns and leaps over the side panel, lands on the road.

Bill climbs in the cab and accelerates hard in a U-turn. She hangs on, slides open the window behind Bill's head, thrusts her face through into the cab and screams:

JO
Why didn't you tell me?

BILL
I can't tell you anything!

As the truck drives away, we see the tornado coming across the road, right where they were. A few of the balls are picked up, but not many.

IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

Bill sees that the balls aren't picked up by the wind. He is attentive to this. Even though he's driving like hell.

IN THE BACK OF THE PICKUP

Jo turns to look at the tornado crossing the road, spinning some of the balls that are still there. It flings aside the white shell of the instrument pack.

JO

(to herself)

We had the perfect position.

Then she turns, puts her face back into the cab.

BACK IN THE CAB

JO

We had the perfect position.

Perfect! That was the one!

BILL

And we woulda had it! If you weren't in such a rush . . .

JO

Why didn't you tell me?

BILL

I tried.

JO

Not hard enough!

BILL

You didn't listen, you were in such a goddamn hurry . . .

JO

That's right, everything's my fault, the marriage is my fault, it's all my fault -

BILL

This time it is -

JO

Hey, you left me!

BILL

I didn't want to! I was crazy about you!

BACK TO MELISSA AND DUSTY

Down the road, packing up the equipment, they hear the argument on the handheld radio, the shouting voices on the CB.

JO
You never said so.

BILL
I'm saying it now! I was crazy
about you!

JO
Great, now you tell me! It's over
now, right?

BILL
You're impossible!

JO
Just tell me! Come on, say it
cowboy! Tell me it's over for
good! Tell me you love somebody
else! Tell me to my face!

Melissa listens more intently than she lets on.

BILL
(on CB)
You're so goddamn pushy . . .

JO
(on CB)
(contemptuous)
Look at you, you don't know *what*
you want!

Dusty shakes his head. Melissa is listening to all this, very cool, her face impossible to read.

MELISSA
Unhealthy relationships are very
hard to end . . .

Dusty senses her distress, tries to smooth it over.

DUSTY
They never did get along. Always
picking at each other.

He clicks the radio. We now hear scattered spotters, shouting excitedly about the storm. They trudge back to the car, Dusty first, Melissa following.

MELISSA
 Second marriages are usually much
 healthier. More mature.

DUSTY
 (still walking)
 Uh-huh.

They continue back to the car. Thunder rumbles.

INT. JO'S TRUCK - LATE AFTERNOON

Jo on the CB as they drive.

JO
 (on CB)
 Dusty? Get going. We're gonna be
 late for dinner.

DUSTY
 (on CB)
 We'll beat you there, Jo. Rick's
 already on his way.

RICK
 (on CB)
 Steak! Steak!

LARRY
 (on CB)
 Gravy! Hash browns!

BILL
 Wait a minute . . .

JO
 We're going to Guthrie.

BILL
 No we're not.

JO
 It's all arranged. Mom's expecting
 you.

BILL
 No, Jo.

JO
 Relax: we're just gonna eat. Looks
 like you haven't had any meat in a
 long time.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF GUTHRIE - LATE AFTERNOON

The cars drive past an old 50s gas station, a motel, and a drive-in movie theater with a neon sign that says: THE GALAXY.

They continue on toward Guthrie, a nice town of 10,000.

EXT. JO'S PARENTS FRONT YARD - EVENING

The mailbox says *JIM & MARGARET WILDER*. It's painted red, white, and blue. The house is a white wood-frame house. The team's cars all pulled up around it.

Larry inspects the pockmarked rental car, shaking his head, then turns away.

EXT. JO'S PARENTS BACKYARD - EVENING

Margaret, Jo's mother, brings out a big platter of steaks. Bill immediately takes it from her, helping out. Jim follows with several pounds of mashed potatoes, a pile of bread. (Nothing green served here.)

At the table in the backyard, everybody falls to as if they've never eaten before. Everybody talking, lively.

Melissa stands to one side, uncertain. Margaret goes over to her, hands her a cup of coffee.

MARGARET

You take cream?

MELISSA

Just a little.

MARGARET

From around here, Melissa?

MELISSA

Dallas, originally.

MARGARET

I've got a sister in Dallas. Big city now.

MELISSA

Yes, it is.

MARGARET

(not knowing what to say)
Yes. . . . it is.

The moment goes awkward. Jim comes over, puts his arm around Melissa.

JIM
Come on, darlin', better get in there. These boys won't leave anything but the tablecloth.

Melissa slips into a spot at the table. They pass her food, all still talking. Rick's piling stuff on her plate.

RICK
Better fill up. In this business, you never know when you'll eat again.

LARRY
Keep your strength up.

Melissa picks up a fork, hesitates. It's not her style. She glances at Bill, across the table. He's eating, but silent. Timmy sees Melissa hesitate.

TIMMY
Here, gotta have gravy.

Timmy pours a big puddle of gravy over her entire plate.

RICK
Margaret's gravy is famous.

LARRY
Makes the meal.

TIMMY
Yeah, we haven't had it since - Jim, when did that last twister come through here?

BILL
'92

JIM
That's right, Bill, '92. That was the year you and Jo got -

Margaret elbows Jim. Melissa starts to cut, furiously.

DUSTY
Say, Jim, you ever find out whose leg that was?

TIMMY
 (explaining to Melissa)
 That tornado dropped a guy's leg on
 Jim's roof.

Melissa looks at the roof.

JIM
 Heck of a time gettin' it down offa
 there. Boys helped me some.

JO
 (mouthful of food)
 Had a nice snakeskin boot on it,
 too.

RICK
 Damndest thing, a whole leg, just
 lying on the roof.

Melissa is appalled. They're all eating continuously as they
 talk. Melissa resumes cutting her steak, slowly.

DUSTY
 What'd you finally do with that
 leg, Jim?

JIM
 Put it in the freezer. Margaret
 hated that.

MARGARET
 (nodding as she serves)
 I did.

JIM
 But I figured somebody might come
 to claim it . . . 'Course it coulda
 blown from Tulsa. Coulda been
 hundreds of miles.

TIMMY
 Like that birdcage?

JIM
 Yeah.
 (to Melissa)
 My brother in Shawnee, finds a
 birdcage in his cornfield. Bird's
 still in it, shriekin'. Cage got a
 pet-shop sticker from Norman,
 eighty miles away. My brother
 called. Pretty soon the owner
 showed up and took it back. Some
 (MORE)

JIM (CONT'D)
 kind of expensive bird. Guess they
 were glad to have it.

TIMMY
 What happened to the leg? Still
 got it?

JIM
 Well. Nobody claimed it, so we
 finally buried it.

MARGARET
 I needed the freezer for my steaks.

Melissa is about to bite the steak, stops.

JIM
 Put it out by the petunia bed over
 there. They're doin' real good,
 too.

Thunder rumbles. Bill gets up from the table, to look at the
 sky.

MARGARET
 Always makes me nervous when he
 does that.

THE SKY

Rolling clouds, streaks of gold as night falls.

BILL STARING

Thoughtful.

BACK TO THE BACKYARD - LATER

It's dark, the meal is over. Lanterns on the table as they
 all clear up, still talking. The house lit inside.

Melissa outside with Timmy, clearing the table.

TIMMY
 So, these ah, reproductive problems
 you deal with in your practice, is
 it usually the man's fault?

She is looking past Timmy, toward the house.

Through the kitchen window, she sees Jo and Bill at the sink,
 scraping dishes and washing. Nothing particularly happening
 - but they're together. Working in an easy, coordinated way.

MELISSA
 (distracted)
 No, there's many different
 etiologies . . .

TIMMY
 'Cause I heard that thinning hair
 is a sign of virility.

MELISSA
 (not listening to him)
 Is what?

TIMMY
 Thin hair. Is is a sign of, you
 know . . . virility?

MELISSA
 Yes, there are studies that show
 high testosterone levels in balding
 me. Yes . . .

As she talks, she picks up plates to take them in - an excuse
 for her to go inside.

MARGARET
 Here, let me take that.

MELISSA
 It's no trouble.

MARGARET
 I wouldn't dream of it. Guests
 don't work at our house.

Melissa looks at the kitchen, where Bill is working.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

As Margaret enters.

MARGARET
 Bill, you've got to get out of here
 now. I love to have you for a
 couple of hours, but let's face it.
 Anywhere you are, sooner or later,
 there's gonna be a storm.

BILL
 Not for a while, Margaret. Air's
 too dry.

MARGARET
 So you say. But I want you moving.

JO
 We gotta fix the packs anyway. And
 the cars need work. Henderson's
 station still stay open all night,
 Mom?

MARGARET
 I believe so . . .

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Everybody saying good-bye, hugging, getting into their cars.
 Margaret hands Rick a big aluminum foil-wrapped pack.

RICK
 Thanks, I'll need a snack later.

First engines start. Melissa in the backseat with Bill, she
 waves to the parents.

Jo embraces her mother, kisses her good-bye. Mother whispers
 in her ear:

MARGARET
 Be smart, honey.

JO
 Take care, Mom.

Cars drive off. Jo runs to get in with Dusty. Waving good-
 bye, the team pulls out onto the road.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

As seen before, an old 50s gas station, with a Mobil flying
 horse sign, and an adjacent motel - a row of little log
 cabins. A buzzing neon sign says FREE TV IN EVERY ROOM.

A short distance away, the drive-in movie plays to a handful
 of parked cars. The screen big and blue.

The chase vehicles are pulled up around the station. The
 garage door is up, and the area around the grease pit is
 brightly lit.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

The station wagon up on the lift. A MECHANIC, late 20s,
 helps Timmy down in the pit, working. Bill working at a tool
 bench, Jo getting boxes out of the back of the sedan.

Horns honking from the street. Jo turns and looks out.

OUTSIDE ON THE STREET

Jonas and his team, honking and driving fast down the road in the night. Jonas waves cheerfully.

JONAS

(on CB)

You boys quitting already? We got two hook echoes in a fifteen-mile radius, going to be a busy night.

JO

(to herself)

Blow me.

BILL AT THE WORKBENCH

With the white instrument pack upright and open before him. The pack is full of balls. Bill has removed one of the balls, and is gluing the electronic innards into a box instead; he has a stack of these boxes. Jo comes over, bringing more.

JO

Jonas is still going.

BILL

Yeah? Hand me that tape.

Jo does, picks up one finished unit, inspects it thoughtfully.

JO

Why didn't we think of this before?

BILL

(nodding)

I don't know, spheres were a mistake. They'll never get lifted up. You need flat surfaces for lift . . . That's why airplanes have *wings*.

JO

(opening a ball)

You wrap the sensors with tape?

BILL

(head nod)

Yeah, that tape there.

JO

And you set 'em in like this?

BILL
 Other way.
 (as she flips it)
 Yeah.

They're working smoothly together, side by side.

JO
 Glue?

BILL
 (head nod)
 There. Pass me those pliers.

Melissa comes over, trying to hide anxiety.

MELISSA
 Bill, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but
 I need to ask you something . . .

BILL
 (looking at equipment)
 Yeah . . .

MELISSA
 Alone.

BILL
 Now?

MELISSA
 Right now.

JO
 I'll finish these.

BILL
 (turns to her)
 What is it?

She doesn't answer, just pits her arm on his shoulder, starts to lead him out. Stay with Jo at the table, as she hears:

BILL'S VOICE
 (soft laughter)
 Really . . .

MELISSA'S VOICE
 Can't work all night . . .

Bill laughs again. Jo tries to continue working, finally can't stand it, turns to look. She sees Bill and Melissa arm and arm, going across the street to the motel. In front of

the motel room, Melissa grabs and kisses him, a passionate moment.

The rest of the team is standing around in the garage, trying not to notice.

Jo turns away, her face tight. Dusty crosses to her.

DUSTY

Guess Jonas's going all night.
He's got the equipment for it.

JO

Nothing we can do about it.

DUSTY

He's got a couple of hook echoes
out there, just a few miles away.

JO

(blowing)

I know that! Tell me something I
don't know!

She stalks angrily out of the garage.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Bill and Melissa rolling on the bed, kissing passionately and struggling to get each other's clothes off. Buttons and zippers, urgency . . . He can't get her tight trousers off.

MELISSA

Just a minute . . .

She rolls away, onto her back, kicks her legs in the air, getting her pants off. Meanwhile he hears the TV, looks toward it as he unbuttons his shirt.

TV ANNOUNCER

Going into the night, severe storm
warnings remain in effect across
Kansas, Oklahoma, and down into
northern Texas . . .
(etc.)

She throws her pants away, rolls off the bed, circles to the TV, clicks it off; and walks directly toward him, swinging her hips. He grabs her, she jumps on him, straddling him, they begin kissing again. It's hot.

While they kiss:

MELISSA

Oh honey . . . feels like it's been
so long . . .

BILL

Ummm.

MELISSA

I miss this. . . .

BILL

Ummm . . .

MELISSA

Oh, I wish we could leave now.

BILL

Yeah . . . I know.

MELISSA

Let's . . . do it . . .

BILL

Ummm . . .

MELISSA

I mean tonight. Let's go.

Bill lifts his head away.

BILL

What?

MELISSA

(kissing his ear)

Let's just get in the car . . .
and go.

BILL

(kissing her again)

Melissa . . . I know, . . . I know
how you feel . . .

MELISSA

You feel *good* . . .

BILL

But I can't . . .

MELISSA

(still kissing)

Why not?

BILL
The papers . . .

MELISSA
(kissing)
Forget the papers. We'll get a
lawyer . . . Let's just go.

BILL
I can't.

MELISSA
Honey, you can. We can just go.

BILL
No, I can't. I've got to finish
this.

This breaks the kissing, she pulls back a little.

MELISSA
Why?

BILL
I know how to make it work.

The break widens. They're apart now.

MELISSA
(annoyed)
Who cares?

BILL
I do. It's *important*. We're
talking about saving lives.

MELISSA
What about our life?

BILL
If I can get those instruments in a
tornado, I'll learn more in two
minutes than anybody has learned in
the previous two hundred years. I
can't stop now.

She looks at him, sees his obsession. She makes a choice,
and has to work very hard to come back, warmly:

MELISSA
I understand, Bill.
(kisses him chastely)
I love you. Go and do what you've
got to do

He looks at her, uncertain how she is really feeling. She's smiling as she starts to put her shirt back on.

MELISSA

I can wait until tomorrow. Go on.
Really.

EXT. BURGER STAND - NIGHT

CLOSE ON BILL'S HANDS as he works on one of the electronic packs. Cup of coffee nearby.

Wider, we see everybody on Jo's team sitting at wooden picnic benches, finishing coffee and doughnuts. Jo is trying to fix a portable fax, which spits out bits of paper and crackles.

In the background, the huge blue screen of the drive-in movie theater. The picture plays against scattered cloud lightning.

A radio on the table gives us spotters and Jonas intermittently, but mostly just crackles static. Occasional distant thunder. Black night, no wind.

Everybody turns to look as Melissa makes an entrance.

Melissa has changed clothes but has a carefully disheveled look. She has pinned her hair up; little wet tendrils hang down. She enters languorously, yawns, stretches, pretending she just got laid.

MELISSA

Boy, am I hungry. I could eat a horse. Anybody want another one?

Jo gives her a black look.

THE REST OF THE TEAM

They are awkward. Then:

RICK

Sure, I'll take one.

DUSTY

You just had two steaks!

RICK

So?

Jo glares at them like they're traitors. Melissa comes over to Jo.

MELISSA
How about you, Jo? Hungry?

JO
(stares her down)
Yeah. Get me a hot dog.

Melissa goes to the stand.

A gust of wind blows Jo's hair. Thunder rumbles again. Jo frowns. Suddenly the CB radio starts to go:

VOICE ONE
(on CB)
Tornado! On the ground! Jonas,
do you see it?

VOICE TWO
(on CB)
Tornado on the ground! It's on the
ground! Jonas? Over.

Everybody freezes. Everybody listens to the CB.

VOICE THREE
(on CB)
Jonas, are we going for it? Over.

JONAS
(on CB)
Damn right we're
(crackle)
in perfect position.

VOICE TWO
(on CB)
It's F-2, going north northeast,
near highway 80.

JONAS
We're on highway 80 right in the
damage path. It'll cross *right*
where we are.

VOICE ONE
(on CB)
Going to place
(crackle)

JONAS
I'm placing the package now. Men!
Prepare to place!

Jo's team listens, exchange glances. Everybody waiting to see if it happens.

JO
Damn it . . .

She tosses her crumbled-up doughnut paper toward the trash can. Misses - it falls to the ground, and blows away in the gathering wind.

JONAS
(crackle)
Right, the instrument pack is out,
it is right in the damage path . . .
(crackle)
Satisfactory.

VOICE TWO
(on CB)
Say again, Jonas? Jonas?

Tense silence. Bill fingers one of his spheres, nervously.

JONAS
Coming right toward the pack,
perfect placement . . .
(crackle)
Still coming . . .
(crackle)
Here it comes . . .

VOICE ONE
(on CB)
Jonas, the tornado
(crackle)

VOICE TWO
(on CB)
(crackle)
Moving to -

VOICE THREE
(on CB)
Damn, it's
(crackle)

VOICE TWO
(on CB)
Jonas?

VOICE ONE
(on CB)
Jonas? Come in. Jonas?

A long silence. Nothing but crackling radios.
Tense looks among the team.

VOICE TWO
(on CB)
Jonas?

JONAS
Goddamn it, I missed it!
(crackle)
Can't
(crackle)
believe it!

The group breaks into cheers as tension releases.

VOICE TWO
(on CB)
Jonas, why did
(crackle)

JONAS
Damn it
(crackle)
incompetents!

VOICE THREE
(on CB)
Say again? Jonas?

JONAS
(crackle)
Pack up, men! Damn!

Jo's cheerful, smiling in relief.

JO
Anybody want coffee?

A few isolated drops of rain spatter down. The wind is higher. It's hard to work outside. They all get up, start heading back.

BILL
I'm going back to the garage.

JO
(to counter boy)
Five coffees, please.

VOICE THREE

(on CB)
 Changed direction, heading
 (crackle)

VOICE TWO

(on CB)
 Never catch it now, but it's still
 (crackle)
 on the ground.

BY THE HAMBURGER STAND - NIGHT

Inside the hamburger stand, LIGHTS FLICKER momentarily.

COUNTER BOY

Which way did he say it was
 heading?

Lightning flashes for an instant behind Jo showing us A THICK BLACK FUNNEL ILLUMINATED BY THE LIGHTNING. This is a night tornado, seen only when lightning shows it. It's very dangerous and very scary.

The lightning fades, and the tornado is again hidden in the black night sky.

COUNTER BOY

Holy shit! Pa! Pa!

The boy runs toward the motel office. As he goes, TWO POLICE CARS, sirens howling and lights flashing, rush by. Jo turns and looks back at

THE SKY

Two lightning flashes in rapid succession show us the funnel clearly. It is thick and churning and wide, looks about a quarter of a mile across. And coming toward us.

THE DRIVE-IN

The handful of cars empty, patrons running to the basement beneath the projection booth.

BACK TO JO

The wind blows harder, more insistent. Jo watches a final moment, her curiosity getting the better of her caution.

BILL (O.S.)

Jo! Come on!

She starts to run.

JO RUNNING

Fast as she can. We hear the freight-train rumble of the approaching tornado.

AT THE GARAGE

Bill is at the side door, shouting, waving her in.

BILL
Move your ass!

JO RUNNING

She reaches the garage and runs inside. Bill pulls the door shut behind her, but after a moment the door bangs back and forth on its hinges.

INT. THE GARAGE - AS THE TORNADO APPROACHES

Wind whining, papers fluttering, lights flickering. Bill gestures urgently:

BILL
Down there!

IN THE GREASE PIT

As they jump down into the pit. It's six feet deep and everybody else is down there already - Dusty, Tim, Rick, Melissa, and the mechanic. Above them is Tim's station wagon.

MELISSA
(clutching him)
Oh Bill, I'm scared.

BILL
It's okay.

He puts his arms around her. Jo watches them. Bill's eyes meet Jo's for a moment.

The freight-train roar comes closer. Muffled EXPLOSIONS. The sound of breaking glass, as windows blow out. They instinctively look up.

BILL
Get your heads down!

The wind is howling and building above them. Stuff is beginning to fly around the room; sound of banging and breaking glass.

They can see the destruction above only through the spaces between the station wagon and the edge of the concrete pit. And they have to duck; things are dropping on their heads.

The wind builds, faster and faster. It doesn't seem possible for it to get faster, but it does. RIVETS AND LUGS slam against the side of the car like a rainstorm of metal.

Melissa clutches Bill, holding him hard.

A hissing pneumatic air hose falls and whips like a writhing snake around the pit, making them duck away. The mechanic grabs it and steps on it, to hold it fast.

The mechanic grins. In the next instant, a metal lid slashes his cheek, drawing a gush of blood and a scream we can't hear over the wind.

More dust is flying; the air now thick, dense. The wind is a shrieking scream.

The car above them begins to rock back and forth ominously. There is the sound of an EXPLOSION up above, but we don't know what it is.

They glance upward, squinting in the dust.

The car above rocks back and forth more wildly. Suddenly, ANOTHER CAR comes slamming in from the side and knocks Tim's car off its hydraulics.

Hubcaps, spinning like saucers, bang down into the pit, carom off the walls.

Tim's car, toppled partly on its side, hangs lower into the pit. Unbalanced by the weight of a second car, one side of the metal runner bends. Tim's car comes lower.

Oil begins to glug down. The wind screams.

The Galaxy drive-in sign, its neon arrow pointing, slams into the car above them, and the neon sputters out.

Melissa buries her face into bill's shoulder, her fingers clutching him. And suddenly the wind lessens . . . and lessens . . . and then stops. Abruptly. Silence.

She realizes, takes her face out of his shoulder, looks down.

At her feet, a spinning hubcap goes slower and slower, then stops.

Melissa looks up.

WHAT'S ABOVE THEM

The two cars overhead. The glug of oil. An unearthly silence from everywhere else.

Bill starts to climb up, picking his way around the cars.

INT. THE GARAGE - AFTERWARD - NIGHT

As Bill and the others climb out of the pit, one by one, in silence. Tim's car has been punctured so many times by flying metal it looks like the car from Bonnie and Clyde.

Bill walks forward. One wall of the garage has been knocked in by the car that hit Tim's car, and through the open wall we see the gas station pumps outside, the lights flickering above them. A Cadillac is up on two wheels, leaning against the pumps. A FAT DRIVER staggers out.

Sound of distant SIRENS.

Dazed, Bill and the others walk outside, through the open wall.

MELISSA

That was awful . . .

BILL

We were lucky. That was just
downdraft and microbursts.
(points down highway)
The *tornado* missed us.

Jo rushes out, energized. Worried about her family.

JO

Which way did it go?

EXT. THE GARAGE AREA - NIGHT

As Jo runs out to the center of the road, into a transformed landscape. The hamburger stand leans at a crazy angle, distorted, as if a big hand has pushed it sideways. The drive-in screen is just gone, dazed people coming out to look for their cars. The motel office is a shattered heap of rubble. The counter boy walks with his father away from the wreckage; he's holding his head. But he's okay.

JO

Dusty! The radio! I want to know!
Where'd it go?

Dusty runs to a car, turns on radio. Jo stares a moment. Then a POLICE CAR and AMBULANCE rush by, lights and sirens.

She starts running back to the car.

DUSTY AT CAR

With radio in hand.

DUSTY
Jo? It's going north.

JO
(starting to run)
Nooo . . .

They all pile into the cars, and head off following the police.

EXT. GUTHRIE - NIGHT

The neat little town dark, asleep. Lightning flashes in the sky. Suddenly air-raid sirens go off.

Lights start to come on in the houses.

INT. WILDER HOUSE - PARENT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sirens continue as Jim flicks on the light, and they both get up, pull on bathrobes. We see the contents of the bedroom. Jim goes to the window, looks out. Margaret, sleep, picks up the bedside clock, then turns.

MARGARET
You see it?

JIM
Yeah.

He turns away from the window, takes her hand. Sound building, curtains at the window blowing harder.

INT. WILDER KITCHEN - NIGHT

They don't turn on the lights, they make their way by lightning flashes as they open the basement door, head down. Jim at the top of the stairs, pauses, looking.

JIM'S VOICE
Where's that flashlight? Someone's
always movin' it.

MARGARET
Leave it.

He finds the flashlight, flicks it on. Wind steadily building. He pulls out the stove, turns off the gas line.

MARGARET

(over)

Jim! Come on!

Suddenly, all the kitchen windows explode, flying glass everywhere.

EXT. DRIVING ON HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Following a police car, its lights flashing. It's going to Guthrie.

INSIDE JO'S CAR

VOICE FIVE

(on CB)

Wedge moving north northeast, past Guthrie now . . .

VOICE SIX

(on CB)

I see it from highway 80 . . .

VOICE SEVEN

(on CB)

Still very strong. Right by highway 80 . . . Very stable and holding.

VOICE FIVE

(on CB)

Looks like it hit Guthrie pretty bad . . .

Click! Jo turns the radio off. Silence in the car.

The car turns off the highway, toward the town.

EXT. BILL'S CAR - NIGHT

As they drive off the highway toward Guthrie. The sky is lit by lights and fires. Even from a distance, a scene of destruction.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Fire trucks spray foam over burning telephone poles and timbers which lie like pick up sticks across the road.

EXT. GUTHRIE - DRIVING SLOWLY - NIGHT

Harsh sweeping searchlights reveal louses flattened to heaps of timber. Rescuers work to get survivors out of the rubble.

Dazed families walk the street, looking at the apocalyptic scene.

There are police cars and ambulances; flashing lights everywhere.

THE GLARE OF HOT TV LIGHTS

A crew interviews Jonas.

JONAS

This tornado was an F-4 or F-5, and you can see the terrible destruction and suffering . . . This is exactly what I want to avoid with a proper warning system, which I intend to supervise.

BACK TO BILL'S CAR

Progress is difficult, the road in places entirely blocked with timbers and rubble, power lines down and crackling. They have to proceed at a crawl.

Rescuers shine lights up into a tree, we see a child's bicycle, nothing else.

IN THE CAR

Melissa is stunned. Jo near tears.

JO

Left up here.

They drive on, past the harsh glare of acetylene torches as rescuers cut open a car crushed like a beer can.

A RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Houses are crushed, or tilt at an angle. A car has turned upside down, its headlights shine into a tree across the road. A man impaled on the branches like a spear. A dog whimpers at his feet.

Bill drives around the tree, going onto somebody's lawn. Then back on the road.

JO
 Right, turn right. It's just
 ahead.

They turn the corner; their progress is blocked by a heap of timbers that once was a house.

Jo can't stand it any longer, gets out of the car and starts to run. Bill parks, runs too. Melissa gets out of the car, dazed.

EXT. FRONT OF WILDER HOUSE - NIGHT

The mailbox tilted over at an angle. As Jo runs up, we see the house is partly crushed. You can still recognize the ground floor, but the second story has been smashed halfway down as if by a giant fist.

EXT. WILDER BACKYARD - NIGHT

The picnic bench they ate at has been driven laterally into the side of the house; it sticks out, tablecloth still there.

Rubble and timbers all over the lawn, heaped up toward the house. Jo runs forward.

JO
 Mom! Dad!

She starts pulling timbers away. Trying to get to the kitchen door. Her way is blocked. She flings timbers in frustration, frantic.

Bill comes up behind her. He has a flashlight.

BILL
 Up here.

He jumps up onto the piled rubble. It shifts precariously. He goes in through a window. She follows.

INT. WILDER HOUSE - NIGHT

As bill lands in the back bedroom. Everything is cockeyed. The whole house is creaking ominously.

BILL
 Jim! Margaret!

He hears faint voices, rhythm like a radio. He moves forward. Jo starts crawling through the window behind him.

IN THE KITCHEN

Water overflows from the sink, onto the floor, which is tilted at a crazy angle.

A scraping sound from above. A lamp crashes at his feet.

He looks up - the entire ceiling has broken loose and is hanging down, so we can see up to the second floor bedroom above. Everything tilts down, the furniture threatening to fall on us at any moment. Bill shines his light up, trying to see what might happen.

A side table slides down and falls, fluttering farm magazines and shattering knickknacks on the ground.

Bill goes to the sink, turns the taps off. A PORTABLE RADIO on the counter gives news:

RADIO

- and very dangerous tornado estimated at F-4 has hit the town of Guthrie a few minutes ago with reports of damage and some casualties. Police and ambulances from the neighboring -

A beam swings down, and smashes the radio. He ducks away.

Jo comes in after Bill.

JO

Mom? Dad?

JIM'S VOICE

Jo, be careful -

She looks over. His voice is coming from behind a toppled hutch, dishes smashed on the floor. She and Bill pull the hutch away. It's hard work on the slanted floor.

Around them, the house creaks again. The whole thing could come down any minute.

THE BEDROOM ABOVE

Big stuff up there. A bed, dresser, a big TV set. Furniture shifts slightly.

THE KITCHEN BELOW

Jo peers down, calling:

JO
 Dad? Are you alright?
 (no answer)
 Dad?

JIM'S VOICE
 (after a pause)
 Think so.

JO
 How's Mom?

He doesn't answer. Behind the hutch, the door to the basement is gone. A gaping hole. She steps forward.

JO
 Dad? Where's Mom?

JIM
 Jo . . . there's no stairs.

She turns to Bill, holds out her hands. He takes them, and holding her by the arms, lowers her down into the basement.

BILL
 Okay?

JO
 Yeah.

He releases her. More sliding sounds make him look up. The dresser smashes down as he jumps back. He has to push it away to get to the basement.

UPSTAIRS

The heavy TV begins to move, then stops.

IN THE BASEMENT

Jo coughs, looks around. She moves over to her father, who is crouched down by her mother. Margaret is pinned to the wall by the refrigerator, which has come down from above.

JIM
 Can't move it myself.

JO
 Bill? We need you.

BILL
 (climbing down)
 I'm here.

JO
 (to Mother)
 Mom . . . We'll get you out.

Her mother does not speak, nods weakly.

They start to pull away the refrigerator. As it moves clear, we see her dress is bloody around the shoulder and chest. It looks bad.

JO
 Maybe we shouldn't move her.

BILL
 Got to. Get that ironing board.

Right over their heads, visible from where they are, is the bedroom and its contents. A standing floor lamp falls like a missile.

THE BEDROOM UPSTAIRS

The TV slides, then stops, held only by its cord.

IN THE KITCHEN

They got Margaret up on the makeshift ironing board stretcher. Jim and Jo above, Bill still below, pushing up. Margaret is halfway out and vulnerable to the TV above.

Bill sees it and pushes hard.

THE TV

It slides, falls free, and hangs from the cord for the briefest instant before the cord snaps at the back of the set and the set descends like a bomb.

THE KITCHEN

Margaret pulled clear and Bill twists and the set crashes down, splintering the kitchen floor, then falling to the basement, right where Bill was. Jo looks horrified.

THE BASEMENT

Dust obscures our view. Bill scrambles to his feet, he's okay, and climbs onto the trashed set, reaching up to haul himself out. Above him, the whole house creaks.

MELISSA OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

Running to meet an ambulance driving down the street.

DRIVER
Ma'am? You all right?

MELISSA
(pointing to Wilder house)
There's somebody inside.

The ambulance pulls over.

AT THE WINDOW

As they get Margaret out. The paramedics take her. Bill goes back, helps Jim climb out. We see that his trouser leg is bloody.

JIM
It's okay. See to Jo.

Bill helps Jo out the window, she climbs into his arms. They move away from the house.

With a rumble, the house collapses, folding like a house of cards.

Bill holds Jo, doesn't set her down.

JO
Thanks.

Melissa sees it. But it was only a moment; Bill sets Jo down, they go over to Margaret, being loaded into the ambulance. Jim gets in the ambulance with his wife.

Overhead, a HELICOPTER thumps by, light glaring down.

IN WILDER BACKYARD

Jo is trying to get into the ambulance with her parents.

JO
Mom . . .

PARAMEDIC
She's going to be okay. Got a broken shoulder.

Jo looks stricken.

MARGARET
You go on now, honey.

JO
(tearfully)
I just want you to be okay, Mom.

MARGARET

I'll be fine. Go get it, Jo.

The ambulance pulls out, siren going. It reveals Dusty, and Timmy and the other cars. All pulled up at the house.

Jo sighs. She looks at her parent's house, which is gone. Bill puts his arm her shoulder.

JO

Shit.

BILL

Yeah.

Thunder rumbles overhead. Bill looks up, frowns.

THE SKY ABOVE

Start of dawn breaking, a pale ugly green. A flash of lightning, a challenge to Bill, rousing him.

ON THE GROUND - PREDAWN

From Dusty's car, they hear th CB radio, still going. The spotters, everything, still going. Jo slowly hears it, realizes.

VOICE FOUR

(on CB)

Tornado is still very stable, going south southeast now . . .

JO

(disbelief)

It's still on the ground?

VOICE TWO

(on CB)

Large wedge on the ground
(crackle)
west . . . it's been down fifty
minutes now . . .

VOICE THREE

(on CB)

No sign of letting up . . .

VOICE ONE

(on CB)

Now
(crackle)
Ashland . . . passing Ashland . . .

JO
 (realizing)
 Ashland? That's only ten miles
 from here.

Bill's still looking at the sky, thoughtful.

BILL
 (to himself)
 I'm going to get this one.

JO
 Dusty? Mount up.

DUSTY
 We going?

BILL
 We're going.

Everybody heads for the cars. Bill looks over at Melissa.

MELISSA
 Bill, I can't do this.
 (beat)
 I could never do this.

BILL
 I know.

They look at each other. Deeply into each other's eyes.

MELISSA
 I need to get on with my life now.
 (beat)
 Do you understand what I'm telling
 you?

He nods, slowly.

JO'S VOICE
 Bill, you coming or not?

Bill doesn't answer. HONKING.

JO'S VOICE
 Bill, let's go!

Bill turns, runs. Abruptly, Melissa turns away, walks off.

THE TEAM'S CARS

Moving out, single file, through the rubble in town.

EXT. A SIGN - LEAVING GUTHRIE - PREDAWN

As the team drives past it, in their cars. Back onto the highway. Bill turns his lights on as he drives, going fast.

EXT. DRIVING ON HIGHWAY - EARLY MORNING

Sunrise over flat farmland. From beneath, it lights up low-hanging clouds, making an image both beautiful and menacing.

The tornado is in the far distance, many miles away, obscured where dark clouds reach the ground.

IN BILL'S TRUCK

The usual excited CB babble of voices. Bill squints at the tornado.

ON THE HIGHWAY

There are other cars on the road - all going the other way, away from the tornado. They honk and flash their lights in warning.

The tornado is rumbling, churning up debris.

BILL

Place it right in the road, I think.

JO

Unless you think somebody'll hit it.

BILL

Nobody'll be there. You want to place it on the side of the road?

JO

Might be safer.

BILL

No . . .

JO

We only have one backup left after this. We got to do this right.

The tornado ahead is menacing and grim.

JO

(focused)
Half mile more . . .

BILL

Right.

There is now debris in the air.

JO

Debris, we have debris.

(on CB)

Dusty, set up!

Only a crackle comes back from the radio.

BILL

Did he hear you?

JO

I don't know.

(on CB)

Dusty?

BILL

He's gotta set up, we're close now.

JO

(on CB)

Dusty, we're close now.

And they are.

THE TORNADO

The funnel as wide as the two-lane highway, it is greenish-yellow up close, and seems to pulse with inner fury. Debris swirling in the funnel is large - sides of barns, whole trees.

Jo stares at the churning funnel. It's really scary, even for her.

DUSTY

(on CB)

Hear us

(crackle)

BILL

Yeah.

DUSTY

(on CB)

(crackle)

Set up

(crackle)

need to

(crackle)

JO
Dusty?

DUSTY
(on CB)
Can't see you, you must be on the
other
(crackle)

JO
Say again, Dusty?

DUSTY
(on CB)
Try to
(crackle)

JO
Damn! I don't know if he's in
position.

BILL
We are!

EXT. THE HIGHWAY - DAY

Bill spins the truck around in a 180 and jumps out, running to the back to unload the instrument pack. Jo jumps out the other side. They work quickly together.

They place the white instrument pack in the center of the road - perfectly in the path of the tornado - and run back in the truck.

BACK IN THE CAB

As they jump in:

JO
Let's get her moving!

Bill floors it, and the truck races away from the solitary white instrument pack.

JO
(looking back)
Dusty?

DUSTY
(on CB)
(crackle)
Jo . . .

JO
 (very tense)
 Dusty, are you in position? Shit,
 we're in position and he's not!

A hundred yards down the road, Bill slows to a crawl. He and Jo look back at the instrument pack, white against the ugly swirling cloud.

JO
 This could be it . . .

Jo rests a video camera on the back of the seat, and begins to film.

JO
 Five seconds, Dusty.

DUSTY
 (on CB)
 We're all set up, Jo.

JO
 (relieved)
 Great!

DUSTY
 But I'm not getting an readings
 yet.

JO
 You will!

WHAT THEY SEE

The instrument pack upright in the road, alone. Farther up the road, there is a line of twenty trees planted as a windbreak. As the tornado approaches, the branches whip and snap; the trees bend . . . writhe. . . Then, starting at the far end of the line, the trees begin to be uprooted, one by one, pulled out by the giant hand of the wind.

BACK IN THE CAB

They stare, mesmerized.

THE APPROACHING TORNADO

The trees uprooted, as the tornado approaches the waiting instrument pack. One tree lands on the road and skids sideways, narrowly missing the instrument pack - which still stands.

BILL

Close.

The pack is starting to shiver in the strengthening wind.
The wind is louder.

JO

(talking to pack)

Come on . . . come on . . . just a
little more . . .

Their truck is struck by increasingly large debris - branches
and flying clods of dirt bang hard against the cab, sometimes
rocking it.

They watch the instrument pack.

THE PACK

The top of the pack is rippling as the wind builds . . . the
whole pack shimmies . . . and then begins to slide laterally,
across the highway.

BILL

No!

The pack picks up speed, sliding sideways.

BILL

It's too light!

JO

Easy . . . easy . . . Don't give
up . . .

The pack almost skids to the side of the road . . . then a
branch off a tree strikes a glancing blow . . . and then a
big limb comes down splat! and crushes the pack. Gone.

JO

Okay. Give up.

The atmosphere now thick, lots of dirt in the air. The
asphalt begins to lift up from the highway in big chunks.
Tree limbs scrape across the hood of the truck and blow away,
screeching on metal, scratching the paint. It's nightmarish.

BILL

Let's get out of here.

Bill puts the truck in gear and floors it, and the truck
streaks forward. But a big tree limb, blown by the wind,
comes skidding sideways across the road, and slams beneath
the truck. Like a wedge it lifts up the rear wheels,

entangling branches in the underside of the truck, and spinning their truck around so they face the approaching tornado again.

Bill puts the truck in reverse, tries to back off the limb.

The wheels engage, spin in the air.

Bill shifts gears, back and forth. He's trying to rock the truck, trying anything to get it free.

Jo stares at the approaching funnel. The wind screams.

Bill's hand shifting gears.

JO
Bill? Getting close.

BILL
I know.

JO
(staring ahead)
Holy shit, what is *that*?

THE VIEW AHEAD

From the core of the tornado, A SOLID WALL OF METAL as wide as the road itself emerges, and comes straight toward them. It looks impossibly big. But they can't tell what it is, its outline is obscured by other debris . . .

JO
Bill . . .

And suddenly the shape comes clear; they are looking at the roof of A BIG DIESEL TRUCK AND TRAILER, caught by the tornado, and literally flying toward them through the air.

As they watch, the truck touches down on the concrete, and starts tumbling toward them, rolling side over side. It fills the entire width of the road.

They are still trapped by the branches of the tree, with the huge diesel truck tumbling toward them. Fast.

Bill stomps the gas and spins the wheel. Their truck grinds against the branches. They don't move.

BILL
This is not good.

The diesel trailer tumbles down the road toward them.

Bill steps on the gas, rubber burns the branches of the tree holding them up.

The trailer tumbling forward, filling their entire field of view.

Bill's truck gets free, bumper ripping away and then the wheels contact concrete and squeals as the truck jolts forward . . .

The trailer tumbles up just as they start to move. They're going to get away - then the trailer hits them a glancing blow, not a full impact, but it sends their little pickup truck spinning away like a toy, spinning in concentric 360s, to one side of the road and then down an embankment.

IN THE SPINNING TRUCK

They hang on for dear life, the landscape swirling around them like a bad carnival ride.

BENEATH AN UNDERPASS - DAY

Their truck careens down the embankment, and comes to rest in a concrete underpass, built for another road that crosses beneath the highway. Bill's truck spins a final time, and unexpectedly comes to rest in this place of relative protection.

Several other cars are parked there, their passengers hiding up in the angle of the underpass. They stare as the wind is whipped all around them, dust and debris flies, the tornado passes, and there is relative silence.

Bill and Jo stare at each other. Both gasping in the aftermath.

DUSTY

(on CB)

Jo! Jo! Are you there? Jo!

Jo reaches for the radio to answer him. Then they hear a creaking, almost human cry, but it is metal rending . . .

RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM

The big diesel comes crashing down, nose first, and for a moment pauses, standing upright. Its radiator grill is on the ground, its rear wheels are still hooked to the roadway above. The creaking continues . . .

The truck begins to twist sideways . . .

The truck folds and partially falls on a parked car - a 50s car painted sparkly metallic red. It flattens the front like a tin can, but the rest sticks out unharmed, like the ruby slippers of the Wicked Witch.

A gigantic cloud of dust and steam rises.

Then silence.

INSIDE BILL'S TRUCK

They watch as people run toward the truck, to help the driver.

To one side, a TEENAGE BOY looks dejected at his crushed ruby car.

DUSTY

(on CB)

Jo! Bill! You all right? Jo!

JO

We're all right.

(looking)

We're in the underpass of 80 and 124. Ten miles north of Guthrie.

DUSTY

Twister's still heading northeast down 80 -

JO

(realizing)

Down 80? Let's go.

Bill steps on the gas. The truck squeals out of the underpass, starts driving diagonally up the embankment, back onto the road.

BILL

The pack's too light.

JO

Make it heavier.

BILL

Have to be a lot heavier . . .

A moment. They smile at each other, realizing . . .

JO

Dusty? Where are you?

BACK ON THE HIGHWAY

Now patchy, with places where asphalt has been lifted up, Bill speeds south, chasing the tornado.

DUSTY

We're north on 80, Jo, east side of the road.

JO

We're on our way. Where is Jonas?

DUSTY

Haven't seen him.

THE TORNADO

Powerful and rumbling. Unchanged in form. It's now several miles ahead of us.

BACK IN THE TRUCK

They listen to the CB voices:

SPOTTER ONE

(on CB)

Very stable, still on the ground, if anything it's building, going north northeast . . .

SPOTTER TWO

(on CB)

Crossing that farm near 80 and 5 now . . .

Bill is focused on the tornado, frowning. He shakes his head. He sees something he doesn't like.

VOICE ONE

(on CB)

Large wedge, must be a quarter mile across . . .

VOICE THREE

(on CB)

Lateral columns very strong, it's an F-4 . . . F-5 . . .

JO

Jeez . . .

BILL

Yeah. This is the one.

EXT. WIDE ON THE OKLAHOMA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Dense black storm clouds in the distance, several miles away. A dark focus tells us where the twister is, though we can't see the funnel yet. Lightning flashes. Bill drives fast.

Dusty's and Rick's cars pulled over on the side of the highway. They stand and watch the storm.

AT THE SIDE OF THE HIGHWAY - DAY

Bill screeches to a stop, jumps out of the truck.

BILL

Dusty! You still got those
bungees?

Dusty ducks down, comes back with a snaky handful of cords. Bill grabs them, turns.

Down the highway - thoom! thoom! thoom! thoom! Jonas's silver fleet rushes past.

BILL

Go!

He runs back to Jo, jumps in the back of the truck.

BILL

Drive!

Jo squeals out. Rick and Dusty follow, gunning engines, spewing dust.

JO DRIVING

Listening to the spotters talking. Jonas is miles ahead.

IN THE BACK OF THE PICKUP

Bill lifting the final pack.

POV DUSTY - FOLLOWING THE PICKUP

We see Bill in the back of the truck, lifting up the instrument pack and starting to tie it upright to the rear of the cab.

DUSTY

What the hell is he doing?
(on CB)
Jo, what're you doing?

JO
 (on CB)
 Just . . .
 (crackle)
 Don't follow us too close.

 DUSTY
 (glance to Timmy)
 Oh boy . . .

EXT. THE BED OF THE TRUCK - DRIVING ALONG

Bill at work, tying the pack upright, wind whipping his hair. In the distance, lightning crackles. Bill looks up. We can see the tornado now, wide and churning, about ten miles away.

Jo throws open the window. She's got the CB mike in her hand.

 JO
 You do it?

 BILL
 Where's Jonas?!

INT. JONAS'S VAN

Driving fast. Much closer to the tornado, and getting ahead of it. Jonas hears it, talks on the headset.

 JONAS
 About to eat your lunch, Bill.

Outside, the car drives past a John Deere dealership. Tractors laid out in neat rows. The tornado on the other side of the road.

 JONAS
 We'll be drinking champagne by the
 time you get here.
 (to his people)
 Go another five miles, then van
 number 2, take highway 18 and place
 the pack while we set up.
 (looks at tornado)
 Not gonna be long now . . .

EXT. BACK OF FLATBED - DRIVING

Bill stares forward, trying to see the geography.

 BILL
 He must be on the side road!

JO

Yeah!

Bill squints in the wind, stares at the tornado.

THE TORNADO

Rumbling, moving, churning beneath the storm cloud.

BILL IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK

BILL

It's not going to hold that path . . .

JO

What do you want to do?!

BILL

Turn left up here!

JO

Too early!

BILL

Do it!

INT. DUSTY'S CAR - FOLLOWING

He sees Bill working, as Jo turns left, onto a smaller road. The tornado is ahead and to their right, still in the distance. The usual cacophony of voices and radios:

VOICE ONE

(on CB)

Big wedge! High vortex high condensation! Moving north northeast!

VOICE TWO

(on CB)

Oh, mama! Picking up speed!

VOICE THREE

Jonas, it's going north northeast.

JONAS

(on CB)

Roger! Men! Positions!

THE TORNADO

It is moving through farmlands, open fields. It is huge.

VOICE ONE

(on CB)

This is the big one! True F-5! F-5!

VOICE TWO

Vortex turning, it's turning . . .

JONAS ON THE ROAD

Three vans pull over, the fourth continues rocketing along. They are all ahead of the tornado. There is light wind as they get out, set up their equipment.

BILL IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK

Squinting. Too far away to see, but he senses:

BILL

What's he doing?

JO

Setting up!

BILL

Gimme the radio!

JONAS PARKED ON THE ROAD

Jonas looks through binoculars at his final van, now parked a half mile away, the men setting up the instrument pack. Jonas expects the tornado to pass him and hit the pack. Jonas is surrounded by telemetry instrumentation, antennas sticking up.

BILL

(on CB)

Jonas! Get out of there!

JONAS

(on CB)

Bill, you just lost.

(drops CB handset)

Men! Ready to read!

BILL

(on CB)

Jonas! It's gonna turn! Get out!

JONAS

(ignoring him)

Stand by!

The tornado is closer. The wind whips wildly.

CLOSE ON JONAS

Staring forward, entranced.

JONAS
Beautiful . . .

BILL
(on CB)
Jonas! Get out! Get out!

JONAS
(on CB)
We're in control!

WIDER IN JONAS'S TEAM

Past their cars to the tornado in a field, a quarter mile away. It is thick and black and roaring. And turning.

Jonas's team sees it, panic on their faces. They run for the vans but it's too late. The tornado engulfs them, a sudden instant of flying bodies and tossed cars. Then roaring blackness.

The tornado moves past. Everything is gone - their vans, everything. Not a trace.

BILL IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK

Staring.

Jo looks back at him, concerned.

BILL
Keep going!

THE TORNADO

Rumbling toward us.

THE JOHN DEERE DEALERSHIP

Tractors all laid out, and the tornado approaching from behind it. It moves in, and the dealership EXPLODES.

JO DRIVING

As the first of the flying tractors comes banging down, bouncing across the road. She swerves.

Another tractor coming. She squeals, turns again.

In the back, Bill just hangs on. She swerves left and right.

It's raining tractors.

BEHIND THEM

Dusty following with Timmy. Crumpled tractors all around. One blows laterally across the road, twirling like a top.

INT. RICKS'S CAR BEHIND DUSTY

Ricks frightened.

RICK
I don't believe this.

JO
(on CB)
Heads up!

A BIG TRACTOR comes swinging through the air, bounces in the road in front of him. He swerves. The wheel breaks free, smashes forward into the windshield.

IN DUSTY'S CAR

Timmy looking back.

TIMMY
(on CB)
Rick! Rick!

BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

A big dent in Rick's car. The wheel jammed into the windshield. Rick pushes the door open, shaken.

RICK
(on CB)
I'm okay.

JO IN THE FRONT OF THE TRUCK - STILL DRIVING

DUSTY
(on CB)
He's okay!

IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK

Bill was looking back, now turns forward again.

BILL
Tell Dusty to stay back!

DUSTY
Here? What're you doing?

JO
(on CB)
We're going in.

He pulls his car over to the side of the road. Bill looks back, waves good-bye from the back of the truck.

DUSTY
Crazy bastards. They're gonna
punch the core.

TIMMY
Yeah. In your truck.

VOICE ONE
(on CB)
(crackle)
just blew hell out of a bunch of
tractors. Twister's going toward a
farm near Lincoln now.

THE TORNADO

Rumbling with immense power. PAN to A SUBSTANTIAL FARM, with many buildings, freshly painted. A beautiful place.

EXT. THE MAIN FARMHOUSE

A housewife, LOUISE, 35, stands by the open door to the storm cellar, yelling. The tornado in the distance. The air is still.

LOUISE
George! Where's Dorothy?!

Her husband GEORGE is across the farm, closing the door.

A young girl come running.

LOUISE
Get in there with your brother.
George, come on!

The husband comes up, they both pause to watch, mesmerized. Then George looks to one side, stares.

GEORGE
What the hell?!

WHAT HE SEES

Jo driving a pickup across his alfalfa field. Bill standing up in the back.

GEORGE AND LOUISE

LOUISE

Get in!

They climb down, and she closes the door.

EXT. THE PICKUP - DRIVING

Bill stands, holding on, as the truck jounces across the field toward the tornado.

INT. THE CAB

Jo has trouble holding on to the wheel as the truck bounces in the field.

THE TORNADO

Getting very close now.

THE INSTRUMENT PACK

As Bill ties the last of the bungees, making it secure.

IN THE CAB

Jo glances back, then forward.

Up ahead, the tornado churns, dense and powerful and wide. They are a quarter mile away.

DUSTY

(on CB)

Jo? It's too big. Get out! It's not worth it!

She stares forward grimly.

JO

Yes it is.

Ahead, a split-rail fence blocks her way. She glances back at Bill, then drives through it.

BILL IN THE BACK

He sees it coming but is still knocked on his butt. He shakes his head. He's taking a lot of abuse here.

BILL
 (to himself)
 Next time I'll drive.

He quickly stands, stares at the tornado.

THE TORNADO

Seen this close, it's unbelievable. The sound is deafening, shaking them, ferocious.

BILL IN THE BACK

Awestruck by the power they are driving toward. His face is coated with dust. He leans down to the window.

BILL
 Get ready!

INSIDE THE CAB

Ahead of Jo, the entire windsheild is filled with the swirling tornado. Jo drives tensely. She's terrified.

JO
 (tense)
 Ready! Ready!

BACK OUTSIDE

Bill faces the tornado. He grimaces, shouts.

BILL
 Count of three! Three!

INSIDE THE CAB

Jo staring forward.

BILL STANDING UP IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK

BILL
 Two!

JO INSIDE THE CAB

JO
 Two?

Suddenly, he sticks his head in the window.

BILL
 JUUMMMMMMP!

FOLLOWING THE TRUCK

As they both bail - she jumps out the driver's side, he flings himself off the opposite side of the flatbed, as the truck races forward.

JO LANDING

Hitting the dirt hard, rolling in alfalfa. She scrambles to her feet, looks around.

BILL IN THE FIELD

Getting to his feet. Jo comes running up, sees he's okay.

They watch the truck driving away, toward the vortex.

THE TRUCK

Driving away from them, as they watch.

The truck drives forward, chasing the tornado . . . And then drives right into the funnel. And disappears.

For an instant, nothing happens. Then suddenly, the dark swirling funnel is filled with BRIGHTLY COLORED BOXES that spiral upward in every part of the funnel.

BILL AND JO

Stare in amazement.

EXT. THE ROADSIDE A FEW MILES AWAY

Dusty watches through his video recorder.

DUSTY

Is it registering?

Timmy looks at the computer screens, which squeal and beep and fill with descending columns of numbers, reading telemetry off the packets.

TIMMY

It's reading! Incredible! It's reading!

DUSTY

All right!

TIMMY

They did it!

They start screaming and cheering, too. They don't pay attention to the following CB babble:

VOICE FIVE

(on CB)

What the hell?

VOICE SIX

(on CB)

What is that junk?

VOICE FOUR

(on CB)

Beats me, I thought it hit a pickup truck.

VOICE TWO

(on CB)

Wedge is changing direction, now going due east, guys. Changing direction!

Dusty and Timmy just keep cheering.

BACK TO JO AND BILL - IN THE FIELD

Still jumping around, yelling, giving high-five, low-five, sideways-five.

THE TORNADO

As if it senses their victory, it turns, rumbling angrily.

BILL AND JO

They look at the funnel, instantly realize.

JO

It's turning . . .

BILL

Yeah.

Bill grabs her arm, and they start running across the field. Ahead of them is the farmhouse, previously seen. The tornado is behind them. It is a half mile away. It is rumbling toward them.

BILL AND JO

Running hard. The thick black funnel fills the sky behind them. Closing in.

UP ON THE ROAD

Dusty watches.

DUSTY

Oh boy.
 (turns to Timmy)
 What're you doing?

TIMMY

(video in hand)
 Filming it.

JO AND BILL

Running hard, gasping, going on. The wind screaming in their ears.

AHEAD OF THEM

A large SHED, a substantial structure, the first of the farm buildings.

Without hesitation, they run inside, slam the door.

INT. THE SHED

They're crouched over, hands on knees, gasping for breath. They slowly look up, around them: the shed is full of sickles, scythes, reapers, and hay rakes - curving sharp metal blades that hang on the walls and stand on the ground, gleaming in the light.

BILL

Not in here.

Still gasping, they run out again.

OUTSIDE THE SHED

The tornado has gotten much closer while they were inside. As they run toward the farmhouse, the shed behind them EXPLODES as the tornado hits it.

BILL

Down!

He drags Jo facedown, in the dirt, just as a DECAPITATING BLADED REAPER screams through the air, bouncing in the dirt all around them, scattering blades.

They get up and start running again. Ahead of them is the FARM POND and beyond that the SPLIT-RAIL FENCE which leads to the main farm buildings.

They pass the pond, running hard. The water is ruffling, whipping. Spirals up dense spray as the tornado hits it.

BY THE FENCE

On the run, Bill vaults over it, so he's on the farm side, runs side by side with Jo, parallel to the fence.

BILL

Come on !

Jo looks uneasy, and we think she can't do it, then . . . She vaults easily, landing on the other side ahead of them.

Behind them, the tornado tears up the fence, flipping rails like matchsticks, shooting them in all directions.

THE TORNADO BEHIND THEM

It passes the pond, and SLAMS DOWN THE ROOF OF THE SHED, still intact.

EXT. THE FARM COMPOUND

Bill and Jo see the farmhouse up ahead, but it's too far away, they head for the barn, which is nearest. As they open the big barn door, FENCE RAILS THUNK into the wooden door like a series of missiles, penetrating several feet into the wood.

INT. THE BARN

Bill gets the door closed as more rails slam into the door, right near his hands. Another almost smashes his face. The wind is screaming. Jo grabs him, and they turn.

They look desperately for someplace safe. The air in the barn is starting to fill with bits of swirling hay - it's just like a blizzard.

The wind screams. The hay flies faster. It lashes their faces and arms, leaving thin streaks of blood. Jo pulls Bill down to the ground.

They are surrounded by flying hay. The wind is worsening. Above them, pieces of the barn roof are being pulled away, revealing black sky above.

They move forward against the wind. They see nothing but hay on the floor around them. But as the wind continues, the hay is blown away, revealing a SMALL WOODEN PUMPHOUSE nearby.

EXT. THE PUMPHOUSE

Jo sees it, tugs at Bill, pulling him forward. As they go, the side walls of the barn start to creak inward, then are sucked upward, board by board.

BILL AND JO

Moving away into the pumphouse, they close the door. There are pipes inside. They stand on either side of the pipes, clutching each other and the pipe. The wind builds.

INSIDE THE PUMPHOUSE

As the boards of the house are sucked up, one by one, streaking into the sky, progressively exposing them. The wind louder and louder.

Finally the entire pumphouse is gone, they are just standing exposed, holding on to the pipe for dear life.

THEIR FEET

Being pulled away from the ground.

THEIR BODIES

Swung up by the vortex, until they are hanging upside down.

THEIR HANDS

Clutching at the pipe and each other, hugging and holding on for dear life. The pipe they are holding on to is starting to shiver, to pull free from the concrete...

THEIR HANDS

Inexorably slipping away, as they are being pulled up into the storm.

THEIR FACES

Wincing, fighting to hold on. The sound building to a crescendo, and then changing... the light is changing, too. Now a pale unworldly blue.

THEIR BODIES

Being slowly released by the lessening wind, turning in the blue light to the ground again. They fall to the ground and look up, not understanding what has happened.

THE VIEW ABOVE- THE EYE

The roof lifts away in big chunks, and suddenly they are staring right up into the center of the tornado, a bright blue swirling circle like the eye of god.

For a still moment, they see it, the the tornado moves on, and LIGHTNING CRACKS DOWN, harsh and malevolent, and they duck as the wind screams. They clutch each other.

They are obscured from view by flying dust and debris.

CLOSE ON BILL AND JO

Pressed together, face to face, with chaos all around them. Then, slowly, it diminishes.

Then silence.

The tornado has passed.

They are very close together. She looks at him. He looks at her. Their faces inch closer.

JO

We did it...

BILL

Yeah. We did. The pack really worked.

JO

It was a good idea.

BILL

Yeah...

(suddenly uneasy)

Well...

He looks away, breaking the moment. Jo looks away, too.

JO

We have a lot to do.

BILL

Yeah...

JO

I mean, I've got to get grant approval for the new warning system, and we need a bigger lab, and you have to start the computer analysis of the data -

BILL

I do?

JO

Yes, of course, we have to generate models off of all this data, and I need to run the lab -

BILL

No. You can do the analysis, I'll run the lab.

JO

I don't think so...

BILL

You don't?

JO

No, I don't.

BILL

(a pause, then)

Do you always have to do things the hard way?

JO

(really considering it)

Well, I married you...

At that moment the tension between them breaks, and then, surrounded by destruction, they start to laugh.

The tornado fades in the distance, dissipates...

And is gone.

THE END