

1

INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL - DAY

1

A GIRL'S FACE

fills the screen, twenty-one years old, pensive, pretty.

Camera lingers on her in CLOSE UP, noticing details: hair worn stylishly messy, no makeup, double-pierced ears (though no earrings today), the corner of her bottom lip a little frayed where she's been chewing it ruminatively.

She's the kind of beauty who can withstand such bad lighting: institutional lighting, florescents HUMMING overhead, joining the chorus of ambient noises: a COUGH, papers RUSTLING, the SCRIBBLE of a pen, someone SHIFTING in their chair, etc. The shot lingers until it becomes uncomfortable, invasive, scrutinizing this unhappy girl in an unguarded moment, then -

A new sound breaks her reverie, a muted BUZZING o.s., and her eyes cut down to -

HER CELLPHONE

skittering sideways across the closed cover of her blue final exam book, like a bug. She has an INCOMING TEXT MESSAGE.

WIDEN TO REVEAL:

2

INT. UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL - ESTABLISHING - DAY

2

Our GIRL is just one of two hundred other STUDENTS filling a big auditorium-style lecture hall. Around her, classmates sit grim-faced, scribbling to beat the clock.

BACK TO:

OUR GIRL traps the buzzing cellphone before it skitters right off the edge of the half-desk, looks at the display.

INSERT CELLPHONE DISPLAY -

u done?!

BACK TO SCENE

Our girl leans back a little in her seat, gives a little nod to her friend seated across the lecture hall. Types a reply.

INSERT CELLPHONE DISPLAY -

(CONTINUED)

yes

INTERCUT: CELL PHONE DISPLAY / OUR GIRL

She looks down as her friend text-messages:

how r u getting home?

Typing.

bus

She sends the message, a moment later the reply appears:

sux 4 U

She glances up, sees her friend shoot her a sympathetic look.

PROCTOR (O.S.)
That's it, people! Wrap it up!

There's a collective GROAN and the sound of two hundred panicked asses twisting in their seats.

Our girl feels her phone buzz, looks down to see a final text message from her friend:

y don't u check the ride board?

A slow smile lights up her face at the idea, as all around her students rise and begin stampeding out.

PROCTOR (O.S.) (cont'd)
(shouting to be heard)
Test results will be posted on the
Philosophy Department's web site in
two weeks... Enjoy your break and
have a Happy New Year.

She gathers her things, begins to make her way down the stairs when -

GIRL
Hey!

- she's JOSTLED from behind by a CLASSMATE bolting past her.

She hands in her exam book, waves to her friend, and exits.

3 EXT. NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY - VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY 3

Campus is a ghost town, most students having already left for the holidays: the DORMS abandoned, the LIBRARY STACKS empty, the LABS silent, the DINING HALLS eerie.

Our GIRL hurries across the deserted college green dotted with little hillocks of snow from an earlier storm. She passes a forlorn pine tree decorated with CHRISTMAS LIGHTS, on her way to...

4 EXT. UNIVERSITY - QUAD - DAY 4

She arrives at a large, partially-enclosed KIOSK covered with dozens of student-made notices, printed in a rainbow of eye-catching computer fonts and colors. A sign at the top reads: RIDE BOARD.

She scans the posted notices. One catches her eye: torn hastily from a spiral notebook, on which is scrawled a handwritten message:

***NE1 Need a Ride 2 Delaware 12/23?
Call 607-154-9835***

A gust of wind ruffles the notice.

TITLE CARD ON BLACK:

DECEMBER 23, 3:12 P.M.

5 EXT. UNIVERSITY - STUDENT PARKING LOT - DAY 5

Our girl wheels her suitcase across a largely-empty parking lot. It's late afternoon, and already dark enough for the sodium vapor streetlights to have come on. A few snowflakes swirl in their sickbed glow.

We follow her to...

A beat-to-shit 1988 OLDSMOBILE idling in the middle of the lot. An unbroken dusting of snow indicates it's been the only vehicle here for some time.

An underclassman GUY, 19, is asleep behind the wheel of the Oldsmobile. He's skinny, dressed in thrift-shop clothes, has the complexion of someone who doesn't get out in the sun much. His car is filled with all of his earthly possessions: books, CD's in plastic milk crates, dirty laundry, etc.

She knocks on the driver's side window, startling him awake.

He stirs, blinks uncomprehendingly at the empty parking lot.

GIRL

Do you think you could have parked
any further from the entrance?

The sight of her quickly snaps him awake. He scrambles out.

GUY

(still a little groggy)
There were still cars when I got
here. I thought we were going to
get an early start to stay ahead of
the snow?

GIRL

What time is it?

GUY

Quarter past three.

GIRL

I'm two hours late?! Shit. Sorry.
You should've just left without me.
That's what I would've done. Hurry
up and pop the trunk so I can stow
my shit.

He does.

She walks back to the trunk, which is stuffed to capacity
with more of his things: CLOTHES, a bag of GROCERIES, etc.

GIRL (cont'd)

(calling to him)

Jesus, I'm just going home for
Christmas. What are you doing?
Pulling up stakes and movin' your
Oakie family to Californey?

She starts rearranging the trunk, making room for her bag.

GUY

I'm kinda getting kicked out of my
apartment. I didn't have time to
find someplace new before exams.

She takes out some of his things. Puts them on the ground.

GUY (cont'd)

Here, let me help you with that-

GIRL

Why don't you just get the engine
started and put the heat on? I can
handle this.

He watches her rearrange his things, a little flummoxed.

GIRL (cont'd)

(smiling)

Well? What are you waiting for? I
thought you wanted to stay ahead of
the snow?

He hurries back to the driver's seat. Starts the engine.

She hurriedly crams everything back in and slams the trunk.
Then runs around to the passenger side and pulls on the door
handle.

Stuck.

5

CONTINUED: (3)

5

Now it's her turn to look impatient. She jerks on the handle again, until he leans over to open the door from the inside.

GUY

Sorry... it sticks.

She rolls her eyes, climbs in.

6

INT. OLDSMOBILE - DAY

6

She climbs in, tries to power her window all the way to the top. It keeps getting stuck, leaving a half-inch gap.

She shoots him a look: "What the hell?"

GUY

That's as far as it goes. Sorry.

She rolls her eyes, never once interrupting her phone conversation.

He puts the car in gear and they set out on their six hour roadtrip.

7

EXT. UNIVERSITY - STUDENT PARKING LOT - THAT MOMENT

7

As they drive off, reveal: a forgotten bag of GROCERIES, still sitting on the ground.

8

INT. OLDSMOBILE - DAY

8

They leave campus. He eavesdrops as she rattles on.

GIRL

(on her cell)

Where are you?

(listens)

No, we're just rolling out...

(listens)

... Believe me, I tried, but I couldn't get a flight. It's my own fault for waiting 'til the last minute...

9 & 10 OMITTED

9 & 10

11 INT./EXT. OLDSMOBILE - DUSK

11

She looks out at the passing landscape as they cruise south on the interstate. The road is wet, though the snow hasn't yet started to stick.

GIRL

(laughs; on her cell)

What, are you kidding? I'm bored to tears... No, we're still on the highway... how should I know, all highways look exactly alike.

She looks up, catches him shooting irritated looks her way.

GIRL (cont'd)

What?

GUY

You going to be on that thing the whole-

He doesn't finish the thought, just chokes back whatever he was about to say. Focuses on the highway ahead.

(CONTINUED)

GIRL
(on her cell)
Uh oh, somebody's upset. I better
call you back.
(pause)
Who do you think? Ride Board Guy.
Okay, 'bye.

She hangs up, aims the camera phone lens his way, and snaps another digital picture of him.

She puts the cellphone away, looks up to see him glaring at her.

GIRL (cont'd)
What?

GUY
(blurting)
This isn't cool. If I have to
drive, you have to talk to me.

GIRL
What, I'm the in-flight
entertainment?

GUY
That's how this ride-sharing thing
works. Division of labor. We split
everything fifty-fifty... Get it?

GIRL
I've got news for you, I don't get
much more entertaining than when
I'm on the phone.

He darkens, mutters under his breath:

GUY
(sarcastic)
This is turning out great.

GIRL
What's that mean?

GUY
Forget it.

They ride in silence for a moment. She tries to strike up a conversation, by way of extending an olive branch.

GIRL
So you're from Wilmington, huh?

GUY
Yeah.

GIRL
Where'd you go to school?

GUY
(falters for a second)
Um... Saint Vitus Academy.

GIRL
St. Vitus? You're making that up.

GUY
You're acquainted with every school
in the area?

GIRL
Pretty much, yeah.

GUY
Including all the Catholic ones?
Because that's where I went. Saint
Vitus Academy for Catholic Boys.

GIRL
Okay, fine...

They drive for a few moments in silence.

GUY
We had a class together, you know.

GIRL
Huh?

GUY
Intro to Modern Philosophy.

He looks at her expectantly, as if she should remember him.

GIRL
What? There were about a million
people in that class. It was like
Woodstock. Did you ever see so many
Eastern religion types?
(then)
So, what's your major?

GUY
Eastern religions.

She hoots with laughter. But he's not kidding. He seems surprised by her response.

GUY (cont'd)
You aren't majoring in philosophy?

GIRL
No. Why?

GUY
I don't know. I just assumed...

GIRL
Why would you assume anything about me? We just met.

GUY
(a little defensive)
I don't know... I guess you just...
look like a philosophy major.

GIRL
Try engineering.

She enjoys the pained look of surprise on his face, lets him twist for a second before explaining:

GIRL (cont'd)
I only took Philosophy because I need a humanities credit. I heard it was an easy 'A.'
(then)
Hey, that reminds me. What'd you put for the extra credit question on the final?

GUY
Nietzsche's theory of eternal recurrence.

GIRL
Which is basically reincarnation, right?

GUY
No, they're not really the same thing. Reincarnation is when you come back as something different and eternal recurrence is when you
(MORE)

11

CONTINUED: (4)

11

GUY (cont'd)

live the same life over and over
again.

He looks out at the road, reciting Nietzsche from memory:

GUY (cont'd)

*The eternal hourglass of existence
is turned over and over, and you
with it, a grain of dust.*

She looks at him as if he's nuts. A beat, then:

GIRL

He died of syphilis, you know.

He stares grimly at the road ahead, biting back a comment.

GIRL (cont'd)

High school and philosophy. Pretty
much covers everything, don't you
think? Guess that concludes the
entertainment portion of today's
flight.

She turns on the radio, finds a station with Christmas music.

TITLE CARD ON BLACK:

5:15 P.M.

12

EXT. INTERSTATE - EVENING

12

The Oldsmobile passes slower-moving VEHICLES and zooms by.

Its interior light is on.

13

INT. OLDSMOBILE - EVENING

13

Her bare feet are propped on the dash, as she removes the old
nail polish.

Widen. She's turned the front seat into a nail salon.
Cotton balls, emery boards, bottles of clear and colored
varnish are strewn everywhere.

She picks a bottle, opens it, begins painting her nails.

(CONTINUED)

GIRL

(concentrating)

Next gas station you see, do me a favor and pull over. I gotta pee.

GUY

Okay, I'll keep my eyes peeled.

She looks up from her feet, giving him a funny look.

GUY (cont'd)

What?

GIRL

(resumes painting)

That phrase. 'Keeping your eyes peeled.' It's kind of creepy, if you think about it.

GUY

Huh. Actually, yeah, it is sorta.

His eyes linger on her freshly painted toes on the dashboard.

She catches him staring. He blushes, embarrassed. Says:

GUY (cont'd)

... Speaking of peeling eyeballs. Did you know that's how they do that corrective eye surgery?

GIRL

They use a laser.

GUY

Well, yeah, they do... But there's definitely peeling involved too. I saw it on Discovery Health. If more people knew about the peeling part they might think twice before going under the knife.

GIRL

Laser.

GUY

Right, laser.

GIRL

I'm having corrective eye surgery over the break.

GUY

Oh.

An awkward beat.

GIRL

It's okay. I'm not really worried.

GUY

Why?

GIRL

I'm not worried?

GUY

You're getting it done...

GIRL

Because I hate wearing glasses.

GUY

But they look good on you.

She frowns.

GIRL

How do you know? I don't wear them outside my dorm.

He gets a cornered look.

GUY

You sure? You never... to class or anything? Because I could swear I-

GIRL

Never.

GUY

Huh. Weird. I wonder why I thought-

He breaks off, saved by the sight of a gas station up ahead.

GUY (cont'd)

Hey, look! Here's your gas station!

She looks at him across the dark front seat, suspicious.

14 EXT. PENN-WAY QUICK MART - NIGHT 14

A florescent oasis in the gathering dark. A tow truck and several old wrecks rusting in the weeds surrounding it.

The Oldsmobile pulls off the highway and up to a gas pump.

15 EXT. PENN-WAY QUICK MART - GAS PUMP / OLDSMOBILE - MINUTES LATER 15

He starts the pump. Notices her still seated in the car.

He knocks on her window. She opens the door.

GUY

I thought you had to pee?

GIRL

I didn't expect us to find a bathroom so soon. My nails aren't dry.

GUY

Oh.

He looks over the roof of the car, sizing up the distance across the slushy parking lot.

GUY (cont'd)

Well if you want, I can carry you.

GIRL

That's okay, they'll be dry in just a second.

GUY

Come on, I'm good at this...

GIRL

You are not carrying me inside.

He opens her door, pulls her legs around, and crouches down between them.

GUY

Hold on.

GIRL

What are you doing?! Wait -

15

CONTINUED:

15

Suddenly he's rising and she throws her arms instinctively around his neck.

Unsettling as the deeply-weird moment is, she decides it's best to just humor him. But first -

GIRL (cont'd)
I need my purse.

He crouches a little so she can reach to retrieve it.

16

INT. PENN-WAY QUICK MART - NIGHT

16

The door JINGLES as he enters, carrying her. His face is red from effort, hers from embarrassment.

GIRL
Thanks.

GUY
Sure.

He just stands there. She taps him on the shoulder.

GIRL
You can let me down now.

GUY
Okay.

He crouches so she can slide off. She gives him a look, slips on the pair of flip-flops she's brought with her, then heads off in search of the ladies bathroom.

Meanwhile, our guy saunters up toward the front of the convenience store. He nods to the twitchy CLERK, 20s, engrossed in a tattoo fetish magazine behind the counter.

17

INT. PENN-WAY QUICK MART - BATHROOM - THAT MOMENT

17

The toilet is gross, tiled a queasy green, graffiti-covered.

Our girl finishes peeing, gets up from the toilet, uses her foot to flush and her elbow to turn on the faucet. She washes her hands, holding them under the automatic dryer.

Broken.

She wipes her hands dry on her jeans. Is about to exit when she catches sight of her reflection in the dirty mirror.

(CONTINUED)

On impulse she takes out her glasses from her purse. Slips them on. Checks herself out in the mirror.

Cool? Sexy?

With her glasses on she notices something scratched into the dirty mirror.

CLOSE ON MIRROR

Where we see:

"J.C.R. 12-24-88 R.I.P."

She frowns, slips her glasses back in their case and moves to exit. But when she grips the doorknob she finds it LOCKED. She frowns. Rattles the doorknob a few times.

A look of panic crosses her face, and she starts rattling the doorknob harder. Did someone lock her in?

Suddenly the doorknob comes off in her hand.

She pounds on the door with the heel of her palm, shouts:

GIRL
HEY. HEY, I'M LOCKED IN HERE!

Nothing.

She turns, scanning the filthy bathroom, notices something.

HER POV:

A VENT above the sink, near the ceiling.

BACK TO SCENE

She puts a foot up into the sink, testing it to see if it can take her weight. Then climbs up and straightens on wobbly legs, until her face is near the filthy dust-clogged vent.

GIRL (cont'd)
(calling into vent)
HEY. CAN ANYBODY HEAR ME?! HEY!

Her voice ECHOES weirdly. When the echoes die down she hears something from the vent that makes her scowl: LAUGHTER. As if our guy and the clerk are having a good laugh at her expense.

Pissed off now, she climbs back down, and attacks the broken doorknob with renewed urgency.

(CONTINUED)

17

CONTINUED: (2)

17

And finally succeeds in getting the door to open.

18

INT. PENN-WAY QUICK MART - OUTSIDE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

18

As she exits she sees the CLERK and our guy talking quietly, as if they know one another. She hesitates for a second, spying on them around a display of chips. Suspicious.

AT THE COUNTER:

She strides up as the guy pays for the gas and a couple bottles of water.

GIRL

Didn't you hear me banging in there?

GUY

(startled; puzzled smile)
When?

GIRL

You think it's funny? Me locked in?

GUY

Locked in where?

GIRL

You're telling me you didn't just hear me banging on the door?

GUY

I don't know what you're-

GIRL

(cuts him off)
Forget it. Let's just get on the road.

He gathers up the bottled water, heads toward the door. The clerk calls to him:

CLERK

Remember, highway's your best bet-

GUY

(dismissive)
Don't worry about it man, I got it all covered.

She frowns, following him to the exit.

(CONTINUED)

GIRL

Are we lost or something?

GUY

(quickly)

No, I've made this drive a million times.

He holds the door for her, then follows her outside.

As they exit and start toward the car she offers him a twenty. He looks at the money, as if he's never seen U.S. currency before.

GUY

What's that for?

GIRL

My half of the gas.

GUY

Keep it.

GIRL

What do you mean? Isn't that how ride-sharing works? -- We split everything fifty-fifty?

GUY

I don't take money from friends.

Since when are they friends?

They separate, walking around to their respective sides of the car. She tries the passenger door handle, only to find it stuck.

19

CONTINUED:

19

She rolls her eyes, waits for him to open it from the inside.

20

OMITTED

20

21

INT. OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

21

She stares out at the road ahead, lulled by the sound of the windshield wipers sweeping snowflakes from side to side.

HER POV:

A nondescript exit comes up fast for a side road. Which wouldn't be cause for alarm or even interest except-

He suddenly turns the wheel sharply, taking the exit.

22

EXT. OLDSMOBILE - THAT MOMENT

22

The car veers off the interstate onto a much smaller two-lane road marked with a simple sign, paint-on-wood, faded to illegibility: **Scenic Route 606.**

The tires crunch across an old chain which had once prevented access to the road but is now half-buried in the snow.

Attached to it is a diamond-shaped warning sign of a more modern vintage reading: **Rough Road.**

23

INT. OLDSMOBILE - THAT MOMENT

23

She falls against him, bracing herself against the dash.

GIRL

What the hell are you doing!?

GUY

Scenic detour.

GIRL

(panicking)

No way! Get back on the highway.

GUY

Relax, I checked it out on the map.
It looks interesting.

GIRL

I mean it, get back on the highway
right now! This is not going to
happen!

He looks a little pissed she's questioning his judgment.

GUY

Will you chill. It's a shortcut.
We'll be back on the highway before
you know it.

Hard to argue with a shortcut...

Nonetheless, she glances back with a look of trepidation OUT
THE BACK WINDOW at the highway receding into the distance.

The Oldsmobile cruises by, the only car on the two-lane
scenic highway.

As it leaves FRAME camera PANS to the dead grass on the
roadside where it finds a sad little SHRINE half-buried in
the snow: two homemade crosses, candle stumps, a rotting
stuffed bear, deflated Mylar balloons.

Scrawled on the crosses are:

Sean
Dec-24-03

Amanda
Dec-24-03

She watches him suspiciously out of the corner of her eye.
His face is eerie in the green light of the dashboard.

He scans the radio dial for something other than static.

GUY

Not many radio stations out here.

GIRL

We're in a valley. FM radio waves
travel in a straight line. They
can't penetrate big obstacles like
hills. Try AM.

GUY

Where were you when I was flunking
freshman physics?

He switches over to AM. Finds a low-wattage mountain station
broadcasting Bobby Helms' 1957 "Jingle Bell Rock."

Then he drives in silence. Still stewing over her most
recent digs.

GIRL

So... Does your family do the whole
traditional Christmas thing?

GUY

No, my grandparents are Dutch, so I
was raised on salted licorice and
Sinterklaas...

GIRL

How's that different from the
regular Santa Claus?

GUY

Instead of the North Pole, he lives
in Spain. And instead of elves he's
got an enforcer named Black Pete.
Basically he's like your Santa,
only scarier.

GIRL

Charming.

GUY

What's your Christmas like?

GIRL

My folks split my freshman year, so
I spend the holidays racing between
them. Two trees... two turkey
dinners...two sets of presents to
return for store credit. So
normally I can deal, but this year
mom decided to rent a condo at the
beach. Which is like, what? Two
hours away.

GUY

I don't know. The beach can be sort
of nice in the winter. Romantic.

She gazes out the window at night overtaking the landscape.

GIRL

So were you a Rehobeth beach family
or Stone Harbor?

GUY

Stone Harbor.

GIRL

We always went to Rehobeth. Year in
and year out... Jesus, I've never
been more bored in my life. I was
always so jealous of my friends who
spent summers at the Jersey shore.

GUY

Me too.

She turns from the window to look at him, scowling.

GIRL

Stone Harbor is the Jersey shore.

GUY

(evasive)

Hm? Oh, yeah, I know. What I meant
was-

GIRL

You aren't from Delaware, are you?

GUY

Well, see, it's kind of complicated-

GIRL

Who are you?!

GUY

I'm exactly who I said I was, am,
it's just-

GIRL

What the hell's going on here?

GUY

Nothing's going on-

GIRL

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE!?

GUY

Look, just calm down. I can explain-

HEADLIGHTS suddenly appear up ahead, blindingly bright.

GUY (cont'd)
What the hell?

She turns to look ahead, momentarily forgetting their fight as the oncoming headlights cross the median into their lane.

GIRL
You think he doesn't see us?

GUY
How can he not?

26 EXT. ROUTE 606 - THAT MOMENT 26

From a high angle overlooking the road we watch the two cars racing toward one another, headed on a collision course.

27 INT. OLDSMOBILE - AS BEFORE 27

For the time being their fight has taken a back seat to the oncoming car playing chicken with them.

GIRL
Pull over and let this asshole by.

GUY
Over where? There's no shoulder.

He's right. On the passenger side the road abuts a steep wooded hillside. Opposite that it drops off into a ravine.

They are both too distracted by the ONCOMING HEADLIGHTS to notice the Christmas SONG that's just come on the RADIO: Brenda Lee's 1958 hit "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree."

BRENDA LEE
Rockin' around, the Christmas tree,
at the Christ-mas par-ty hop...

28 EXT. ROUTE 606 - THAT MOMENT 28

The distance between the SPEEDING CARS is closing rapidly.

29 INT. OLDSMOBILE - AS BEFORE 29

The kids faces go white in the glare of the oncoming lights.

29

CONTINUED:

29

BRENDA LEE

*Mistletoe hung where you can see,
Ev'ry couple tries to STOP. Rockin'
around, the Christmas tree, have a
happy hol-i-day... Later we'll have
some pumpkin pie, and do some car-
rol-ing...*

30

EXT. ROUTE 606 - THAT MOMENT

30

The OTHER CAR continues barrelling toward the OLDSMOBILE.
The game of chicken fast approaching the point of no return.

BRENDA LEE

*You will get a sen-ti-men-tal fee-
ling when you hear... Voices
singing "Let's be jolly, DECK the
halls with boughs of holly"...*

31

INT. OLDSMOBILE - AS BEFORE

31

Relief turns to dread as they realize the other car isn't
slowing.

GIRL

He's not stopping!

GUY

Hold on!

He jerks the wheel hard, sending the Oldsmobile fishtailing
out of control.

The OTHER CAR skids over a small bridge and drops out of
sight.

They spin out in the opposite direction. Skid off the road
and SLAM into a snowbank with a bone-shuddering CRASH.

BRENDA LEE

*Rockin' around, the Christmas tree,
Have a happy hol-i-day. Everyone's
dancing mer-ri-ly in the New. Old.
Fash-ioned. Wa-a-ay!*

TITLE CARD ON BLACK:

6:23 P.M.

32 EXT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT 32

The Oldsmobile has ended up on the opposite roadside facing the wrong way, its driver's side jammed into a snowbank.

Snow boils in its headlights.

33 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT 33

The interior is dark.

The girl has been thrown under the dash. It's hard to tell in this light whether she's still breathing.

Finally she stirs, disoriented.

She climbs back into her seat, piecing together where she is. It takes her a beat to remember him. She looks over slowly.

He's not moving, though thanks to his seatbelt he's still upright behind the wheel. His head rests limply against the driver's window, which now looks out on nothing but snowbank.

A link of blood trickles down the glass.

Dead?

She's not taking any chances. Without a sound she slips into her shoes, coat. Gropes for her cellphone among the detritus at her feet.

Suddenly he stirs, groaning.

She freezes.

The seconds ticking by on the DASHBOARD CLOCK.

When he doesn't wake, she resumes fumbling for her cell.

Finds it. Then eases open the creaky passenger door.

And launches herself into the frigid night.

34 EXT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE / ROADSIDE - NIGHT 34

She hurries down the road away from the car. Breath clouding in the frigid air. Punches in numbers on her cell phone.

INSERT CELLPHONE SCREEN --

No SIGNAL BARS.

She's starting to freak now. She hits the REDIAL button.

GIRL
... please... please... please...

Suddenly, from behind --

GUY (O.S.)
What are you doing?

She screams, spins around.

He's standing right behind her, his face in silhouette.

GIRL
C-Calling 9-1-1. Or trying to.

GUY
Any luck?

GIRL
(shakes head 'no')
Can't... I can't get a signal here.

He receives this news with a strange calm.

GIRL (cont'd)
What about yours?

GUY
I don't have a cell.

GIRL
How can you not have a cell?

GUY
(ignoring her)
How're you doing? You all right?

GIRL
I... yeah, I'm okay. Nothing
broken... What about you?

GUY
I don't know. Think I hit my head.

He puts his hand to the left side of his skull and pushes on it. Like someone testing a melon for ripeness.

Come to think of it, his speech is a little wooden.

She watches as he turns and takes a few aimless steps away.

GUY (cont'd)

What happened to the, uh, the guy?

GIRL

Who?

GUY

Asshole who ran us off the road.

She's completely forgotten all about the other vehicle until now. She turns to look, puzzled.

There's no sign of the other vehicle anywhere. They're alone.

GIRL

I don't know. I guess maybe he decided just to hit and run.

GUY

So where are his tire tracks?

She looks, sees an unbroken expanse of fresh white snow.

GIRL

In case you haven't noticed, it's coming down pretty hard.

GUY

(points)

Yeah, but you can still see our tracks.

The mystery of the missing tracks seems to have penetrated his post-accident fog, bringing him back into sharper focus.

She watches as he walks out in front of the Olds' headlights to the middle of the road, where the other vehicles track's should be.

GUY (cont'd)

What the hell?!

He walks back to the Olds and opens the passenger door (the only access into or out of the stranded car, thanks to the snowbank). He begins searching the glove compartment for a flashlight.

ANGLE ON HER

Deliberating whether to seize this moment of distraction to make a break for it.

She looks back down the long dark road.

Looks back at him bent over rummaging in the Oldsmobile.

Too risky.

Curiosity getting the better of her, she walks out to the middle of the road to have a look for herself.

No tracks.

Just an expanse of fresh powder and a few of his footprints.

GIRL
(to herself)
This doesn't make any sense...

At that moment he emerges from the car with a flashlight. He spokes it, sweeps the strong beam over their surroundings.

The left side of the road falls off into a darkness so deep even the flashlight's beam can't penetrate it. A precipice.

He cups his hand and calls out at the top of his lungs.

GUY
(calling)
HELLO!

She jumps at the sound of his voice, her nerves frazzled.

GUY (cont'd)
(calling)
ANYBODY OUT THERE!? ANYONE?! HEY!

His voice is swallowed by the dark. After the echoes subside the only sound in the hush is the SIZZLE of falling snow and a weird otherworldly HUM.

He snaps off his flashlight, thrusts it into his coat pocket.

GIRL
What now?

GUY

I guess we see how bad we're stuck.

They trudge back to the car, boots crunching in the snow.

GUY (cont'd)

You steer, I'll push.

He holds the passenger door for her while she scrambles in, scooting over into the driver's seat. He leaves the door open so they can communicate.

He walks back to the rear of the stranded Oldsmobile.

He's pulling on gloves when something half-buried in the snow nearby catches his eye. He takes out the flashlight, shines it at the roadside.

Little wooden crosses.

Just two this time. Another sad shrine, to a different set of anonymous victims of Route 606.

Their proximity to the stranded Olds obviously unsettles him.

GIRL

(calling)

Ready?

He bends with a little wince and braces his shoulder against the rear bumper.

GUY

(calling)

Ready!

The tail lights come on as she turns the ignition. He hears her crank the starter motor.

Cranking... cranking... cranking...

Finally turning over.

She slips the Oldsmobile in gear, and he starts pushing.

The rear tires spin, throwing slush; but car won't budge.

GUY (cont'd)

(calling)

Give it more gas!

She floors it; the tires SCREAMING.

He puts everything he's got into pushing, but it's no use.

Suddenly his face contorts in pain and he clutches his side. He drops out of view, disappearing in a cloud of red exhaust.

A beat later he pulls himself up, pounds on the trunk.

GUY (cont'd)

Stop!

The tires stop spinning.

She's sitting in the driver's seat of the idling car when she hears the crunch-crunch-crunch of his approaching footsteps.

In that moment she makes a decision.

Scrambles across the front seat, pulls the door shut hard.

He arrives at the passenger side door handle just as the power locks all go THUNK.

He's locked out.

GUY

Hey, open up.

He tugs at the handle a few times. Knocks on the window.

GUY (cont'd)

You wanna pop the locks?

When there's no response from her he puts his lips to the half-inch gap at the top of the stuck window.

GUY (cont'd)

You gonna unlock the door or what?

She sees him cup his hands and peering in through the window.

She keeps her eyes down, focuses on her shaking fingers as they frantically dial her cellphone.

No signal.

GUY (cont'd)

Hey, c'mon, it's freezing out here!

GIRL

Better get used to it, asshole.

He rattles the door handle, starting to get panicked now.

GUY

What the hell is wrong with you?
What did I do?

But she's in full-blown paranoid mode now, near hysterics.

GIRL

You drove us here, that's what you did!! What the hell did you think you were doing!?

GUY

I thought I was driving you home.

GIRL

You're not driving me home because one, you don't live near my home and two, this piece of shit isn't driving anywhere. Now what are we doing here? Why did you get off the highway?

GUY

I told you, this is a shortcut. Anyway, you were the one who said she was so bored on the highway. This used to be called 'Scenic 606' because there's an amazing view of the valley-

GIRL

One, you've never been anywhere near here before so don't pretend you knew it's a shortcut, and two, there's an amazing view of shit BECAUSE IT'S PITCH BLACK OUT!

He stands there as she freaks out.

GUY

Let me get this straight. You think I intentionally arranged for us get stranded out here?! It was an

(MORE)

GUY (cont'd)

accident! You saw the other car.
You think he was in on it, too?

GIRL

(raving)

Maybe! Maybe he's like your Black
Pete or something! Why the hell did
you tell me that story anyway?

GUY

You're crazy...

GIRL

(lying)

Anyway, I've got news for you... I
got through to a friend's voicemail
while you were supposedly
unconscious. I'm sure she's called
the cops by now.

GUY

Would you listen to yourself? What
kind of psycho do you think I am?

GIRL

Exactly.

He straightens, exasperated, puts a hand to his injured head.

She looks at him standing there, hugging himself against the
sub-zero cold, his teeth chattering. He doesn't look like an
ax-murderer.

She doesn't know what to do. There's a long beat. Finally,
he throws up his hands in disgust, decides to go to Plan B.

GUY

I'm gonna walk back to the gas
station for help. You've got the
heater and the radio, so you should
be all right here. Though I really
think you should consider coming
with me.

GIRL

I bet you do.

GUY

(pissed)

Fine. Whatever. If you feel a draft
and you want to patch this...

Sticking his fingertips through the half-inch gap at the top of the stuck passenger side window.

GUY (cont'd)
... I keep duct tape in the back.

GIRL
(sarcastic)
I bet you do.

He looks in at her one last time, exits.

She listens to the crunch of his footsteps until she can't hear them anymore.

Suddenly there's a loud BANG against the passenger side window. She jumps.

GUY
BUT IT'S MY CAR!!

He goes crazy on the stranded Olds: punching the roof, jerking the door handle, kicking the door, screaming at her the whole time.

She cowers inside, scared to death.

Finally he gives up, and with a final BANG to the roof, exits.

He turns and heads back down the road.

We watch through the rear window as he trudges robotically away, his boots crunch-crunch-crunching in the snow.

He stops. Leans his weight against a tree. Looks back at the car.

Whatever it is he's doing, he's clearly not walking to the gas station.

He straightens, and continues on until he's out of sight.

The stranded Oldsmobile sits on the roadside, engine running, hood and windshield covered in white. The interior lights are on, giving it an enchanted look, like a cottage in a Grimm's fairytale.

38 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

38

She's in the back seat ransacking his suitcase and other possessions, looking for the duct tape. Despite the heater it's cold enough in the car (thanks to the gap in the window) to see her breath.

A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT plays on the car's radio.

RADIO PSA

*... The National Weather Service
has issued a Winter Storm Warning
for the entire Eastern Seaboard...*

Boxer shorts. Socks. Box of condoms. A copy of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. A cheap Radio Shack TELEPHONE wrapped in its cord. A CROW BAR, which she tosses up to the front seat.

RADIO PSA (cont'd)

*... Carbon County residents can
expect snow accumulations of four
to six inches...*

Suddenly we see -

A BLUR OF MOVEMENT outside the car's foggy REAR WINDOW...

But she's too busy searching through the junk in the back seat to notice.

Finally she finds what she's looking for: silver DUCT TAPE.

Also a PAIR OF SCISSORS.

She holds the scissors like a dagger, clearly thinking they could come in useful if she needs to defend herself.

She climbs up front, rips off a three-foot length of tape.

Again, in the b.g. -

MORE MOVEMENT outside the car...

But she's too busy sealing the passenger's side window against the frigid draft to notice that someone's outside.

RADIO PSA (cont'd)

*... State and local officials are
urging residents to remain indoors,
(MORE)*

(CONTINUED)

38

CONTINUED:

38

RADIO PSA (cont'd)
*as wind chills plunge to fifteen
below overnight...*

Finally -

She glimpses MOVEMENT outside the passenger window.

She gasps, ducking out of sight below the car's dashboard.

She doesn't move, listening, her eyes bright with fear.

After a long beat she risks a peek over the steering wheel.

The windshield is fogged, so she wipes a peephole in the condensate. It's too dark to see much beyond the car's hood.

She reaches shaking fingers toward the steering column.

Flicks on the headlights.

A STRANGER is walking away down the middle of the dark road.

She screams, reaches instinctively to check the power locks.

The stranger, a black man dressed in a dirty suit, walks with hunched shoulders. Snow swirling around him in the darkness.

Who the hell takes a stroll in the middle of a snowstorm?

Over her initial shock now, she reaches for the door handle.

39

EXT. ROUTE 606 - ROADSIDE - NIGHT

39

She gets out of the car, clutching the SCISSORS in both hands like a dagger. She stands behind the protection of the open car door and calls out to the stranger moving down the middle of the snowy road a dozen yards ahead.

There's a weird HUMMING noise in the air she can't place.

GIRL

Hey!

No reaction from the stranger.

GIRL (cont'd)

Hello? Do you live around here?

Again, nothing. Maybe he's deaf?

She moves out from behind the safety of the car door and starts after the stranger, keeping her distance as she calls:

(CONTINUED)

GIRL (cont'd)

We had an accident. My friend went
for help. He'll be back any second.

The stranger's dapper suit is more than dishevelled. It's
soaking wet, caked in motor oil or some other dark slime.

GIRL (cont'd)

Kinda crappy night for a walk,
don't you think?

And there's something definitely "off about his shuffling.
It's like he's crippled, or injured. In fact he seems to be
CRYING. (Or is it moaning?)

GIRL (cont'd)

Hey, wait!

But the stranger just keeps shuffling toward the shoulder of
the road, headed in the direction of the DARK STAND OF TREES
beyond. Soon he moves beyond the reach of the headlights and
disappears into the gloom.

GIRL (cont'd)

What the hell - !?

Spooked, she begins to back toward the stranded Oldsmobile.

Backs into -

GUY

Hey.

She SCREAMS.

GUY (cont'd)

Jesus! Calm down. It's just me.

GIRL

Stay away from me!

She brandishes the SCISSORS. He puts up two hands
defensively.

GUY

Whoa! Take it easy. What's wrong?

GIRL

You! Everything! The guy-

GUY

What guy?

GIRL

I don't know, it was weird. I saw
some guy walking down the road.

GUY

Where did he go?

GIRL

I don't know. Into the woods.

Her eyes keep cutting back and forth between him and the woods where the stranger disappeared, as if not sure which is the greater threat.

GUY

Look. It's freezing out here. Let's
just get in the car and you can
tell me what happened...

GIRL

(paranoid)

What are you doing back so soon?
What about hiking to the gas
station?

GUY

It was closed. I was going to leave
a note, but I didn't... You know.
Have anything to write with.

She clutches the scissors tighter, not believing a word.

GIRL

But those places are supposed to
stay open 24/7! Why wasn't it open?

GUY

How the hell should I know?!
Independent operator. Look, can we
continue this conversation in the
car, 'cause I'm freezing my balls
off standing out here.

GIRL

(shrieks)

I'm not getting into the car with
you, you psycho!!!

He closes his eyes and shakes his head, beyond frustrated.

GUY

Fine. Whatever. I'm getting in.
You're welcome to join me.

He turns and trudges back to the Oldsmobile, climbs in, and pulls the door shut after him. Leaving her there in the snowy road, clutching the scissors, her teeth chattering.

She stands there, shivering, looking very small and alone.

HOLD on her as she weighs her options: stay out here and freeze. Or risk seeking shelter with a stalker.

Not much of a choice.

INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - MOMENTS LATER

He looks over as the door wrenches open and she climbs in.

She pulls the door shut behind her, then huddles against it. Eyeing him warily.

He starts to reach toward her and she brandishes the scissors-

GUY

Relax.

- and switches off the overhead interior lights, explaining:

GUY (cont'd)

We need to conserve the battery.

With the interior light off the car fills with an otherworldly blue glow reflected off the snow. She pulls her knees up as if trying to make herself as small as she can, to position herself as far away from him as is humanly possible on a bench seat.

Her eyes cut to the DASHBOARD CLOCK. She frowns.

GIRL

That's not right. The clock...

GUY

(checks watch)

Huh? No, it's not. It should read...

He frowns, looking down at his watch. He holds it to his ear.

GUY (cont'd)

My watch stopped. Oh well... Guess we'll just have to rely on my precisely calibrated body clock.

He tosses his useless watch over his shoulder into the back seat.

Suddenly she notices a trickle of blood coming from his head.

GIRL

Hey.

GUY

What?

GIRL

You're bleeding.

He touches two fingers to the left side of his head. They come away bloody. As he lifts his watch cap we see the left side of his head is matted with frozen blood, now beginning to melt. The collar of his coat is soaked with it.

GUY

It's nothing...

GIRL

It doesn't look like nothing.

GUY

Scalp wounds bleed a lot. Head wounds in general. That's why, if you're ever in a bar fight, the thing to do is pick up a bottle and smash the other guy across the bridge of his nose. It'll make his eyes fill with blood and snot, and buy you enough time to run away.

GIRL

(softening, amused)

That's really useful, thanks.

A tense silence fills the car. He closes his eyes and leans his head back, as if trying to catch a few Z's.

GIRL (cont'd)

So where are you from, really?

GUY
(eyes closed)
Place called Glens Falls...

GIRL
That's not in Delaware.

GUY
No...

GIRL
That's, like, in the complete
opposite direction!

GUY
Yes...

GIRL
That's like twenty minutes from
school!

GUY
All right, all right, so I lied...
Obviously.

GIRL
Why?

Eyes still closed, he answers in a flat uninflected voice.

GUY
I just thought you seemed cool. I
don't have a line or a 'game' or
whatever the hell it's called. So
when I saw a chance to get you
alone for six uninterrupted hours,
I took it.

She ponders this for a beat, one piece still not clicking.

GIRL
But how did you know where I lived?

GUY
Asked around.

GIRL
Which explains how you found out I
was from Delaware... But not how
you knew I needed a ride home. I
mean, I always fly. How could you
possibly know that for, like the
(MORE)

40

CONTINUED: (3)

40

GIRL (cont'd)

first time in my college career, I
was planning on going Greyhound-

Just then her eyes go wide, as it suddenly dawns on her.

41

FLASHBACK:

41

A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS revisits events from earlier that day.

- The text message, "y don't u check the ride board?"
- Her looking up, smiling.
- Sitting behind her, reading the message: OUR GUY.
- Who bolts from his seat the instant class is dismissed.
- Who turns out to be the one who jostled her on his way out.
- He races across the empty quad, scribbling on the run.
- Tears the improvised notice out of his spiral notebook.
- Slaps it up on the RIDE BOARD just in the nick of time.
- As she enters and sees: "NE1 Need a ride 2 Delaware 12/23?"

FLASHBACK ENDS:

42

INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - AS BEFORE

42

She looks at him, the pieces all finally falling into place. He makes no effort to explain. Doesn't even open his eyes.

GUY

(bitter)

Forgive me for attempting a romantic gesture.

GIRL

Romantic? Try stalkerish.

GUY

Not if things worked out between us...I would've told you everything eventually, and then it wouldn't be stalkerish. It would just be this sweet funny story we'd have.

GIRL

We?!

He sits up sharply, temper boiling over, glaring at her.

(CONTINUED)

GUY

Okay, you've made your point! I'm a creep who gets off on chauffeuring women under false pretenses. Can we drop this already?

(changing subject)

Christ. I'm starving. You hungry?

He leans over the seatback, begins rummaging in the back.

GUY (cont'd)

Did you see a bag of groceries in the trunk?

At mention of groceries she temporarily drops the topic of the gas station. Remembers:

GIRL

No. Oh, shit. I think I might've left it in the parking lot.

GUY

What?!

GIRL

I'm sorry. It was an accident-

GUY

Shit! I spent sixty bucks on this gourmet crap you like! Saint Andre's cheese and Carr's crackers and those stupid little French pickles, I forget what they're called-

GIRL

(quietly)

Cornichons... I love cornichons.

He sighs, slumps back behind the steering wheel, defeated.

GUY

I know.

The wind blows. In between gusts it's quiet, except for the strange HUM.

44 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

44

She's still huddled up front, still holding her scissors.

He's in the back seat, scouring the car for anything edible, scrounging Tic Tacs, stale pretzel nibs, a candy bar, etc.

GUY

I think I remember losing pack of
Big Red down the back seat cushions
last week...

He thrusts his hand between the seat cushions like a scuba diver feeling for lobster under a coral reef.

DOWN THE BACK SEAT:

His hand fumbles in the dark space below the seat cushions, among the seatbelts, lost nickels and dimes, lint.

BACK TO SCENE

Suddenly his eyes go wide as something lurking under the seats seizes his hand and jerks him in hard.

She GASPS.

His face contorts in agony.

Then changes to a smile, as he pulls his hand free, unhurt, holding a stick of gum.

GUY (cont'd)

Kidding.

She looks at him in mute fury and disbelief. He shrugs, unwraps a stick of Big Red and pops it into his mouth.

GIRL

Asshole.

Suddenly his hand shoots out and seizes her wrist holding the scissors. Her eyes go wide in terror and she starts to resist, but his grip is too strong.

GUY

(gritted teeth)
Let go, goddamnit...

(CONTINUED)

GIRL

No!

GUY

Give them to me!

GIRL

No!!!

With his free hand he reaches over and wrenches the scissors away from her, his eyes flashing. She gives a little terrified whimper as he pulls her close, brandishes the scissors.

GUY

I need these.

INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - LATER

With the blade of the open scissors he divides a stale candy bar, divvying it up.

He closes the scissors. Serves up the two halves of candy bar on napkins with a side of stale pretzel nibs.

GUY

I still can't believe you left all our food in a stupid parking lot.

GIRL

Look, I'm sorry, okay? I'll write you a check for sixty bucks if it will make you get off my case. I don't know what else I can say.

GUY

Let's just eat.

They eat in silence, each chewing the unappetizing "dinner."

GUY (cont'd)

(to himself)

Story of my life. Never fails...

GIRL

What?

GUY

You. Girls. Women. You seem cool at first.

GIRL

What the hell are you talking about?

GUY

You should all come with a warning, like car mirrors: "Objects in belly shirts are flakier than they appear."

GIRL

You want to talk about fake? How about guys who pretend to be from Delaware to meet girls?

GUY

How about we just stop talking altogether.

GIRL

That's perfect. Because now that I'm not some Nietzsche-spouting sexbot, suddenly I'm not worth knowing. And who's fault is that?

He doesn't answer, only withdraws into himself, sulking.

All of a sudden the Oldsmobile gives a SHUDDER.

And then the engine DIES.

They leap out to investigate, dropping down on all fours to shine the flashlight under the chassis.

HER POV:

Under the car. The beam illuminates a yellow crater of melted snow beneath the car's undercarriage.

BACK TO SCENE

She reaches under to scoop up some of the yellow snow. Retrieves it so she can hold it under her nose and sniff.

GUY

Well?

GIRL

Gas.

GUY

Oh shit.

GIRL

Fuel tank must've been ruptured in the accident.

GUY

Can you fix it?

GIRL

Not unless you have a welding rig in all that shit of yours. And even if you did, it wouldn't matter. We're out of gas.

GUY

But we still have the battery, right?

GIRL

As long as we use it sparingly, it should last the night. Question is, will we?

GUY

What do you mean?

She gives him a sober look, as the storm rages around them.

GIRL

No engine... no heat.

He looks at her, a look of grim determination on his face. He marches to the car, pops the trunk.

Retrieves her suitcase.

He dumps her suitcase in front. She climbs in after it.

Slams the door.

GUY

Layers...

He rolls into the back, fishes his suitcase out of the mess.

GUY (cont'd)

Only thing that's gonna get us to sun-up. So put aside fashion sense and start layering everything you brought.

GIRL

But I didn't bring anything.

He raises an eyebrow, leans over the front seat to unzip her suitcase and see for himself.

Christmas gifts, skimpy tees, panties and bras, a bikini.

GUY

Ah, Jesus.

GIRL

(defensive)

I'm sorry, but who could prepare for something like this?! I've got a complete winter wardrobe, it's just in Delaware... And no, that doesn't make me a flake!

He unzips his suitcase. Starts pulling out Ragg socks, long-sleeve pullovers, etc.

He shoves a ball of clothes into her hands without a word.

48 OMITTED

48

49 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

49

The kids have retreated to the front- and back seats for privacy while they change. Not an easy proposition in the cramped quarters.

She strips down to bra and panties as demurely as possible. Puts on his insulated underwear and the rest of their things.

He slips on his woefully inadequate shirts and pants. It's obvious he gave the warmest stuff to her. Also that he took the backseat because it's more cramped than the front.

Once they're finished dressing he reaches up, switches off the interior light.

They lie in the blue darkness for a few moments of silence, watching their breath plume in the cold air. [Note: from this point on, their breath will always be visible in the car.]

He hears her sigh, restless.

GUY
What's the matter?

GIRL
I'm freezing. I can't feel my toes.

GUY
Me neither.

Nothing much they can do about it. They fall silent again.

GUY (cont'd)
You know, there is a better way for
two people to conserve body heat-

GIRL
Dream on.

But we see her smiling a little in the dark front seat.

They lie in silence for another beat as she tries every position possible to get comfortable. Finally she sits up.

GUY
What?

GIRL
Gotta pee.

She starts to climb over into the cramped front seat, intending to go outside. He winces when she puts a hand on his chest to steady herself as she climbs over him.

GUY
(testy)
Why didn't you go before, when we
were outside?

GIRL
Because it's freezing out. We're
talking about an arctic air mass
out of Canada.

GUY

It's still freezing out-

GIRL

Yeah, but now I've got to go.

Promise not to look.

She pops the door and exits.

She climbs out into the bitter cold, hunched against the howling wind, and moves off as far as she dares from the car.

She fumbles with the buttons and zippers of her multiple layers, turns her back to the car, squats to pee.

Her teeth chatter as she does her business, one wary eye peeled to catch the guy peeking.

Suddenly, out of the gloom appears -

A DARK FIGURE, moving by very near her.

She GASPS. Tumbles back onto her ass. As she's struggling to pull up her pants -

MORE DARK FIGURES appear, moving in the same direction.

As the figures enter the woods their leader turns so she glimpses his face: elderly and unremarkable at first glance, then for an instant CHANGING into a twisted ashen deathmask.

Her SCREAM brings our guy BOLTING out of the car.

GUY

What?! What happened?!

But it all happened so fast she doesn't believe her eyes. She gestures at the procession of DARK FIGURES disappearing ahead.

GIRL

(still in shock)

- Did you see? - They were right here! -

GUY

Why didn't you stop them?! Maybe they have a phone!

50

CONTINUED:

50

Our guy ducks back into the car, retrieves a flashlight from the glove compartment.

He eases the door shut, carefully so it doesn't latch and accidentally lock them out.

The he starts off running after the figures. Scared as she is, she decides to follow rather than remain at the car by herself.

51 EXT. ROUTE 606 - FURTHER DOWN ROAD / TOP OF A RAVINE - NIGHT 51

The two kids arrive at the place on the road -- top of a ravine disappearing thirty feet below -- where the dark figures seemed to be headed.

Only to find NO ONE THERE.

GIRL

Where'd they go?!

GUY

There!

She looks where he's pointing with the flashlight-

HER POV:

On the wooded slope on the opposite slope of the ravine are SEVERAL TALL OLD MEN IN DARK COATS, dispersing through the woods. As if whatever somber occasion that brought them to the ravine has ended.

GUY (cont'd)

(calling)

Hey! Wait! We need help here!

Climbing down into the ravine seems too treacherous, so the kids are forced to backtrack to a place several yards away where they can follow the DARK FIGURES into the:

52 EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

52

They follow the bobbing beam of the flashlight through the trees, in pursuit of the OLD MAN in black coat and fedora.

Our guy falls behind, winded.

(CONTINUED)

GUY

Gotta - just a sec - catch my -

GIRL

(still unnerved)

Maybe we should go back to the car.

GUY

No! There must be a house or something. Keep going. I'll catch up.

GIRL

(reluctantly)

Okay.

She trudges on ahead, her footsteps growing FAINTER, finally fading entirely.

He's alone now.

He leans against a tree to catch his breath, wincing in pain. For an instant it seems like he's going to be sick. But then he just hocks up phlegm and spits into the pure white snow.

Blood.

Though still winded, he pushes on.

A few minutes later he trudges into view. Looks around. No sign of our girl.

GUY

Hello? Hello?

He arrives at the top of the hill. Silhouetted against the night sky. Treeless.

His flashlight finds the few vertical objects still standing.

A RUINED BUILDING

Windowless and long-abandoned, its ceiling and walls caved in around a large stone chimney.

He crunches inside and examines the black maw of the large stone fireplace, now stuffed with trash and dead leaves. His flashlight beam finds a SMALL IRON DOOR built into the side of the chimney.

A FIREBOX.

He kneels in the snow and tugs the little iron door open.

Gingerly slips his arm inside the firebox.

Retrieves a bunch of OLD NEWSPAPERS. He stuffs them inside the front of his jacket. Continues rummaging around in the firebox.

As he rises he winces in pain, one hand going to his side.

He takes slow breaths until the pain subsides.

He turns in a slow circle. His flashlight sweeps over the interior of the abandoned ruins, the beam picking out what look like branches -

HUMAN HANDS

frozen into claws, reaching from...

A FROZEN BODY.

It's lying on the bare springs of a metal bedframe: teeth clenched in a terrible rictus, icicles dripping from nose, clawlike fingers, eyes.

He's so startled he nearly drops the flashlight.

The wayward light finding ANOTHER FROZEN CORPSE in a nearby bed mere feet away: another rictus grimace, clawlike fingers seeming to reach for him. And then another. And another...

All OLD MEN.

Frozen in their death throes, like the bodies from Pompeii.

ONE OF THE BEDS is EMPTY.

Our guy sweeps the flashlight beam to the side and finds the bed's occupant: frozen sitting upright in an old wooden wheelchair.

Eye to eye with him.

He reels in horror, trips, LOSES THE FLASHLIGHT as he goes sprawling. Then recovers, snatching the flashlight up again and sweeping it back in the direction of the frozen bodies -

And sees NOTHING: No beds. No old men...

53

CONTINUED: (2)

53

Just his footprints in the snow.

54

EXT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE / ROADSIDE - THAT MOMENT

54

Our girl emerges from the trees, having decided to give up the chase and return to the safety of the car.

Just as she's reaching for the door handle she GASPS -

As a FIGURE suddenly appears out of the darkness.

It's the black STRANGER from earlier, shuffling and mumbling. This time he's close enough for her to make out some of the words he's muttering:

STRANGER

...please, officer, please don't...

GIRL

Wait!

Determined not to let him vanish again, she takes off in pursuit, coming alongside him and keeping pace as he shuffles down the middle of the road.

STRANGER

...don't put me in the river...

Suddenly she glances down, sees why he's shuffling so oddly.

His ankles above his sodden dress shoes are bound with BALING WIRE, as are his wrists.

GIRL

(shocked)

Oh my god! Who did this to you?!

STRANGER

...please, officer, just take the booze and let me go...

She reaches toward him.

The instant her hand nears him the wind HOWLS DEAFENINGLY. She experiences a sudden powerful JOLT, almost as if she's grabbed a live wire... only instead of electric heat she feels a terrible otherworldly cold...

Frostbite.

The jolt stuns the stranger out of his daze, and for the first time he becomes aware of her. He raises his frightened eyes to her slowly, and in doing so reveals his face.

A scream builds in her throat at sight of him.

The stranger's face is bloodless, bloated, swollen with rot.

A sludgy gargling noise comes from his throat and his mouth moves, as if he's trying to speak.

But instead of words emerging, his throat suddenly bulges. Something's in there, fighting its way up his esophagus.

54

CONTINUED: (2)

54

She watches in horror as it emerges, blind and wriggling like a blood-fattened leech. Forcing its way out through his lips to land at his feet with a wet PLOP.

It lies there writhing in the fresh snow.

A river eel.

She SCREAMS.

55

EXT. WOODS - THAT MOMENT

55

POV of our guy running blindly through the woods, FLASHLIGHT BEAM throwing weird bouncing shadows across the trees, boots CRUNCHING in the snow, sound of his GASPING BREATHS...

He stops, wracked with pain, and doubles over with hands on knees to catch his breath.

In the silence he hears her SCREAM coming from ahead.

He stands, and though still winded, starts running again.

56

EXT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE / ROADSIDE - NIGHT

56

Our guy emerges from the woods still carrying the newspapers he found in time to find our girl white with shock and SCREAMING. He grabs her by the shoulders, shakes her.

GUY

It's okay! You're okay! It's okay!

Her screams give way to hyperventilating sobs.

GIRL

Where were you?

GUY

I was looking for those guys. I didn't see anyone--
(hesitating at the memory)
--there's nobody up there. What's wrong, what's wrong? Did you see someone?

GIRL

I...there was another guy...

She starts to tell him, then stops, not sure if she believes it herself.

(CONTINUED)

Suddenly he looks down, notices her blackened mitten on her right hand. The palm is blistered and raw. He takes her hand gingerly, examines it. She winces in pain. *

GUY *

What happened to you!? This looks like... oh jesus... like frostbite!

GIRL

I tried to... touch him...it burns.

He raises his eyes from her frostbite, looks at the dark silent stand of dense woods surrounding them. **They exchange a look of knowing concern.** *

GUY *

Let's get back in the car... *

They start back in the direction of the stranded Oldsmobile.

Pan down to the road, where something moves weakly under the fresh powdering of snow.

The RIVER EEL, in its death throes.

They climb back inside. He pulls the old newspapers out from inside his jacket, tosses them on the dashboard. She pulls the passenger door shut.

The duct tape has come loose, allowing a cold draft in through the cracked window.

She notices the NEWSPAPERS on the dash, grabs them.

GIRL

Where'd these come from?

GUY

There's the ruins of an old house
or something back in the woods.

GIRL

Oh... Give me the duct tape...

He hands it to her, and she starts using the tape and old newspapers to seal out the draft.

When she's finished, he starts to climb over into the back.

GIRL (cont'd)

(softly)

Wait.

She looks at him, too embarrassed to ask him to hold her. It takes him a beat to understand. Then he crawls over to her, and they spoon together in the front seat, finding their best fit.

Any awkwardness quickly passes.

They lie there, too frightened to sleep.

TITLE CARD ON BLACK:

11:17 P.M.

Our kids lie awake, him spooning her, listening to the RADIO quietly playing Christmas music: (segue into Brenda Lee's "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree.")

GUY

Are you awake?

GIRL

(teeth chattering)

Uh-huh. D-Don't want to sleep.

GUY

Why?

GIRL

Because I'm afraid I won't wake up.
That's what they say happens. When
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

GIRL (cont'd)
you freeze to death. It's like
going to sleep...

GUY
There are worse ways to go.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK --

Someone is outside, knocking on the Oldsmobile's window.

They both jump, startled. He glances up into the rearview mirror, sees HEADLIGHTS behind them and a RED FLASHING LIGHT.

GUY (cont'd)
A cop!

She cranks down the icy passenger side window, revealing the silhouette of a HIGHWAY PATROLMAN standing just outside: 40s, wearing a trim-fitting uniform and a stiff-brimmed trooper's hat.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
Everything all right in there?

The kids speak over one another in their relief to see him.

GIRL
Thank God! You don't know how glad
we are to see you...

GUY
...you won't believe what's been
happening...

The cop listens without comment, shining his flashlight over the car's interior.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
Having car trouble, huh?

GIRL
Someone ran us off the road.

He shines the flashlight directly in our girl's eyes.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
There's no parking here.

GUY
What are you talking about? We're
not parking here. Didn't you hear
what she said? Someone ran us off-

(CONTINUED)

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

...Of course I might be willing to let you off with a warning this time... if we can come to some sort of arrangement...

GUY

What are you talking ab-

The girl, quicker to catch on than the guy, puts a hand on his arm.

GIRL

(whispers)

It's a shake-down. He's probably partners with the guy who ran us off the road. Wouldn't be surprised if he has a deal with the tow guy, too.

He turns to her, says in an angry whisper -

GUY

You think this whole thing was a scam? Jesus, he could've killed us!

But she's already digging cash out of her purse.

GIRL

(fierce whisper)

How much cash do you have on you?

He looks at her in disbelief. Sees that she's serious. He digs out his wallet, starts to climb over her to exit. She stops him.

GIRL (cont'd)

How many speeding tickets have you sweet-talked your way out of?

He concedes her point silently. She plucks the money from his hand. Opens the door.

She exits the stranded car into the frigid cold.

The cop waits, facing away, in the spotlight-like glare of his IDLING PATROL CAR's headlights.

She walks back toward him, finds him mopping the back of his neck with a handkerchief.

GIRL

This is all we have.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

Some weather we're having...

GIRL

Yeah, it's really coming down.

(indicating the money)

So what do you say? How 'bout a little Christmas spirit here?

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

(still facing away)

You know, this is one bad stretch of road. All kinds of trouble going on up here: Kids drag racing. Niggers hauling booze across the state lines. Lady drivers breaking down, no-one ever hears from them again...

Her bravado begins to flag. This isn't the kind of police officer she's used to dealing with. She glances worriedly back in the direction of the Olds.

GIRL

We just want to get out of here, so if you could just-

She holds out the money, but he ignores it.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

Let me tell you, I've seen a lot of fatalities on this road...

He takes off his hat so he can mop his brow. As he turns, she gets a first good look at his face: handsome but hard, with cruel snake charmer's eyes looking back at her...

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN (cont'd)

You're lucky I came along when I did. So why don't we get in my car...

She's scared now.

She looks past him to where the HIGHWAY PATROL car sits idling in a red plume of exhaust fumes.

GIRL
(backing away)
I think maybe I just want to go
back-

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE!

She startles as if slapped, too horrified to parse his meaning.

She continues backing away until she's backed up against the trunk of the Olds.

GIRL
No...

The cop is advancing toward her when suddenly he catches sight of something high on the hillside behind her that makes him stop.

She glances over her shoulder to see what he's looking at:

A LIGHT on the hilltop, where the burned-out ruins stand. And weirder still, there's a FIGURE in silhouette standing nearby.

Someone watching.

The cop darkens, enraged by this unwanted audience. His face contorts, fury building in him until he trembles with it. He rests his hand on the butt of his service revolver, says to her in a low urgent voice:

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
Get in the damn patrol car...

She starts walking toward the parked patrol car ahead of him.

The highway patrolman's boots CRUNCHING behind her.

The patrol car's HEADLIGHTS are blinding. She moves towards them, squinting, as if moving down a tunnel of light.

GIRL
(terrified; beginning to
cry)
Please... just let us go...

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

Hurry up...we've got an audience...

GIRL

(begging)

But we didn't do anything! Please!
We won't tell anybody if you let us-

GUY (O.S.)

Get away from her you bastard!

Suddenly the guy appears brandishing a CROWBAR.

He swings it in a lethal arc toward the patrolman's head.

The cop's head crumples inward. The cop's expression of FURY suddenly STUTTERS, like film slipping in the projector -

As two worlds that should never intersect, do, violently -

For an instant, the cop's face appears...charred. Like a human face projected onto a scorched and melting balloon. The image flickers -

And on an ear-splitting HOWL we -

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

Suddenly, jarringly, the kids are seated BACK INSIDE THE CAR.

As if someone hit RESET.

GIRL

(stunned)

What just... out there...?

GUY

I don't know.

GIRL

(unsure)

But it did happen, right? Or not...

Our guy winces in pain. TILT DOWN to reveal:

HIS HANDS

Frostbitten, still clutching the crowbar. She tries to take it out of his bloody, blackened hands and he GASPS in agony.

(CONTINUED)

GIRL (cont'd)

Oh Jesus. OK. Hold on.

She pours water from a plastic bottle over his palms to try and break the seal between the fused skin and metal.

GIRL (cont'd)

OK, hold on, this is going to hurt.

GUY

Do it.

She fights her own gag reflex as she pulls the crowbar free. It comes away with several long black strips of dead skin still attached. His palms are bloody pulps.

He fights to hold himself together as she ministers to him. The pain is so bad it brings tears to his eyes. His teeth chatter; he's teetering on the edge of shock.

GUY (cont'd)

How bad?

GIRL

Frostbite, second and third-degree.

GUY

How do you know? You take a first aid course or something?

GIRL

Ski camp, seventh grade...

(off his look)

Don't make fun. What else do you have going on when you're thirteen?

She stretches herself out alongside him in the back seat.

Tugs up her layers of sweaters to expose her stomach.

GUY

(weak)

I'm kinda not in the mood anymore.

GIRL

We have to rewarm your hands. You have ice crystals in your blood. If we don't get circulation restored you could lose your fingers.

She takes his frostbitten hands and gingerly as possible presses them against the warm skin of her belly, rewarming them.

They lie there in silence for a beat, faces inches apart.

GIRL (cont'd)

What just happened to us out there?

GUY

What do you mean? You were there.

GIRL

I know, but who was he? Where'd he go? It's like one minute there's a, a gun to my head and the next all the lights go out and he's gone, like a, like a-

GUY

Ghost.

Her eyes cut to his, afraid, resistant to the very idea.

GIRL

No.

GUY

Yes. And the old guys we chased-

GIRL

No.

GUY

What then? How do you explain-

GIRL

I don't know! This is crazy! I can't be having this conversation.

GUY

(forceful)

You're having it.

GIRL

I don't want to!

GUY

You think I do?! Jesus. I'm just as freaked by what's happening as you. But we have to deal with it, 'cause like it or not, it is happening...

GIRL

Then how do we make it stop?

GUY

I don't know. They don't cover this
in Philosophy 101.

GIRL

(casting for ideas)

What about that book, in the back?

GUY

What book?

GIRL

Something Book of the Dead.

GUY

Tibetan. It's not a How-to manual.
It's an 8th century Buddhist guide
on death and dying.

GIRL

(despairing)

God. Why is this happening to us?

He doesn't have an answer. They fall silent for a beat.

GUY

(hands on her belly)

I can feel your stomach rumbling.

GIRL

I know. God, I'd give anything for
some of those Carr's crackers right
now...

Trying to take their minds off the grim situation.

GIRL (cont'd)

So what else was in the grocery bag
I forgot?

GUY

Um, let's see. Duck liver paté with
truffles.

GIRL

Oh no...

GUY

Some olives, the normal kind and also some of the little shrivelled black ones. A bottle of white wine...

GIRL

Mmmmm...

GUY

And for dessert, anisette biscotti and a thermos of espresso.

GIRL

(ecstasy)

Ohhhh...

She closes her eyes, imagining the meal that might've been.

GIRL (cont'd)

That's pretty much the exact meal I'd order for my last day on earth. I swear to god, if we ever get out of here I'm going to have to get a restraining order against-

If they ever get out of here. Her eyes brim, tears spilling down her cheeks. He tries to sound optimistic.

GUY

Can't be too much longer until dawn. Someone's bound to come along then. A snowplow or something. Right?

GIRL

How are your hands?

GUY

Starting to burn...

GIRL

That's good. It means the circulation's coming back.

GUY

(winces)

Yeah, but I mean really burn...

GIRL

Hang on. I think I have a few Tylenol-with-codeine in my purse.

She climbs into the front seat and searches through her purse for the prescription bottle. With the poor light and without her contacts she has trouble finding it. She takes out her glasses and, a little embarrassed, slips them on.

GUY

What's taking so long, nurse -

GIRL

I just-

She's about to climb back when something catches her eye.

INSERT OLD NEWSPAPER --

The one used to patch the small gap in the passenger window.

There's a faded PHOTOGRAPH of a group of ELDERLY PRIESTS gathered around a MANGLED '55 FORD CROWN VIC. We recognize one of them, glancing back over his shoulder at the camera, as the LEADER of the mysterious procession of DARK FIGURES from earlier.

INTERCUT OLD NEWSPAPER / GIRL & GUY

GIRL (cont'd)

Oh my god. I think I know who our old guys are... I mean, were...

Below the accident scene photo are HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK PORTRAITS of TWO TEENAGE BOYS with crewcuts and letter jackets bearing a distinctive team insignia "The Cougars."

Across the top of the paper is a torn headline: "North Granville Youths Killed In Joy Riding Accident" and below it "Cougars Coach Mourns Loss."

GIRL (cont'd)

(reading)

"... first to arrive at the scene were Roman Catholic priests from St. Christopher's Home for Retired Clergy... "

GUY

Priests!

Suddenly, the interior light fizzles out, making her jump. She reaches up and taps on it until it flickers back on.

GIRL

"... Hearing the crash on nearby
Route 606, they braved inclement
weather to administer Last
Rights..."

GUY

That must be what we saw them
doing!

She skim-reads ahead, trying to glean more information.

GIRL

"... also killed was State Highway
Patrolman... continued on page
seven."

She tears the brittle top pages of the newspaper away.

Finds there is no page seven.

GUY

(gritted teeth)
You got that Tylenol?

GIRL

Coming.

She climbs over into the back seat, feeds him two of the
Tylenol with a sip of water from a bottle. Then stretches
out alongside him again.

GIRL (cont'd)

We should take turns keeping watch.
In case he comes back.

GUY

(eyelids heavy)
Okay.

GIRL

I'll go first. You get some sleep.

He drifts off to sleep.

TITLE CARD ON BLACK:

2:32 A.M.

61 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

61

Both kids are asleep in the back seat.

She's dreaming, her eyes roving behind closed lids. All of a sudden she stirs, eyes fluttering open in the dark. Shivers.

Woken by a cold draft.

She shivers, sits up, disentangling herself from the guy snoring quietly beside her in the cramped back seat.

She locates the source of the draft.

The STUCK PASSENGER WINDOW up front, where the duct-tape-newspaper patch has come loose. She shivers as a gust of wind blows a few snowflakes in.

She grabs the roll of duct tape, climbs up into the front. Tears off a fresh strip of tape off to replace the old one. She smooths it in place, her teeth chattering between yawns.

Just then the radio SNAPS on by itself.

BRENDA LEE

*Rockin' around, the Christmas tree,
at the Christ-mas par-ty hop.*

She freezes.

Her eyes cut to the backlit radio dial as the song continues.

BRENDA LEE (cont'd)

*Mistletoe hung where you can see,
ev'ry couple tries to STOP -*

The radio SHUTS OFF mid-song.

She holds still, scared to move, scared to even breathe.

Her eyes cut to the interior light as it starts flickering in a weird staccato way that's more Morse Code than loose wire.

After a few seconds it stops.

The seconds creep by on the dashboard clock.

She peeks over the front seat looking out the back window, wondering where his highway patrol car is.

(CONTINUED)

61

CONTINUED:

61

Which is when a gloved fist PUNCHES THROUGH THE WINDOW and hauls her kicking and screaming out of the Oldsmobile...

62

NIGHTMARE - EXT. '57 CHEVY / ROADSIDE - NIGHT (1958)

62

... and into a sweltering summer night in the late 1950s...

What follows is brutal and hallucinatory: a SERIES OF SHOTS that thrust us into the sickening first person POV of a BLONDE young woman, 19, in the final moments of her life. The RASP of CICADAS in the treetops provide the only soundtrack to the assault, as we see:

-- CLOSE ON their feet, high heels and boots, doing a violent two-step as he drags her along the gravel road shoulder

-- HANDHELD footage as she's dragged toward his idling patrol car

-- POV of a FULL MOON in the tree-tops, dispassionate spectator to the assault going on on this lonely stretch of road

-- CLOSE UP of the COP'S MOUTH, twisted with lust as he whispers something obscene we cannot hear.

-- CLOSE ON his HAND working it's way up to her throat, forcing his thick hairy thumb between her lips and making her suck.

-- POV underneath his patrol car, as his boots kick her feet apart, and take up position between them

-- The brim of his hat lifting to reveal him looking up with a scowl of surprise

-- And the cop's scowl curdles into a look of outrage at sight of --

-- SILHOUETTES of old men watching on the hilltop, roused by the commotion down on the road below --

(CONTINUED)

-- The cop wrenches open the back door of the car, hurls her in, slams the door shut.

-- He shoots a warning look in the direction of the SILHOUETTES ON THE HILLTOP that says, "Don't fuck with me..."

-- Then he climbs behind the wheel of his car and drives off.

BACK TO:

OUR GIRL's face as her eyes snap open and she bolts upright in the backseat, scaring the shit out of our guy.

GUY

Thank god! You were having some kind of seizure or someth-

He doesn't get to finish his sentence: Her eyes roll back in her head and she collapses again, as if yanked down by an undertow.

She starts violently CONVULSING in the cramped confines of the back seat, limbs flailing, feet kicking windows, etc.

Our guy tries everything to wake her: shaking her shoulders, slapping her face hard. But it's no use: the nightmare has her again.

He sits back, helplessly looking on.

Suddenly the radio SNAPS ON mid-song, scaring the crap out of him.

BRENDA LEE

You will get a sen-ti-men-tal feeling when you hear... Voices singing "Let's be jolly, DECK the halls with boughs of holly"...

The car's rear window brightens with APPROACHING HEADLIGHTS of a highway patrol car, it's strobe light flooding the Oldsmobile's interior with RED.

From our girl's eyes going crazy in R.E.M.-pattern we--

SMASH CUT TO:

64 OMITTED 64

A64 NIGHTMARE - EXT. WOODS - NIGHT (1958) A64

In a SERIES OF HALLUCINATORY SHOTS we see the BLONDE'S LIFELESS BODY -- shoeless, dress torn -- being dragged through the undergrowth and left in a secluded wooded spot. The COP kicks leaves and dirt over the body, then exits.

BACK TO:

65 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - AS BEFORE 65

CLOSE ON the RADIO, midway through "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree..."

Our guy listens to the CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH of the cop's boots outside in the snow, circling the snowbound Oldsmobile. Whistling along with the song that always accompanies him.

Suddenly the dashboard air vents all OPEN SIMULTANEOUSLY.

A gust of supernaturally frigid cold blows in, like the icy breath of Old Man Winter himself. White frost spreads with time-lapse velocity from the air vents across the dashboard.

Our guy scrambles up front, slapping the air vents closed. Begins ripping off strips of duct tape to plaster over the vents to keep out the lethal chill.

CLOSE ON OUR GIRL as her nightmare becomes even more violent-

SMASH CUT TO:

66 OMITTED 66

A66 NIGHTMARE - EXT. WOODS / STREAM - NIGHT (1956) A66

Another night, and a different victim. In a SERIES OF SHOTS we see: the black STRANGER pleading for his life as his WRISTS and ANKLES are bound roughly with baling wire by the COP. Ignoring the stranger's desperate pleas, the cop drags him by the bound wrists through the woods and shoves him down a muddy incline. He splashes facedown in a shallow stream.

BACK TO:

67 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - AS BEFORE

67

And our girl finally surfaces from the dream as if coming up for air, with a huge GASP and eyes wild with fear. Only to find herself in a waking nightmare.

The car interior flooded with red. Our guy terrified.

GIRL

What's happening!?

GUY

It's him! Hurry! Help me!

She climbs up front to help our guy frantically taping over the vents. A shadow moves by the WINDSHIELD and she gasps-

As another shadow goes by in a blur past the BACK WINDOW and he gasps-

The assault coming from everywhere at once now, the cop an elemental force, like the storm itself. Skittering along the undercarriage one moment, across the metal roof the next. Even appearing -- fleetingly, impossibly -- in the snow on the blocked driver's side window.

All the electronics in the car start going crazy, power locks opening and closing, the interior light flickering, the dashboard clock hands spinning wildly, the windshield wipers sweeping back and forth, etc.

Then stop all at once.

Even the radio SNAPS OFF.

Dead silence for a beat.

Then an odd SCUTTling SOUND underfoot, something crawling along the undercarriage of the car.

Our guy sits there frozen with fear, too scared to move, to even breathe.

Likewise, the girl sits nervously, watching her breath in the cold. Her eyes happen to wander to the rear view mirror-

A blue-faced DEAD BABY stares back at her from the rear window ledge.

She SWINGS around, looks back at the window. But nothing's there.

(CONTINUED)

She turns back, he looks at her with concern. Unsure of her own senses, she shakes him off. Exhales slowly.

Beat.

Suddenly the scuttling noises outside EXPLODE into to a full-blown assault.

There's the shriek of RENDING METAL, the thing outside begins HAMMERING at the car's hood, doors, etc.

The car gives a violent shudder side-to-side tosses our kids around like plastic flakes in a snow globe.

The radio snaps back on: the saxophone solo in the Brenda Lee song, accompanying the violent CLANGS and GROANS of metal being torn asunder as the thing under the car rips away muffler, brake lines, wrenches the handles from the doors, etc.

BRENDA LEE

*Rockin' around, the Christmas tree,
Have a happy hol-i-day...*

Our guy claps hands over his ears so he can't hear the sound of the cop's rage as he attacks the car, fury growing and growing until it's indistinguishable from the HOWLING wind outside.

The attack ends.

The red police light in the rear window FADES.

Leaving them sitting there in the dark in stunned silence.

GIRL

What happened?

GUY

I think... he's gone. I guess when he couldn't get in he gave up.

(suddenly grinning)

I told you these '88 Olds were built like tanks!

He turns around in the front seat to shake a bandaged fist at the rear window.

GUY (cont'd)

(nervous relief)

HAH! Next time pick on someone driving a Hyundai-

She claps a hand over his mouth.

GIRL

Shhh! How do you know it's not a trick! He could still be out there waiting-

GUY

He's not! Listen!

They sit in silence, listening, but hear only the wind.

GIRL

But what if he comes back..?

GUY

We just have to stay in the car until morning. Then we'll be safe. That can't be more than, like, a few more hours... Someone's bound to come along once the sun comes up... Someone human I mean. Think you can hold on until then?

GIRL

(shy)

What if, you know. We have to pee?

GUY

We can use the empty water bottles. From this point on, the back seat is a co-ed bathroom. Sound like a plan?

Sounds like a plan.

GUY (cont'd)

Why don't you try to get some sleep? I'll take the next watch.

She shakes her head, eyes full of fear.

GIRL

I don't want to sleep.

He nods, understanding.

So they just hunker down in the front seat, staring at the snow covered windshield, and start the long wait to morning.

TITLE CARD ON BLACK:

4:58 A.M.

68 EXT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE / ROADSIDE - NIGHT

68

The snow is slacking off. The stranded Oldsmobile is now completely snowbound, a car-shaped hillock of white on the roadside.

69 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

69

The interior of the car is eerily QUIET, cocooned in snow.

The kids sit in silence in the front seat, fighting to stay awake. His face is pale, skull visible beneath the skin. She stares at the black, snow-covered windshield.

GIRL

I gotta pee...

GUY

Again?!

She climbs over into the back seat and crouches down, urinating as demurely as possible into an empty bottle.

GUY (cont'd)

(teasing)

I swear, I never met anyone who had to go so much.

GIRL

Stop talking.

GUY

You should ask Santa to bring you a bigger bladder.

GIRL

I'm serious! It's hard enough doing this in front of you.

GUY

What, are you one of those people who can't pee with the bathroom door open?

GIRL

No. But it's not something I usually do until much later in a relationship...

She catches herself at the last second, but it's too late: the word "relationship" hangs in the air. Beat.

Finished peeing, she twists the cap on the water bottle. Sets it on the floor with the other URINE-FILLED BOTTLES.

Noticing ONE BOTTLE that doesn't look like the others.

She climbs over into the front to confront him with the urine bottle, which is tinged with PINK.

Blood.

GIRL (cont'd)

What the hell is this? Is this blood?

No answer.

GIRL (cont'd)

How badly were you hurt in the crash?

GUY

(shrugs)

No big deal. Just your average day in the NHL...

But she sees through his tough-guy facade. He's frightened.

GIRL

How long have you known?

GUY

Since I tried hiking back to the gas station. You were right, I never got anywhere near it. I

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

GUY (cont'd)
started hurling blood, so I turned
around and came back.

GIRL
Why didn't you tell me?

GUY
I didn't want to scare you-

Suddenly he goes rigid in pain, his teeth clenched. She looks on helplessly.

GIRL

We've got to get you some help now.
You won't make it to morning. I'm
going to try and hike back to the
gas station-

GUY

How far do you think you'd get out
there before running into Mr.
Freeze?

GIRL

I'm not going to just sit here and
watch you die!

They sit there a moment in silence. She digs out her
cellphone and checks for a signal: NO SIGNAL BARS.

GIRL (cont'd)

(to herself)

Damn it! We need a land line ...

A long beat.

Then she's struck by an idea.

She switches on the wipers to clear snow from the windshield.
Wipes at the foggy glass until she's got enough of a peephole
to peek out.

GUY

What are you looking at?

GIRL

Telephone poles. They must have a
junction box or something to test
the lines ... There! See that one?

She indicates a TELEPHONE POLE twenty yards up from them.

There's a SMALL GREY STEEL JUNCTION BOX near the top.

GUY

So?

She turns, leaning over the seatback to rummage among his
junk in the back. She retrieves his old wall TELEPHONE,
examines the jack at end of its cord.

GIRL

So maybe there's some way I can...
I don't know... jack into it or
something. Try and call for help.

GUY

You want to climb a telephone pole?

GIRL

Of course I don't want to! But it's
got rungs. Can't be any harder than
the climbing wall at my gym. Big
fat repair guys do it all the time,
right? Right?

Trying to convince herself.

GUY

But you're forgetting one thing...

GIRL

What?

GUY

He's out there.

They both go quiet.

She sits there with the phone in her lap, brooding on this.

Until something clicks.

GIRL

The song! That old Christmas song
on the radio. It always comes on
just before he shows up...

She switches on the RADIO.

They hear Elvis Presley's 1957 "Blue Christmas" playing.

GIRL (cont'd)

Keep listening. If 'Rockin' Around
the Christmas Tree' comes on, yell
like hell.

(trying to convince
herself)

Hopefully I'll have enough time to
get back.

70 EXT. ROADSIDE / TELEPHONE POLE - HIGH ANGLE - NIGHT 70

Looking down at the stranded Oldsmobile from the top of the telephone pole. The grey JUNCTION BOX in the foreground.

The weird HUMMING is louder here.

71 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT 71

He watches her prep for her mission out into the bitter cold.

She disconnects the TELEPHONE RECEIVER from it's base, wraps it in its chord, stows it for safekeeping under her sweater.

She's ready.

GUY

(weak)

I've been thinking...

GIRL

What about?

GUY

Eternal recurrence. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad.

GIRL

What wouldn't?

GUY

Repeating this life. Over and over. Exactly the same each time.

GIRL

Even the last twenty-four hours?

He shows a weak smile. Even the last twenty four hours.

GIRL (cont'd)

Yeah, but it's even nicer to think maybe we get a chance to fix all the things we screwed up the first time around, don't you think?

They fall silent, both thinking about this.

GUY

Know what I'd do different? Next time I'd just to walk up to you after class... and say "Hey."

GIRL

(smiles)

You should. Definitely. Do that.

She uses her sweater cuff to make clean spot on his cheek.

Kisses him tenderly.

The kiss working it's way to his mouth, lingering a beat.

Their lips part.

He catches her arm as she reaches for the power window switch, holds tight.

GUY

(urgently)

Don't let me die out here-

She looks at him with fierce eyes full of determination. The look calms him, at least a little.

She keys the ignition, lowers the passenger side window.

The duct tape rips away as the window glides down, admitting a mini-avalanche of powdery snow and a frigid blast of cold.

She climbs out.

Viewed from high atop the telephone pole she looks small and vulnerable as she climbs out of the Oldsmobile-shaped igloo.

73 EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT 73

An eerie HUSH has fallen, snow muffling sound except for the occasional forlorn wailing of the WIND through the trees.

She sets out through deep powder toward the TELEPHONE POLE.

74 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT 74

Teeth chattering, he watches through the windshield as she begins her long trek across the MOONLIT EXPANSE OF WHITE.

He turns up the VOLUME on the radio, which is now playing a funereal church-organ instrumental of "Silent Night."

75 EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT 75

The deep powder makes her trek difficult, and she's soon winded. Her breath plumes in the frigid arctic cold.

76 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT 76

CLOSE ON THE BACKLIT RADIO DIAL as "Silent Night" concludes.

In between STATIC we hear a pre-recorded PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT.

RADIO PSA

*The State Weather Bureau has issued
an extreme cold warning...*

77 EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT 77

She leans into the wind as it gusts, the cold bringing tears to her eyes. She puts her head down and soldiers on.

RADIO PSA (O.S.)

*...Residents of Carbon County are
advised to seek shelter as sub-zero
temperatures produce wind chills in
excess of twenty below...*

78 EXT. ROADSIDE / TELEPHONE POLE - NIGHT 78

Arriving at the base of the telephone pole, she peers up at the grey JUNCTION BOX high above. From here the top of the

78

CONTINUED:

78

telephone pole looks much higher than it did from the car. And the iron rungs look a lot narrower, too.

She's losing her nerve.

She glances back to check no police lights are coming.

Steels herself.

Then puts her foot on the first rung and hauls herself up.

79

INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - THAT MOMENT

79

CLOSE ON THE RADIO, where, between increasingly long snatches of STATIC we can just discern Gene Autry's version of "Here Comes Santa Claus."

80

EXT. ROADSIDE / TELEPHONE POLE - AS BEFORE

80

The rungs are icy, forcing her to climb slower than she would like. She keeps her eyes forward, never once looking down. When the wind gusts she pauses and waits for it to subside.

She's midway to the top when her foot SLIPS on an icy rung.

She clutches the pole tightly, wind whistling in her ears. She waits until her heart slows and she's recovered from her near fall.

Then looks up to gauge the distance left to the JUNCTION BOX.

Keeps climbing.

She reaches the last rung at the TOP OF THE TELEPHONE POLE.

It's noisy up here, thanks to the WIND and the icy telephone wires, source of the mysterious HUMMING she's been hearing.

She tries the little metal door of the grey JUNCTION BOX.

Locked.

GIRL

No!!!

She fumbles in her coat, takes out the SCISSORS, uses them to try and pry open the junction box (which turns out to be frozen shut, not locked after all.)

It finally yields, opening.

(CONTINUED)

Revealing a rat's nest of multicolored WIRES and PHONE JACKS.

Hurrying now, she tugs her glove off with her teeth, and with her bare hand retrieves the cord-wrapped RECEIVER from inside her sweater. In her effort to juggle all these items she loses her grip on the SCISSORS...

Which drop all the way down to disappear in the snow below.

She concentrates now on the receiver. But her fingers are so clumsy from the cold, she fumbles it.

And the receiver FALLS too.

Then jerks to a STOP a few feet below as it reaches the limit of its cord.

Which she's managed to catch. She winds the receiver up by its cord, finally plugs the jack-end into the junction box.

Hears a DIAL TONE.

GIRL (cont'd)
(stunned she did it)
Oh my god!

Teeth chattering she thumbs "0" for the operator.

GIRL (cont'd)
(as it rings)
Please please please please please-

On the third ring an OPERATOR answers.

OPERATOR
(filtered)
Nine-one-one emergency response.

GIRL
Thank god! Hi! Hello! We need help!

OPERATOR
(filtered)
What's that? Can you repeat-

GIRL
We're on highway 606! Oh god,
please hurry! We need help! My
friend is hurt-

OPERATOR
Can you repeat your-

GIRL
Hello? Hello?

The connection SPARKS and she feels a small shock that makes her drop the phone. When she retrieves it and holds it back to her ear the line is DEAD.

No way of knowing if her message got through.

It's a moment of such soul-crushing despair she shuts her eyes and leans her head against the pole, as if wanting to just quietly die up here thirty feet above the earth.

81 INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - THAT MOMENT 81

CLOSE ON THE RADIO playing nothing but STATIC now.

82 EXT. ROADSIDE / TELEPHONE POLE - AS BEFORE 82

Her eyes open, and she commences climbing back down to earth.

She reaches the second set of rungs from the bottom and drops the last several feet. The snow does little to cushion her fall and she goes sprawling, lays there for a dazed moment.

She starts crawling on all fours back toward the stranded Olds. Suddenly she stops as she comes upon-

A WOMAN'S BARE FEET

standing in the snow, veins visible through gravid skin.

A thick spatter of mud lands on the bare foot.

Our girl raises her eyes to see -

A DEAD WOMAN

It's the blonde we saw raped and murdered in the summer of 1958. Her dress is in tattered ruins, coated in leaves and dirt like someone recently exhumed from a shallow grave.

Her head is twisted at an unnatural angle on a broken neck.

Our girl GASPS and scrambles to her feet, fleeing.

Only to stop dead in her tracks as she nearly collides with-

TWO DEAD TEENAGE BOYS

The joyriding teens killed on Christmas Eve 1958.

Both wear blood-soaked letterman jackets bearing the DISTINCTIVE COUGAR INSIGNIA and stand in a post-accident haze.

One's chest is concave, stove-in by the impact with the steering wheel. The other's teeth are visible where his cheek has been torn away.

She reels away in horror, forced to take the long way back to the Oldsmobile. She runs the last few yards to the car where we can hear the eerie sound of STATIC emanating from the radio as she hurls herself -

Inside. Safe!

She sits there, out of breath. She glances over quickly at our guy, gravely pale, slumped unconscious behind the steering wheel.

She chafes her hands to get the circulation going again.

She turns down the volume on the radio.

GIRL

(chattering teeth)

- I did it - got through - but I
don't know how much she understood -
the operator I mean -

He doesn't respond.

GIRL (cont'd)

- Just have to hope - maybe - they
can trace the line -

When this too gets no response from him she looks over, frowning. She scoots a little closer across the front seat toward him.

Which is when WE SEE -

HIS GHOST

standing outside the car, slack-expressed and staring.

He stands there a beat, then drifts off into the night.

GIRL (cont'd)
Hang in there, can't be much
longer...

She reaches to jostle him awake. One touch confirms her worst fears.

She reaches up to switch on the INTERIOR LIGHT, to get a better look at him.

GIRL (cont'd)
Oh god!

Her reaction is so sudden and violent and overwhelming it seems for a moment she's going to be sick. She covers her mouth, muffling a cry of raw-throated terror.

Then shakes him again, harder this time, desperate to wake him.

GIRL (cont'd)
No! Please! Don't leave me alone!

Tears spill down her cheeks as she fights hysteria. She shakes him harder. His inert body spills to one side, slumping against her.

Her grief turns to something else, instinctive and immediate: revulsion, at the feel of his cold dead weight against her.

She scrambles across the front seat to put as much distance as she can between herself and the corpse.

Cowers against the passenger door.

The INTERIOR LIGHT flickers out as the battery finally dies.

The door opens and she backs out, hauling the dead body after her. Her face is red, tear-streaked.

GIRL
(crying)
Sorry... sorry... I'm sorry...

She strains to move his dead weight. Her feet slip on the ice and she lets go of him, catching herself on the open door.

She grabs the body under the armpits, hauls with all her strength. Drags him a few yards away from the Oldsmobile. His boot heels ploughing twin gouges in the snow.

Behind her, gravity pulls the heavy car door shut with a soft THUNK.

Suddenly her feet go out from under her as she hits a patch of ice. She goes down hard on her ass, sprawling. Sits there a beat, as-

HEADLIGHTS appear on the dark horizon. We see them a split-second before she does...

He's coming.

When she glimpses the oncoming headlights out of the corner of her eye she turns her head slowly in their direction, and for an instant it almost seems as if they don't register.

Then her eyes widen in terror, she lets out a small whimper, and leaps into action.

She scrambles to her feet and makes a mad dash toward the Oldsmobile -

Only to find when she tugs on the handle that it's STUCK.

She yanks on it harder, getting frantic now, as -

The HEADLIGHTS get brighter, bearing down, close enough now that we can hear the ROAR of the oncoming engine.

She kicks the handle, tugs with all her might, rocking the car but not succeeding in getting the door open.

As the headlights become BLINDING...

Suddenly there's the sound of BRAKES being engaged, and the headlights slow to a stop just a few yards shy of where she's standing in the middle of the road.

She shields her eyes with an upraised hand.

It's a SNOWPLOW.

The SNOWPLOW DRIVER, 50s, sticks his head out the window.

SNOWPLOW DRIVER
You kids okay?

She's too stunned to speak.

TITLE CARD ON BLACK:

5:43 A.M.

85 EXT. SNOWPLOW / ROADSIDE - NIGHT

85

The snowplow driver is a hale townie dressed like a high school principal on a hunting trip.

He and our girl transfer our guy's lifeless body to the BACK SEAT of the snowplow.

86 INT. SNOWPLOW - CONTINUOUS

86

Inside the cab it's blessedly warm. The dashboard panel, GPS and CB radio are lit up like a Christmas tree.

While the snowplow driver tests the front tire chains, our girl checks on our guy's body.

The snowplow driver climbs up behind the wheel, gives her a sympathetic look. Picks up the C.B. microphone.

SNOWPLOW DRIVER
(to C.B.)
Dispatch, come in...

DISPATCH (RADIO)
Go ahead...

SNOWPLOW DRIVER
I'm out at the site of that reported accident on 606. One of them didn't make it. I'm taking the other directly to the trauma unit in Hadleyville.

DISPATCH (RADIO)
Copy that.

The driver puts the snowplow in gear and sets off driving.

Her eyes cut to the-

SIDEVIEW MIRROR

Where she sees the STRANDED OLDSMOBILE receding in the distance.

87 EXT. ROUTE 606 - NIGHT 87

The snowplow cruises along, its plow blade throwing twin white rooster's tails of ice and snow to either side.

88 INT. SNOWPLOW - NIGHT 88

She stares blankly out the window at the snow swirling in the headlights.

The snowplow driver makes small-talk to help pass the time.

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

Been some real bad accidents on this road over the years. When I was growing up, there was a family from New York City found out here froze solid-

QUICK CUT TO:

89 EXT. STRANDED VOLVO - DAY (1970) 89

Three blue CORPSES sit in the car: mother, father, infant. Their gaping mouths frozen open in a silent rictus scream.

BACK TO:

90 INT. SNOWPLOW - AS BEFORE 90

The snowplow driver shakes his head at the eerie memory.

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

... fire department had to hose them down with hot water for two hours to thaw them out. I remember back in high school there was a stupid rumor going around if you went driving out here on moonless nights and looked up in your rearview, you might see the dead baby in your backseat ...

She frowns at this, reminded of her earlier vision.

(CONTINUED)

GIRL

What about those ruins up on the hill? The retirement home for old priests?

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

Tragic story. Winter of '61 they were all found froze to death in their beds...

QUICK CUT TO:

91 & 92 OMITTED

91 & 92

93 INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT (1960)

93

ELDERLEY PRIESTS lie motionless in their beds, FACES frozen in blue rictus deathmasks.

BACK TO:

94 INT. SNOWPLOW - AS BEFORE

94

The snowplow driver squints out at the murky horizon ahead.

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

Must've been a pilot on the boiler went out, or something...

CLOSE ON our girl, processing this. She has her suspicions the truth isn't as simple as a pilot light blowing out.

SNOWPLOW DRIVER (cont'd)

Actually, there's no big mystery why this is such a bad stretch of road for motorists. You got low-lying fog that gets trapped in the valley, reduces visibility to-

Just then BRIGHT HEADLIGHTS appear out of the pre-dawn gloom.

SNOWPLOW DRIVER (cont'd)

Who in the hell is out driving in this mess?

He scowls, raising a meaty hand to shield his eyes.

A dread look of déjà vu crosses our girl's face.

(CONTINUED)

94

CONTINUED:

94

She knows.

 SNOWPLOW DRIVER (cont'd)
 Must be Tom McClintic. Only fellow
 I know who lives way out here...

He reaches for the C.B. mike, thumbs the switch.

 SNOWPLOW DRIVER (cont'd)
 (into microphone)
 Tom, is that you?

 GIRL
 It's not Tom...

And as the ONCOMING HEADLIGHTS OF THE HIGHWAY PATROLMAN get brighter, she calmly buckles her seatbelt.

95

EXT. ROUTE 606 - THAT MOMENT

95

The ONCOMING CAR roars down the middle of the pickup's lane, the distance between the speeding vehicles closing fast. The game of chicken is fast approaching the point of no return.

96

INT. SNOWPLOW - AS BEFORE

96

They watch the ONCOMING HEADLIGHTS.

 SNOWPLOW DRIVER
 Doesn't this stupid son of a gun
 realize we're bigger than him?! No
 way he's going to win this fight!

He blasts his horn, but the HEADLIGHTS just keep coming.

She braces for impact. At the last possible moment the snowplow driver jerks the wheel hard to the right.

97

EXT. ROUTE 606 - NIGHT

97

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- The snowplow fishtails out of control, its plow blade slicing through snow and ice until metal bites blacktop, throwing up SPARKS.

- The 1950s HIGHWAY PATROL CAR (the HIGHWAY PATROLMAN behind the wheel) veering off in the opposite direction.

(CONTINUED)

- The snowplow flipping ASS-OVER-TEAKETTLE
- Inside the snowplow the world somersaults, our guy's body thrown halfway out of the shattered windshield onto the hood.
- The highway patrol car skidding off the side of the road and dropping from sight, crashing with a SPLASH somewhere in the darkness.
- As the snowplow comes to a rest right-side up on its tires as we -

SMASH TO BLACK

The WRECKED SNOWPLOW has ended up on the edge of the ravine where the highway patrol car disappeared.

There's a metallic GROAN of hinges as the snowplow's driver's side door opens and the SNOWPLOW DRIVER, dazed but unhurt, climbs out.

He calls down into the gloom below, where we hear the faint sounds of the highway patrol car's RADIO playing "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree."

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

Hang on, officer, I'm coming...

Then he begins to make his way down.

Our girl rouses from her post-accident daze. Sees the body of our guy thrown through the windshield. She eases it back inside and onto the seat beside her.

She looks up in time to see through the windshield -

The SNOWPLOW DRIVER making his way down the steep slippery ice-and-leaf-covered embankment.

Her eyes go wide as she suddenly realizes where he's headed.

GIRL

No!!!

She unbuckles her seatbelt, throws open the passenger door, exits.

100 EXT. SNOWPLOW / ROADSIDE - NIGHT 100

The instant she sets foot outside she stops dead, the blood rushing from her face and her eyes going wide in disbelief.

PAN 360-DEGREES to reveal a landscape she knows all-too-well:

The stranded '88 Oldsmobile.

The telephone pole she climbed.

They haven't gone anywhere.

No time to puzzle it out. The sound of the snowplow driver making his way down the embankment O.S. stirs her to action.

101 EXT. RAVINE - CONTINUOUS 101

She starts down the steep snowy embankment after the snowplow driver, who is now far enough below to be out of sight.

GIRL

(calling down)

Wait! Don't go down there! Stop!

Suddenly the snowy leaves gives way under her and she SLIPS.

Lands hard and SLIDES the rest of the way down on her ass.

102 EXT. BOTTOM OF RAVINE - CONTINUOUS 102

She comes to a stop thirty feet below at the bottom of the ravine beside the surprised SNOWPLOW DRIVER.

And the HIGHWAY PATROL CAR.

It's resting on its roof in the snow at the bottom of the ravine, wheels in the air. It looks like an overturned beetle.

Something moves in its front seat.

The snowplow driver calls to the TRAPPED HIGHWAY PATROLMAN.

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

Hang on, officer! We'll get you out!

She catches his arm to stop him.

(CONTINUED)

GIRL

No!!! Don't go near it!!!

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

What!!? We have to get him out of there...

Smoke rises from the car's gas tank, a small FIRE burning.

GIRL

Doesn't matter! He's already dead!

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

What the hell are you talking about?

Inside the overturned car the trapped HIGHWAY PATROLMAN struggles. His hat has fallen off and floats in the icy water flooding the car, threatening to short the radio.

Which is playing the same song as Christmas Eve fifty-seven years earlier. "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree."

Despite being pinned upside-down and in pain from injuries sustained in the accident, he chuckles at his predicament. We realize he's been drinking.

As he struggles to free himself the cop looks in the direction of the snowplow driver and our girl.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

Should've known you vultures would turn up...

SNOWPLOW DRIVER

Try not to move, officer, you might have a neck injury.

But the cop continues to struggle, pain sobering him.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN

What are you waiting for, a letter from the Bishop?

Suddenly it dawns on our girl that he isn't talking to them.

Also that they aren't alone.

Widen to reveal -

A DOZEN ELDERLY PRIESTS in black winter coats and fedoras are standing all around them on the snowy embankment, faces grim.

The residents of St. Christopher's Home for Retired Clergy.

Suddenly there's a WHOOSH as the engine fire spreads across the car's undercarriage, moving toward the FUEL TANK.

The priests exchange a look, reaching some silent decision.

The LEADER of the elderly priests comes forward.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN (cont'd)
Hurry it up, I smell gas...

The snowplow driver stands there, confused by what he's witnessing.

The old priest crouches down, reaches through the open window past the trapped highway patrolman.

Rips out the chattering TWO-WAY RADIO by its cord.

The cop's face registers disbelief, then fury, as he realizes the priests aren't going to help him. Are in fact condemning him for years of crimes committed on this stretch of road.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN (cont'd)
(struggling)
Oh no you don't! You bastards have no right to sit in judgement of me. I know what you're thinking but I had nothing to do with that drunk girl's disappearance. I saw her home safely. Just ask the County investigators. And anything else you think you saw? All of it was lawfully done!

He sputters as gasoline drips on his face from above.

Another WHOOSH, blue flames spreading out from the fuel line.

The cop smells smoke, a pleading note entering his voice now.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN (cont'd)
Please, father... For the love of Christ have mercy on a poor sinner!

There's a SMALL EXPLOSION, and the inside of the car starts filling with FLAMES and black smoke.

The trapped highway patrolman begins burning alive, cursing.

HIGHWAY PATROLMAN (cont'd)
 Goddamn you filthy bastards! You
 think you'll be rid of me!? You'll
never be rid of me!! I'll be your
 worst nightmare!! I'll be -

The rest is lost in a second larger EXPLOSION.

Flames flicker on the elderly faces of the priests gathered here to bear mute witness. They watch the burning patrol car for a moment longer, then one by one climb the embankment.

CUT TO:

A103 EXT. ROADSIDE - NIGHT (1958)

A103

Christmas, 1958. The crash scene we saw depicted in the news clipping. The wrecked '55 CROWN VIC. PRIESTS administering last rights two the two TEENS in letter jackets: one already dead, the other breathing his last breaths.

BACK TO:

B103 EXT. BOTTOM OF RAVINE - AS BEFORE

B103

Our girl and the rattled snowplow driver stand there in the silence and the flickering firelight from the burning car.

GIRL

Come on. We can go now. It's over.

The snowplow driver, stunned, speechless, can only stand there and nod.

Suddenly -

The COP launches himself out of the window of the overturned car at them.

Skin peeled and blackened, he starts crawling over the rocks, dragging his paralyzed lower body after them.

The snowplow driver's eyes go wide and he stands rooted in place, unable to move.

She grabs him by the arm, pulls him away.

GIRL (cont'd)

MOVE!!

(CONTINUED)

He comes to his senses, staggers up the embankment after her. He loses his footing on the icy rocks and goes sprawling.

As the cop seizes him around the legs, and starts crawling up the length of his body.

We hear the sizzle of instant FROSTBITE, the frost spreading with time-lapse speed up the snowplow driver's limbs as he shrieks in agony.

Until even his shriek is FROZEN IN HIS LUNGS.

ANGLE ON OUR GIRL

As she begins scrambling up the snowy slope away from the horror below.

Suddenly she loses her grip and starts to slide back down on her belly toward the cop a dozen feet below.

She whimpers, fingers clutching at anything.

Finally she succeeds, manages to haul herself up the steep embankment, climbing with everything she's got left in her until she reaches the road.

103 EXT. TOP OF THE RAVINE / WRECKED SNOWPLOW - NIGHT 103

She hauls herself up from the gloomy abyss, wrenches the driver side door open and scrambles inside -

104 INT. WRECKED SNOWPLOW - CONTINUOUS 104

She pulls the door closed, twists the key in the ignition. Nothing.

GIRL
(urgently)
Come on, come on!

She tries again. And again. But the engine is dead.

Just then she notices the "power" light glowing on the C.B. She ducks under the dashboard, retrieves the microphone, sits up again -

The cop.

Unscathed.

Standing right outside the snowplow, restored to his former glory, grinning at her.

Then the smile curdles. He reaches through the shattered window. Grabbing for her.

She scrabbles just out of reach. Pins herself against the opposite door. Cornered.

Suddenly -

GUY

Get away from her, you bastard!

And OUR GUY'S GHOST appears out of the gloom.

He swings a CROWBAR into the cop's skull.

And, just like before, there's a VIOLENT FLASH OF light and -

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - NIGHT

It's like someone pressed RESET.

She's back inside the STRANDED OLDSMOBILE, seated beside the body of our guy.

Her panicked breathing turns into hyperventilation as she realizes all efforts to escape the road are futile.

Suddenly she spots something through the windshield that causes her breath to catch -

OUR GUY'S GHOST

heading down the road toward the trees.

She gasps. Starts sobbing.

Throws open the door and scrambles out.

EXT. STRANDED OLDSMOBILE - CONTINUOUS

The sky is showing the first signs of approaching dawn.

She watches OUR GUY'S GHOST moving into the woods, back toward the direction from which they came.

She stands there, exhausted, spent.

Suddenly -

A familiar SONG begins to chime on her cellphone RINGTONE:

CELLPHONE
 ("Rockin Around the X-mas
 Tree...")
Ding-da-da DING, da-DING da-DING...

Her eyes widen in terror. She fumbles out the cellphone.
 Stabs the "off" button with her thumb.

She instinctively starts back to the stranded Oldsmobile -

Stops -

Looks at the ghost.

And in that moment decides, for better or worse, to follow
 him.

She takes off down the road.

We follow as she hurries to catch up with our guy's ghost.

GIRL
 (crying; breathless)
 Wait!

She's close enough now to hear that he's MUMBLING something.

GUY'S GHOST
 ...I would've told you everything
 eventually...

Exhausted, she's having trouble keeping up with him.

GIRL
 I know.

GUY'S GHOST
 ...then it wouldn't be stalkerish.

GIRL
 (out of breath)
 I know!

GUY'S GHOST
 ... It would just be this sweet
 funny story we'd have...

But it's no use. She stops trying to keep up and pauses briefly, devastated, catching her breath. Then she pushes on in the direction he went.

TIME DISSOLVE:

It's almost light out now, and SHE'S ALONE, staggering along the road as quickly as her exhausted state allows. It's like running in a dream, never fast enough to outdistance an unseen pursuer.

But then she hears it -

THE HIGHWAY.

She can't believe she's made it back to civilization.

FADE TO BLACK.

The gas pumps are crowded with EMERGENCY VEHICLES and PERSONNEL. The morning calm is broken by the BEEP BEEP BEEP of trucks backing up, the BLEET of arriving ambulances, the constant CHATTER of two-way radios.

OUR GIRL is seated in the back of an open ambulance with a blanket draped around her shoulders, allowing EMTs to treat her frostbite.

She watches ATTENDANTS from the county morgue zip the bodies of our guy and the snowplow driver into BODYBAGS.

Suddenly she remembers her cellphone, and takes it out.

INSERT CELLPHONE DISPLAY --

It's the DIGITAL PICTURE OF OUR GUY when she first met him, asleep behind the wheel of the '88 Olds in student parking.

BACK TO SCENE

She closes her cellphone.

The EMT helps her into the passenger seat of the ambulance.

As the ambulance drives off we CRANE UP to see...

(CONTINUED)

In the distance, the haunted road snaking through the white forest.

END FILM

ROLL CREDITS