

LABOR OF LOVE

by

M. Night Shyamalan

FADE IN:

EXT. ROUTE 476 - OUTSKIRTS OF PHILADELPHIA - NIGHT

A three lane highway relegated to one lane. The serpentine line of cars bottlenecks as it slithers by. An arch of ORANGE AND RED FLARES outlines the area of shattered glass and twisted metal.

We are at the site of a gruesome car accident. An ambulance and four police cars are on the scene. Two cars are involved in the crash. The first, a SILVER CADILLAC with its front caved in a perfect semi-circle; there is no-one inside the car.

The second car is a different story entirely. A DARK GREEN HONDA PRELUDE crushed against the concrete median that separates the South-bound lanes from the North-bound lanes. All the windows have imploded. The original seventeen foot length of the car, compressed to ten. The hood has folded back into the front seat. This car is not empty! Through the sliver that used to be a window, WE SEE a female hand, purple, swollen and bloody.

Some drivers have stopped their cars on the shoulder and have walked over to the flares. A set of cops wave them back.

POLICE OFFICER

Get back in your cars and continue with the traffic. There is nothing you can do.

(beat)

Get back in your cars...

CUT TO:

OFFICER PIERCE speaks to a female OFFICER DANA.

OFFICER PIERCE

What's the story?

OFFICER DANA

She's been dead about ten minutes. The jaws are on the way... Ran a license check. Her name is Ellen Parker. Forty-two years old.

OFFICER PIERCE

What about him?

Pierce gestures to a HISPANIC TEENAGER who is cuffed behind his back and being led to a police car.

OFFICER DANA

D.U.I.

OFFICER PIERCE

Shit... How old is he?

OFFICER DANA

Seventeen. It's his grandfather's car. On his way back from drinking with the 'boys'.

Pierce lets it sink in.

OFFICER PIERCE

Who do we contact for her?

Dana checks the papers in her hand.

OFFICER DANA

Her husband. Maurice Parker. They live in Wynnewood. Married seventeen years.

Pierce looks back at what remains of the HONDA PRELUDE. Beat.

OFFICER PIERCE

There isn't any good left in the world, Dana. Not one damn thing.

CLOSE UP of the hypnotic RED AND BLUE LIGHTS that consume the highway.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROAD - EARLY MORNING

"TWO WEEKS EARLIER"

Just AFTER DAWN. A gentle mist hangs in the air. The calm suburban streets wait to be flooded with a sea of middle class homeowners on their way to work...

A woman's REEBOK CROSS-TRAINERS move along the sidewalk... long, brisk steps, steps people have when walking with a purpose...

The Cross-Trainees enter the doors of a bakery store seconds after a man turns a window-sign from "CLOSED" to "OPEN"... This happens with precision timing, not losing a step... a well practiced routine.

CUT TO:

INT. ANGELO'S BAKERY - MORNING

ANGELO, a large man, black slicked hair -- has laid out three identical loaves of RAISIN BREAD on the counter.

ANGELO

Very good batch today.

We finally see the person standing in the REEBOK CROSS TRAINERS... MRS. ELLEN PARKER, a woman in her forties with a heart-warming smile and wise glint in her eyes. The kind of woman that somehow becomes more beautiful with age.

She carefully squeezes each loaf. Her hand hovers over the middle loaf.

ELLEN

That one.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Twenty minutes later. The basket of the "chosen" raisin bread is placed on the center of a table. Ellen covers it with a cloth napkin.

The eggs sizzle in a pan. We find Ellen cooking breakfast. A stunning African Grey Parrot sits proudly on Ellen's shoulder. CLAUDE is a breathtaking creature with grey feathers and a cherry red tail.

The DOOR BELL RINGS.

CUT TO:

FRONT DOOR

where a delivery man hands over a bouquet of VIOLET ORCHIDS. Claude, still perched on Ellen like a clothing accessory, spreads his impressive wings defensively. The delivery man scans the far wall to find a collection of bird photographs. A dazzling collection of all kinds of birds, elaborately framed and hung.

Ellen signs the release and closes the door. She takes a deep smell of the violet orchids and looks down the hall to the open bedroom door with a glowing smile. We CATCH A GLIMPSE of a man dressing.

CUT TO:

KITCHEN

Where Ellen and her husband are eating breakfast. Claude is now in a cage in the hallway.

MR. MAURICE PARKER eats a buttered piece of raisin bread. He is a man in his late forties, neatly combed hair, his New York Times folded into a manageable rectangle. This is a man who has been seated a great deal of his life... the type of man who breaks into a sweat when taking out the garbage.

He feels a stare and looks up to find his wife with that

glowing smile. He smiles back.

Ellen gestures with her eyes to the violet orchids now displayed proudly on the window ledge.

MAURICE

Yes?

ELLEN

The flowers... they're beautiful.

Maurice studies them.

MAURICE

They are... who sent them?

Beat. This takes Ellen by surprise. Maurice catches the expression.

MAURICE

You thought I sent them?

ELLEN

(disappointed)

There was no card.

Maurice reaches over and searches the bouquet.

MAURICE

Have I forgotten something? Is this a special day?

ELLEN

(flat)

It's just a regular day.

Maurice pulls out a small bent card from between the stems.

MAURICE

It's from Dan and Kate Wilkins... for dinner last week...

Maurice hands Ellen the card, she looks at it uninterested.

MAURICE

It's a special day isn't it?

ELLEN

Well, I'm sure it's not Christmas, because you'd be worried about how much money we don't have to spend on each other... I know it's not New Years, because you'd be going on and on about wearing a tuxedo and how much you don't like to dance... and I'm sure it's not our anniversary, because I didn't find

an envelope with a hundred dollars
cash on my bureau with a note that
says, 'Pick out something
pretty'... Yes -- Maurice -- I'm
virtually certain it's not a
special day today.

Ellen begins to eat. Maurice stares at her...

MAURICE

You're mad at me... You were
beaming a minute ago, but since I
didn't send the flowers... now
you're mad at me.

Beat.

MAURICE

Why would I send flowers? What's
the occasion.

Ellen instantly becomes emotional.

ELLEN

Occasion? Because you love me...
That's the occasion.

Ellen returns to eating. Maurice stares at her quietly.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - MORNING

A SHAFT OF LIGHT penetrates the darkness of a room... growing
LARGER as the door swings open.

Ellen steps in first followed by Maurice. Ellen goes
straight for the blinds. BURST OF LIGHT stab the room.

The spines of the BOOKS catch the light... rows and rows of
books cradled by a maze of mahogany book shelves. This is an
old-fashioned store with antique chairs at select places. A
coffee table sits near the window with a set of deep
cushioned sofa-chairs. This store is a home...

Maurice moves behind the counter and TURNS ON THE RADIO.
CHOPIN FLOWS from the old speakers atop the corner shelves --
delicately.

Ellen opens the door to the store and locks it in that
position with a slanted piece of wood... The store is now
open.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - DAY

Half a dozen people wander the isles. Maurice's eyes drift to a pair of eleven year olds who have sauntered into the store. One boy disappears behind "Philosophy" and reappears momentarily with his sweat-shirt zipped up to his neck -- a rectangle is outlined under his shirt.

MAURICE

I see that!

Maurice comes around the corner -- the boys HAUL ASS out of the store. They're long gone before Maurice reaches the door. He yells after them.

MAURICE

I'm getting a Doberman! Two!

Ellen who is sitting in the back room doing the accounts, comes out when she hears the commotion.

ELLEN

You've been saying that for two years; I think they know you're bluffing.

Maurice inspects the "Philosophy" section.

Maurice looks up as a young man, early twenties, hurries in. KRIS REDDY walks past Maurice, his black locks of hair peeking out from under his Philadelphia Eagles cap.

KRIS

(to Maurice)

Lizy Bennett?

ELLEN

Hi Kris.

Kris waves as he removes his jacket. He is wearing a PARKER BOOKS T-shirt underneath. He pins an "Assistant Manager" tag on.

Maurice thinks to himself.

MAURICE

Lizy, Eliza... Elizabeth Bennett...
(the answer comes to him)
Pride and Prejudice.

KRIS

You're amazing.

MAURICE

It has to be a full character's name.

KRIS

They called her 'Lizy' in the

book...

(beat)

Sorry I was late. My jeep died on the way over from the paper.

MAURICE

They printed your article on, 'Dry Verses Can Dog Food'... Very enlightening.

KRIS

Pulitzer, here I come.

Kris notices as Maurice goes back to searching the isles.

KRIS

What happened?

MAURICE

Never have children. If they're not a burden to you, they're a burden to someone else.

ELLEN

(on the end of his words)

Kris, go to the pharmacy. Ask Mr. Donnavan to get you a large bottle of Geritol... Tell him, Maurice has officially become a grumpy old man.

KRIS

What'd they take this time?

MAURICE

Nietzsche!... As if they're going to read Nietzsche.

Maurice moves back behind the counter clearly irritated.

ELLEN

They pick on you because they can get a rise out of you... children can sense those things.

Kris quickly opens his black shoulder bag and pulls out a mini-tape recorder. He talks into it -- dead serious.

KRIS

Monday -- August 24... Juvenile delinquency -- Are the victims to blame?

CLICK. The tape recorder returns to the bag. Ellen stares at him curiously.

KRIS

Story ideas. I'll forget them

otherwise.

Ellen nods with realization. Ellen and Kris turn their attention to Maurice who is mumbling to himself angrily. He looks out the window to the street to see a familiar group of school boys waving at him tauntingly.

CUT TO:

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

DIMLY LIT. Red and gold paper mache lanterns are sprinkled around the room. WE FIND Ellen and Maurice polishing off a dish of General Tso's Chicken.

MAURICE

Two thousand square feet... We can add a used book section.

Ellen is not listening. She is staring at a young couple two tables over, who can't take their eyes off each other.

MAURICE

Next door is a jewelry store with a full-time security guard... He stands outside all day. Let's see them try and take Nietzsche then...

Maurice finally notices Ellen is not listening.

MAURICE

Ellen?

ELLEN

(snapping out of it)
What?

MAURICE

The new store?

ELLEN

Honey, I told you. If it makes you happy, we should just do it.

MAURICE

It's a tremendous amount of work -- moving.

ELLEN

We can do it together.

Maurice needed the support. His face brightens.

CUT TO:

LATER

An empty table. The dishes have been cleared. Maurice and Ellen are opening their fortune cookies.

MAURICE

What's your's say?

Beat.

ELLEN

... Love is shown through actions
not just words.

MAURICE

What's that? That's not a
fortune... You will be rich...
That's a fortune. What you have is
a statement.

ELLEN

What it is -- is the truth.

MAURICE

I don't follow.

Beat.

ELLEN

Maurice, what would you do for me?
What would you do for our love?
I'm not talking about saying, I'm
talking about doing.

Maurice notices the STRAIN IN HER VOICE.

MAURICE

Is this going to be similar to the
flower incident?

ELLEN

(very emotional)
Sometimes people need to see things
done for them -- because sooner or
later they don't believe the words
anymore.

MAURICE

(raising his voice)
You don't think I love you?

Customers react.

ELLEN

(lowering the volume)
I want to be shown...
(beat)
Maurice would you do anything for
me?

MAURICE

Yes.

ELLEN

Anything?

MAURICE

What do you want from me? Would I swim across an ocean for you?... Would I walk across the United States for you? Yes... Yes I would. You know that.

ELLEN

(soft)

No I don't. I don't even know if you'd walk across the street for me.

Maurice is getting redder by the second. The entire restaurant hangs on his response...

MAURICE

So what have you done for me that's so earth-shattering?

The waiter closest to the table cringes with Maurice's words. Ellen drains of color. She stares at him in complete and utter disbelief. She drills him with this iron glare for an eternity then grabs her purse and heads to the exit. Maurice stares at the table for a moment to gather what's left of his dignity and follows her out.

The waiter moves to the table and clears the aftermath. He sees Ellen's fortune crumpled next to her tea cup. He unravels it. The fortune reads...

"YOU ARE A FRIENDLY AND GENEROUS PERSON."

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The room is LIT BY ONE BEDSIDE LAMP. Maurice is sitting in bed wearing a robe. Reading glasses at the end of his nose as he rubs a yellow cloth over a SILVER MEDALLION. The medallion has a raised picture of a lamp, the kind Aladdin uses, seated on an open book and the words BOOK SOCIETY - 1992. Maurice meticulously rubs away the smudge marks.

Ellen is at the edge of the bed -- as far from Maurice as possible. Her back is to him as she sleeps under the covers. She speaks without turning around.

ELLEN

Why do you polish that thing all

the time?

MAURICE

You're talking to me?

ELLEN

Why do you polish it?

Maurice studies the impressive silver medallion.

MAURICE

A Book Society Award is a very prestigious thing.

ELLEN

Why are you polishing it -- in bed -- in your pajamas -- at 11:15 at night? Are you going to show it to someone?

MAURICE

No.

ELLEN

Then why?

MAURICE

There's no reason.

ELLEN

Exactly. No reason. No occasion. It just makes you feel good to do something for it, to express your pride and affection for it some how...

(beat)

How come you'd do that for a piece of metal and not for me?

Maurice has no answer. He just stares at his hands.

ELLEN'S face can be seen under the covers facing away from Maurice. Her eyes are red. The tears roll off her nose and land on the pillow unseen and unheard.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The kitchen table is mockingly empty. No bread. Not even a crumb. Maurice, dressed for work, eyes the table with great resolve. He rubs his hands together ceremoniously.

MAURICE

I can do this.

Maurice moves to the fridge and gets out two eggs, onions,

green peppers and mushrooms.

CLAUDE is chirping INCESSANTLY FROM THE HALL.

The pile teeters precariously in Maurice's arms as he moves to the counter. Next the pans come out -- He tries to pull the bottom pan from the cabinet --

CUT TO:

BEDROOM

Ellen is seated in bed, arms crossed -- equal resolve in her face. A LARGE METALLIC CRASH OF POTS ECHOES FROM DOWNSTAIRS. Ellen grabs her robe.

CUT TO:

HALLWAY

Ellen gently takes Claude out of his cage. She kisses him. The bird, once frantic, instantly at peace.

ELLEN

(whispering)

You missed mommie... worried when I didn't come down... my baby... so sweet.

Ellen feeds the bird as she peeks around the corner, careful not to be seen. Maurice is desperately trying to cook an out of control omelette. It spills over the sides and SIZZLES on the range top. He tries to scoop it up with the pan, tilting it further -- further -- the entire omelette slides onto the range. Maurice frantically tries to wrangle it back in. Man vs. Egg. Man losing.

Ellen has to keep herself from laughing. Her expression changes to pity as she watches the chaos unfold.

CUT TO:

INT. BAKERY - MORNING

Ellen scrutinizes a new three loaves of raisin bread.

ELLEN

That one.

Angelo smiles and packages the chosen loaf.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

A defeated Maurice is eating an apple. He looks up with surprise as Ellen walks into the kitchen from the back door,

a bag under her arm. She glances at him and then moves to the counter where she prepares the bread for serving. Ellen looks down into the trash to find the rebellious omelette sitting uneaten.

The bread gets laid out in its usual basket, in its usual manner. Maurice says nothing as Ellen pulls two eggs from the fridge and cracks them on a sizzling pan with expert ease.

ELLEN

Onions?

Maurice smiles warmly at his wife's back before moving to her and hugging her from behind. He whispers in her ear.

MAURICE

Why do you put up with me?

Beat.

ELLEN

Love... has something to do with it.

Maurice reaches over and turns off the stove. He then turns Ellen around and kisses her long and hard. Ellen pulls away gently and stares into his eyes. Maurice looks very emotional.

MAURICE

I do love you... very, very much.

ELLEN

Show me.

MAURICE

(with all his heart)
I will -- I promise.

Ellen kisses Maurice and returns to the eggs. Maurice continues to hug her from behind. The MORNING SUN pours into the kitchen covering Ellen and Maurice in a golden bath.

CUT TO:

INT. EMPTY STORE - AFTERNOON

A large black man wearing a dress shirt, sleeves rolled up to the elbows **TURNS ON** a switch. A SET OF TUBE LIGHTS **FLICKER TO LIFE**.

CARL STONE leads Maurice out to the main room which is presently a cob-web infested, barren space with a few discarded packing boxes left in the corners.

Maurice runs his fingertips against the wall.

MAURICE

History and the arts will be
here...

His hand makes a grand swirl pointing to another area. He says the next two words with great awe as if he was saying something holy.

MAURICE

The Classics...

Carl watches curiously as Maurice walks around in a trance. He moves to the bay window that over looks the street.

MAURICE

We'll have a hand-painted sign...
(another grand swirl)
... Parker Books.

Maurice's already bright eyes, brighten even more as he spots the security guard strolling up and down the front of the jewelry store. The guard catches his stare and waves. Maurice is aglow... He turns to Carl.

MAURICE

This is my dream... it's finally
here.

Carl has to smile -- rarely does he see someone so happy.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE ROOM - AFTERNOON

We are in Carl's cramped upstairs office... just enough room to walk amongst the file cabinets.

Maurice holds his pen over the documents before him.

MAURICE

I wish my wife were here. She
should see this...
(stalling)
She had a doctors appointment in
Blue Bell. That's a one and a half
hour drive. Ellen's been going to
that doctor since she moved to
Pennsylvania...

CARL

(understanding)
We could do this tomorrow?

MAURICE

Ellen gave me strict orders to sign
it... We invited some friends over

-- you see, for a celebration.

Carl smiles patiently, he's seen this before.

Maurice gathers his strength as he puts pen to paper... He scribbles his signature quickly and let's the pen drop to the table top as if all the energy drained from his body. He looks up to Carl with powerful eyes.

MAURICE

Every journey begins with one step right?

Beat.

CARL

Enjoy your party Mr. Parker... Your new store will be waiting for you Monday morning.

Carl and Maurice shake hands like best friends.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

A wine chiller sits proudly on the coffee table. The SOUNDS OF LIGHT CONVERSATION float through the room. About ten friends and family have gathered.

Maurice sits on the sofa nearest the window. He's listening to the drone of TED PRICE.

Ellen is not present.

TED

... So she says the "L" word, after two dates, the "L" word! She says 'Don't you believe in true love? Love that can conquer all?' I say, 'Whoa, hold on. Just so we're clear on things, I think love these days is shit. It don't mean a thing and it don't stand for nothing. Shit.'... You know what she says, 'Fine, but how do you feel about kids?'

Everyone near the SOFA LAUGHS. A CAR LIGHT DANCES ON THE CURTAINS... Maurice quickly pulls the curtain aside and watches as the car pulls past the house and around the corner. Maurice turns back from the window hiding his concern and without missing a beat...

MAURICE

It's nice to see you don't have any scars from your divorce.

This brings on another ROUND OF LAUGHTER.

THE TELEPHONE RINGS.

Maurice rises from his seat -- but is waved off by ADELLE MATLIN who picks up the phone right away. Adelle is Maurice's niece, early thirties, very attractive and always smiling -- except at this moment.

Ted begins another one of his stories -- the words are incoherent as Maurice watches Adelle carefully... Adelle turns her back to the room as she talks and then DISAPPEARS into the kitchen stretching the phone cord around the doorway... Something is definitely wrong.

Maurice steadies his gaze at the door of the kitchen... eternal seconds pass before Adelle appears again. She looks different -- ghostly. She glances up for a fraction of a second locking eyes with her uncle -- she immediately looks away.

Maurice watches Adelle move to her husband GERALD and whispers in his ear. Gerald changes instantly -- taking on the same ghostly transformation -- his eyes dart to Maurice.

Ted's story is cut off as Maurice speaks LOUDLY...

MAURICE

What's wrong?

The room goes SILENT as all eyes fall on Adelle and Gerald.

GERALD

(shaking)

Maurice, can we go into the dining room?

Beat.

MAURICE

What's happened to my wife?

This hits everyone in the room like a bomb. A dread hangs over every passing second... Gerald crumbles under the moment... Adelle begins to cry.

GERALD

There was a car accident... Drunk driver.

Some of the crowd reacts. A woman covers her mouth. The moment is unbearable.

MAURICE

(to himself)

Please God -- don't do this.

Gerald cracks -- the tears start to flow from his eyes.

GERALD

Maurice, it was serious... I don't
know how to --

Gerald buries his face into the heels of his palms as if
trying to contain an explosion in his head.

GERALD

Oh Jesus, please help me... She
didn't... Ellen didn't make it...
Ellen's dead Maurice.

Maurice closes his eyes shut tightly... like a child scared
of the dark.

Adelle blacks out, knocking over the wine chiller on the way
to the ground. In less than a minute the room has
transformed from a celebration to a mourning. Everyone is
frozen staring at Maurice for their cue... A child in her
mother's arms begins to cry as if aware of the circumstances.

EXTREME CLOSE UP. Maurice opens his eyes slowly. The room
stays still as Maurice stares at Ellen's HAT sitting on the
piano.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PARKER HOUSE - MORNING

A "FTD" Florist truck pulls up. A delivery man, moves with
an extravagant bouquet of flowers to the front door. He
RINGS THE DOOR BELL. No answer. KNOCKS. No answer.

The delivery man looks to the ground and searches, before
placing the bouquet on the porch.

WE NOW SEE that the porch is completely covered with flowers,
bouquets and wreaths. The delivery man tip-toes his way
through the maze of condolences and moves to his truck.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Maurice waits, as the SOUND OF THE FLOWER TRUCK FADES AWAY,
then looks into Claude's cage. Claude sits on the highest
perch and continues to call to his mother. Maurice stares at
the pile of untouched food on the floor of the cage.

MAURICE

Eat the food Claude...

CUT TO:

LATER

Maurice seated at the kitchen table.

He looks at the bouquet of flowers still seated on the window sill. The violet orchids are all dead and shriveled up.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PARKER HOUSE - NIGHT

The house feels abandoned -- lifeless.

THE HOUSE IS SILENT EXCEPT FOR THE FRANTIC CHIRPING OF CLAUDE FROM THE HALL. His hopeless cries punctuating the air every few seconds.

CUT TO:

BEDROOM

Maurice sits in a chair facing Ellen's wardrobe closet. The **LIGHTS IN THE ROOM ARE OFF.** The room is lit only by the **LIGHT FROM THE HALLWAY STREAMING IN AT AN ANGLE.**

Maurice gets up and with a great deal of uncertainty, opens the closet. Maurice stares at the collection of hanging dresses.

He reaches out and pulls the cloth of a floral dress towards him... He closes his eyes and smells the cloth... his face tightens in pain... both hands cling to the dress tightly... he tries desperately, can't fight it -- Maurice Parker begins to cry.

His hands grab frantically at the rest of the dresses -- pressing them to his face and chest.

MAURICE

Oh God... I'm sorry Ellen... I'm so sorry...

He hugs the dresses as if they were her. His weeping turns to a torturous wail of grief... all the love, all the anger spilling out in this one moment.

He falls to the ground yanking all the dresses down with him -- they collapse atop him... He buries his face in his wife's clothes...

The **MUFFLED SOUND OF HIS CRIES ECHOES** through the lonely house.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PARK - MORNING

The neighborhood park. The trees in full bloom. Maurice walks down a path leading to the open fields. Only mothers with strollers and the elderly are out this early.

CUT TO:

PARK BENCH

Maurice is seated on a park bench. Across from him is an ELDERLY COUPLE -- in their seventies. The OLD WOMAN is frail with tiny eyes that disappear when she smiles. The husband is a skinny man with a baseball hat that makes him look like a little boy.

Maurice watches them silently as they sit and hold hands... Their warm laughs and whispered conversations stinging him. He watches as the old man gets up. The old woman tries to make him stay, but he playfully pulls away. She shakes her head like a shy school girl as the old man walks back down the path by himself.

The old woman glances Maurice's way.

OLD WOMAN

Good morning.

MAURICE

Good morning.

The old woman glances at the empty baby carriage standing next to the bench.

OLD WOMAN

Is it a boy or a girl?

MAURICE

Oh, that's not mine.

Maurice gestures to the woman and baby who are sitting on a blanket in the grass.

MAURICE

I don't have kids.

OLD WOMAN

You should. Children are a blessing from God. I have four.

The old woman studies him.

OLD WOMAN

Are you okay?

Beat.

MAURICE

Is that your husband?

She nods, "Yes."

MAURICE

You look so happy -- how long have you been married?

OLD WOMAN

Forty-seven years.

This hits Maurice hard.

OLD WOMAN

Are you married?

This hits Maurice even harder.

MAURICE

(this is painful)
Yes... Seventeen years.

The old woman looks down the path for her husband.

MAURICE

Where did he go?

OLD WOMAN

He's getting my sweater from the car. I said there was a breeze.
(shaking her head)
I told him not to go.

Beat.

MAURICE

May I ask you a question that might sound strange?

OLD WOMAN

Yes.

Beat.

MAURICE

How do you know he loves you?

The old woman looks at him oddly.

MAURICE

I mean besides... time -- how did you know ten years ago -- twenty years ago?

She thinks hard... tough question. No answer for a moment then --

The old woman sees something out of the corner of her eye --

her husband is walking up the path with her white lace sweater over his arm...

She smiles as the answer comes to her.

OLD WOMAN

Because he shows me... he's not much for words, but he shows me.

Maurice sits back -- her answer lingers in the air like a haunting voice.

Maurice watches as the old man comes back and drapes his wife with the sweater. The old woman waves as they continue down the path... hand in hand.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE - DAY

An obese woman with a hacking cough sits to the left of Maurice... To the right, a man with a patch over his eye.

NURSE

Parker... Maurice Parker.

The nurse sticks her head outside the glass divider till Maurice stands up.

CUT TO:

EXAMINATION ROOM

DR. ROYCE checks a chart. Maurice watches him from his perch on the examination chair.

DR. ROYCE

So what's the deal Maurice?

MAURICE

Pardon?

DR. ROYCE

I mean why the sudden voluntary visit -- usually it takes gun-point to get you in here...

MAURICE

Routine, I assure you. I just wanted to gage my health. Am I healthy?

DR. ROYCE

Yes -- you are.

MAURICE

I'm going to ask you a question

that may sound peculiar.

Dr. Royce folds his arms and waits... What's this all about?

MAURICE

How far could an individual walk if they had no athletic training -- you understand, just an ordinary person?

Dr. Royce stares at him suspiciously.

DR. ROYCE

I know what you're getting at.

MAURICE

You do?

DR. ROYCE

I've seen it before.

MAURICE

You have?

DR. ROYCE

You're feeling old and you want to start exercising. A lot of men your age feel the need to recapture their youth. Don't feel embarrassed about it.

MAURICE

(playing along)

Okay.

DR. ROYCE

You should start slow and easy -- fifteen minutes a day.

MAURICE

No. How far in one attempt -- what's the farthest someone like myself could walk?

The doctor is confused again.

MAURICE

Just for curiosity sake that's all?

DR. ROYCE

I don't know -- maybe twenty miles... Of course I'm not recommending that... if someone like you had to I mean... that's how far they'd probably get before encountering serious physical walls.

MAURICE

Twenty miles? I see.

Maurice thinks about it carefully as the doctor returns to the chart.

CUT TO:

INT. AAA AUTO CLUB - DAY

A hip young woman with her forehead wrapped in a headband chews away on a stick of gum. JOSELLE leans over the counter with Maurice and studies a map.

JOSELLE

Each inch represents 150 miles...

MAURICE

Making the grand total?

JOSELLE

Damn baby, relax. I'm getting to it.

(taking on a rehearsed tone)

From Philadelphia following the route highlighted to Pacifica California -- you're traveling an estimated three thousand two hundred miles...

Maurice is a bit pale. He follows the yellow highlighted highways winding it's way across the U.S.

MAURICE

Three thousand miles?... How many times does twenty go into three thousand?

JOSELLE

What was that?

MAURICE

Perhaps there's another route?

JOSELLE

This is the route approved by triple A. Even if you followed back roads the entire way, you'd still be looking at roughly the same distance...

Joselle studies his concerned expression.

JOSELLE

Don't worry baby, it shouldn't take

you more than five days if you just
stop to sleep and eat.

MAURICE

By car right?

Joselle scrunches her face in exaggerated shock and takes a
step back to look Maurice up and down.

JOSELLE

How else you gonna get there on the
ground?

Maurice gives her a sad expression. If she only knew.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW STORE - DAY

The future Parker Books. The room sits as empty and barren
as before.

Maurice sits on the floor against the far wall. He stares at
his new store. His gaze turns to the window where the guard
strolls by. The guard doesn't notice him.

Maurice looks terrible, his eyes red and framed by bags...
his skin a yellowish white.

He moves to his feet and **TURNS OFF THE LIGHTS.**

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - AFTERNOON

Kris unloads the last of a shipment of books. He moves to
Maurice who sits by the window to the street. Maurice points
to a chair across from him and Kris takes a seat.

MAURICE

Why do you want to be a journalist
Kris? What sparked your interest?

Beat.

KRIS

I want to reach people. Nobody
listens to me. This is my way to
reach them.

MAURICE

To reach people, you have to feel
something first... You write about
the wrong things. How can you feel
for dog food? The people at the
Gazette don't respect it, and
neither do you.

KRIS

This is a ghost town. Nothing ever happens.

MAURICE

Write from your heart. That's why the classics are great.

Beat.

KRIS

Why are you telling me this Mr. Parker?

Maurice looks out the window and picks up an envelope from the coffee table between them. He hands it to Kris.

MAURICE

Your bus is arriving.

Kris opens the envelope and finds money.

MAURICE

It's one month's pay.

Kris gets up. A shock of adrenaline hits him.

KRIS

Are you firing me?

MAURICE

No. No... I won't be here for a while. The store will be closed in the interim.

Kris grabs his coat, shifting his attention between the window and Maurice?

KRIS

You going on a trip Mr. Parker?

MAURICE

Yes.

KRIS

Where?

MAURICE

California.

Kris moves to the door.

KRIS

That's cool. What day are you arriving?

Beat.

MAURICE

I'm not sure -- sometime in January
I think.

Kris stops cold. The door to the street half-open.

KRIS

When are you leaving?

MAURICE

Tomorrow.

Kris is seriously confused now. Maurice decides to end the confusion.

MAURICE

I'm walking there Kris.

KRIS

Walking where?

MAURICE

California.

Kris' jaw hits the floor as the bus pulls to a stop across the street. Kris pulls up his sleeve and glances at his forearm.

KRIS

The hairs on my arm are standing
up... Something strange is
happening.

MAURICE

I always knew you had good
instincts...
(beat)
Goodbye Kris. I'll see you when I
get back.

Kris hesitates before darting out of the store, across the street and into the bus. Kris takes a seat in the back and digs into his bag and pulls out the tape recorder. CLICK.

KRIS

Thursday, September 25... 'The
Death Of A Spouse - Can It Drive
You Insane?'

CUT TO:

EXT. WYNNEWOOD PENNSYLVANIA - DAWN

A BRILLIANT RED HUE BLANKETS THE HORIZON.

The suburbs come to life...
Men and women leaving for work...
School buses picking up their cargo of passengers...
Store owners opening their businesses...

CUT TO:

PARKER BOOKS

A group of eleven year old boys including the two kleptomaniacs we saw earlier, are standing before a closed door staring at a sign. They look at each other before heading down the block.

The sign reads: CLOSED - OWNER OUT OF TOWN.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

The house is eerily silent.

Three things lay on the dining table. A shoulder bag filled with clothes. A carrying bag with personals. And a set of maps.

Maurice checks the locks on all windows... He places all the food in the refrigerator into a trash bag... He pulls out a drawer and loosens a side panel, a wad of money flops out. Maurice pockets the bills...

Maurice walks through the hall with a portable cage. He stops before Claude's hanging cage... no movement, no chirping. Maurice stares emotionally for a moment before reaching in and carefully removing CLAUDE'S LIFELESS BODY from the bottom of the cage. Maurice looks down at the lost pet in his hands.

MAURICE

I know how you feel.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE - MORNING

Maurice buries the bird in the backyard.

CUT TO:

DINING ROOM

Maurice sits at the table... the essentials laying before him. He clings to a wallet size photo of Ellen.

Maurice stands and gathers his things.

CUT TO:

EXT. PENNS LANDING - DAY

Maurice stands at the edge of the water. Recreations of historical ships are docked in the harbor. The old fashioned sails and masts sway in the gentle breeze.

The SOUNDS OF A STREET VENDOR catch Maurice's ears. He turns to see a funnel cake booth in a row of food stalls.

CUT TO:

EXT. TWENTY YEARS EARLIER - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The harbor is jammed with people. A street fair is in full swing. The SOUNDS OF A LIVE BAND MIX WITH THE CRIES OF THE **STREET VENDORS...**

MAURICE -- EARLY TWENTIES... Skinny, dark rich hair. He yells out from behind a booth of paperback books.

YOUNG MAURICE

Three dollars a piece... Two for four dollars! All the classics!

A young woman emerges from the crowd of browsers. Maurice begins to speak but is caught off guard by YOUNG ELLEN'S beautiful features. Maurice manages a few words.

YOUNG MAURICE

Can I help you?

Beat.

YOUNG ELLEN

My father owns the food stall over there.

Maurice looks over to find an enormous man serving food.

YOUNG ELLEN

You look thirsty.

Ellen places the soda she had at her side on the table. Maurice is completely flustered.

YOUNG MAURICE

Hi, I'm Ellen.

Ellen places her hand out. Maurice grabs it instinctively and shakes.

YOUNG MAURICE

Maurice.

Ellen looks at the full table of books.

YOUNG ELLEN

Not doing too good huh?

Maurice nods "no."

YOUNG ELLEN

It'll pick up. I've been coming to these things my whole life... people don't want to carry things as they walk around... you'll sell as the fair starts to end...

Ellen waits for Maurice to say something but nothing comes out.

YOUNG ELLEN

You don't talk much do you?

YOUNG MAURICE

I read a lot.

Ellen's father BELLOWS FOR HER OVER THE CROWD. Maurice jumps at the sound.

YOUNG MAURICE

I better go...
(Ellen starts for her booth)
... Come over if you get hungry.

Ellen disappears into a sea of people. Maurice stands in awe for a second before snapping out. He shakes his head to himself.

YOUNG MAURICE

I read a lot?

CUT TO:

LATER - IN THE FAIR

The people are filing out of the street. Maurice is a whirlwind of activity as people wave dollar bills at him calling out classical titles.

Maurice glances over to Ellen's booth. She is watching him with a big smile. Maurice gestures to the line with a shocked expression. Ellen laughs.

CUT TO:

FOOD STALL

The booths are packing up. Ellen helps pack away the remaining food. A book is placed in front of her on the counter. The book is "Romeo and Juliet." Ellen looks up to see a very shy Maurice standing before her. Ellen gives him

a smile that melts him.

MAURICE

Are you trying to tell me something?

Beat. Maurice eyes Ellen's dad who throws him deadly glances. Maurice is very intimidated. He whispers to her.

MAURICE

(barely audible)
Walk with me?

ELLEN

You like to take walks?

MAURICE

No. But I want to take a walk with you.

Ellen looks at him carefully... looks right through him.

ELLEN

You just said something very sweet.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE EDGE OF THE WATER - DUSK

The water reflects the lights from the harbor. Maurice and Ellen are standing very close.

MAURICE

What are you thinking?

Ellen looks out onto the water.

ELLEN

It's one of those thoughts you keep to yourself.

MAURICE

Please tell me.

Beat.

ELLEN

I was just thinking that if we actually became a couple -- this was a beautiful place to begin things.

Maurice is bright red. Ellen giggles at his shyness. Maurice gathers his strength and looks her straight in the eyes.

Maurice leans forward and kisses her softly.

CUT TO:

EXT. PENNS LANDING - MORNING (PRESENT)

Maurice, tears in his eyes, stands in the spot they stood many years before.

MAURICE

(softly)

I love you Ellen.

On this empty dock... on this hot day in September... with no witnesses and no fan-fare, Maurice Parker takes the first steps of his journey.

SUPERIMPOSED ON THE SCREEN: SEPTEMBER 26, 1993

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

A topless CHERRY RED WRANGLER JEEP pulls out of a mechanic's garage and moves down route 32. Kris Reddy is at the wheel. A "Daily Gazette" sign flaps from his roll-bar.

Kris changes the station on the radio as his eye catches a man walking on the opposite side of the street... Kris turns back to the road -- mind racing... BRAKES SCREECH as the jeep slows and then RUMBLES over the island separating the lanes... making a U turn across a four lane highway.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Maurice wiping his brow with a handkerchief. The Wrangler jeep rolls up next to him as he walks. Maurice doesn't stop walking as Kris leans over the passenger seat.

KRIS

Phileas Fogg?

MAURICE

(looking ahead)

... Round The World In Eighty Days.

... Hello Kris.

KRIS

You're amazing... What are you doing Mr. Parker?

MAURICE

I told you.

Beat. Cars HONK as they pull by the slow duo.

KRIS

You're walking to California?

MAURICE

Pacifica, California -- it's a coastal city.

KRIS

Oh, a coastal city. That's good.

Kris looks around to see if anyone else sees the lunacy in this moment.

MAURICE

Ellen told me that she didn't know if I loved her.

KRIS

She knew you loved her.

MAURICE

She wasn't certain... I never really showed her.

Beat.

KRIS

I'm really lost. What does this have to do with walking?

MAURICE

I said, 'I would do anything for her'... and she didn't believe me. I said, 'I'd walk across the country for her'... she didn't believe me.

Maurice looks to Kris rolling along beside him. He sees the worried expression on his face.

MAURICE

I need to show her how much I love her Kris.

KRIS

Why know?

MAURICE

Because I should have shown her before... Everyday, I should have shown her.

Beat.

KRIS

Pacifica, California... that's a long ways away.

MAURICE

So I've been informed.

Kris tries to act calm, but it doesn't last long.

KRIS

Shit Mr. Parker. You can't walk across the United States -- it's over three thousand miles.

Maurice takes his time with the response. Kris waves more cars to pass them.

MAURICE

Ellen got up every morning and went to the corner store to get me my bread for breakfast... Everyday. Now that's about a quarter mile each way... 17 years... that comes to about three thousand miles...
(he smiles to himself)
And you know what Kris?

KRIS

What Mr. Parker?

MAURICE

She never ate a slice.

Maurice picks up speed -- surer with every step... Kris slows the jeep to a stop and reaches into his bag. The mini tape recorder goes on with a CLICK.

KRIS

Thursday, September 26... 'The Question We Never Ask - What Would We Do For Love?'

Kris watches through the windshield as Mr. Parker disappears down Route 32.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKER HOUSE - AFTERNOON

The wreaths, flowers and bouquet have now tripled in number. They spill onto the lawn and walkway. A neighborhood dog rummages through the more colorful bouquets.

CUT TO:

INSIDE

The abandoned house. A TELEPHONE RINGS CONTINUOUSLY. It stops after a string of rings. It BEGINS AGAIN AFTER A FEW SECONDS.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - AFTERNOON

The dark bookcases echo the RINGS OF THE TELEPHONE. The answering machine finally picks up.

MACHINE (ELLEN'S VOICE)

Hello you've reached Parker Books --
our store hours are eight to six...

CUT TO:

INT. ADELLE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A center-city Town house. Wall to wall books, "Cognitive Psychology", "Physiology of Behavior", "Abnormal Psychology", "Clinical Psychology", the titles cover every shelf and every tabletop.

Adelle Matlin hangs up the phone, and moves to the living room where her husband is reading a paper in his recliner.

ADELLE

Something's wrong. I'm worried.

Gerald looks on with an assuring smile.

GERALD

He probably just went somewhere.

ADELLE

Where?

GERALD

For a walk. I don't know.

Beat.

ADELLE

Uncle Maurice? Are you kidding?
He hates walking.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Nighttime. The empty street ECHOES with the TIRED SHUFFLE OF MAURICE'S FEET.

Maurice stops in this tracks and picks up a CRUSHED COKE CAN FROM THE SIDE OF THE ROAD. He places it upright at the place where he stands. Maurice immediately walks off the highway into a small MOTEL PARKING LOT.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

A motel clerk checks his wooden keys.

CLERK

Pool times are 11 am to 5 pm,
there's cable in every room with
two premium channels. HBO and
CINEMAX. Pay Per View Channels can
be --

MAURICE

I need a bed and I need Tylenol...
that's all.

CLERK

The room comes with two twin Sealy
Posturepedics... but the Tylenol
will be extra.

Maurice stares at him with exhausted eyes.

CUT TO:

THE INSIDE OF A FLORAL PRINTED ROOM

Maurice's shoulder bags are on the bed... The WATER IS
RUNNING IN THE BATHROOM.

Maurice gently moves his hands under the bathtub head,
checking the temperature. He sits on the edge of the tub.

Maurice peels off his shoes with great pain. They slide
across the dull white tiles into the corner. The once well
kept English Loafers could be mistaken for trash now.

Maurice rubs his barefeet with both hands -- grimacing from
the pain. The tub is almost filled. Maurice stops the tap.
The steam from the water fills the room.

Maurice raises his legs with great effort and submerges each
leg into the steaming water. His eyes close with great
relief as his body melts into the tub. Maurice lays his head
on the side of the tub... It only takes ten seconds before
Maurice's SNORING fills the bathroom.

CUT TO:

THE OUTSIDE OF THE QUAKER MOTEL ON ROUTE 32

The neon MOTEL SIGN THROBS RED.

SUPERIMPOSED across this image are the words:

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA... MILE 26

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - MORNING

Maurice looks down the highway... eyes squinting to block out the sun. The road winds and dissolves into the horizon... Maurice looks back the way he came -- a second of indecision... the moment passes.

Maurice takes a deep breath before moving to the CRUSHED COKE CAN. He moves to the exact spot where he left the road the night before and begins walking again...

CUT TO:

INT. NEWSPAPER BUILDING - MORNING

The elevator BELL dings, letting off a cargo of newspaper personnel. FRANK AND SETH are two of them. They make their way to the desks... a sea of desks pressed against each other -- each desk has a computer.

Frank and Seth come to their corner and stop before a young man, Phillies cap turned backwards, sitting behind an IBM 486 DX... fingers flying over the keyboard.

FRANK

Someone's got a hot story.

SETH

What time did you get in?

Kris Reddy keeps typing. He spits out the answer after a few seconds.

KRIS

Five... Couldn't sleep.

FRANK

What's this one about Kris?
'Blinds or Curtains - The Eternal
Question?'

SETH

No, no... 'Boxers Verses Tight
Undies - The Battle Continues.'

Frank and Seth crack up laughing. Frank reaches for the printouts... Kris immediately covers them with his hand. He stares up with a smile.

KRIS

Read about it on Sunday.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Maurice exits an athletic store in a small town. On his feet a new pair of sneakers.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Maurice as he walks down a winding highway. His new sneakers shuffling slowly.

A SHARP PAIN SHOOTS UP MAURICE'S LEG. His knees buckle. The shoulder bags tumble to the ground followed by Maurice himself. From a distance it looks like he's been shot.

Maurice grabs the back of his thigh and tries to straighten his leg out... His face frozen in a painful expression. Maurice rubs his legs slowly -- working the cramp out. He relaxes a bit as he finally straightens his leg. Maurice sits there motionless -- eyes glazed... defeated.

The SOUNDS OF A BIRD snap him out of his trance. He looks up to see a PAINTED BUNTING, a bird about six inches in height FLY DOWN from a tree and land on a rock next to him. Maurice stares at the beautiful bird curiously. Its body splashed with brilliant blues, reds and greens. It looks out of place in these mundane surroundings. Maurice looks around the skies to see no other birds. The Painted Bunting chirps a few times before taking flight into the air. It circles over Maurice before disappearing behind the trees.

Maurice smiles. He pulls himself to his feet with great effort.

Maurice opens all of his bags and begins emptying the essentials -- the maps, food, a canister of water.

Maurice reloads one bag and pulls it over his shoulder with great effort. At his feet, are the rest of his belonging -- piled on the side of the road.

Maurice painfully begins walking again.

WE PULL BACK on Maurice's figure walking on the highway... the pile of disregarded things laying by the side... The highway is endless... winding it's way for miles and miles into a fixed dot in the distance.

CUT TO:

INT. ADELLE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Sunrise on Pennsylvania. Gerald picks the Philadelphia Gazette off the front porch.

CUT TO:

DINING ROOM

Gerald flips open the paper as he waits before an empty plate.

GERALD

Smells good, honey.

CUT TO:

KITCHEN

Adelle puts the finishing touches on a stack of pancakes. She sets up two plates and brings them into the

DINING ROOM

Gerald's eyes remain glued to the paper. Adelle comes to the table, holding the golden pancakes over the table. She notices the strange look on his face.

ADELLE

What is it?

GERALD

Adelle... Maurice is in the paper.

She stares silently at the paper laid out on the table. The headline beams at her:

A PHILADELPHIA NATIVE'S LABOR OF LOVE

Adelle is shocked. She gazes at an old picture of her uncle printed underneath the headline.

ADELLE

Oh my God.

She STORMS off into the kitchen with the golden pancakes. Gerald looks down at his empty plate longingly.

GERALD

Honey.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

SERGEANT DALLY pretends to be concerned.

DALLY

What would you like us to do?

ADELLE

Put out a P.B.S.... Or whatever it's called.

DALLY

A.P.B.... He isn't breaking any law. He's a grown man... He can crawl on his hands and knees to China if that's what he wants to do.

ADELLE

Sergeant, I'm a psychologist and I know the difference between normal whims people have and actions that clearly display psychological problems... My uncle lost his wife and it devastated him.

DALLY

We're very sorry about that. Some of our men were on the scene of the accident.

ADELLE

I think my uncle is suffering from a condition called Mania which is linked with depression. It is a time when an individual will act over-confident, and will act out impractical, grandiose plans. Sometimes these plans can be dangerous.

DALLY

How long does this... Mania last?

ADELLE

A couple days to a few months if untreated.

Dally digests this information.

DALLY

Look, I'll see if anyone has spotted him recently. If I get any information, I'll call you.

ADELLE

Thank you.

DALLY

Don't wait by the phone. If he's really been walking this whole time, he's out of our jurisdiction...

Adelle looks very emotional... on the verge of tears.

DALLY

Don't worry he'll be back. He's in

his forties. He's had no physical training... He'll be back by the end of the week.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAYS - DAY

A floating DOT moves along a flat stretch of road...

DISSOLVE TO:

EVENING

The sun drops behind rolling hills. The DOT has become LARGER, sprouting arms and legs...

DISSOLVE TO:

NIGHT

Darkness has fallen. The DOT has materializes into MAURICE.

CUT TO:

MOTEL

A clerk hands over a set of keys in exchange for money.

DISSOLVE TO:

ROAD - MORNING

Maurice walks back onto the highway and steps next to an old boot that has been used as today's MARKER. Maurice starts walking from that point.

DISSOLVE TO:

DRUGSTORE

Maurice grabs two handfuls of small green boxes. He places them on the table. The cashier stares down at the eight boxes of Ben-Gay and rings it up.

DISSOLVE TO:

ROAD

Maurice standing at the entrance to a tunnel that pierces the side of a mountain side. Maurice makes "The sign of the cross" and walks into the darkness...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXIT OF TUNNEL

Maurice appears on the other side with a smile of relief. He's awed at the beauty of the landscape. Tiny clusters of buildings far in the distance wrapped in a blanket of green for miles on every side.

DISSOLVE TO:

MOTEL

Maurice asleep in the bathtub.

DISSOLVE TO:

ROAD - DUSK

It's raining hard like gun-fire from the sky. Maurice sits on the edge of a road rubbing his legs. His hair matted to his head. The rain pelts the ground in forceful waves.

DISSOLVE TO:

SUPPLY STORE

At a cash register, Maurice slaps ten more boxes of Ben-Gay down on the counter. A teenage girl with braces looks at him like he's Charles Manson.

DISSOLVE TO:

MOTEL

Maurice sleeps. His barefeet are propped up on his bag. His feet are swollen and red with fresh blisters. A pack of ice is wrapped around his knee with an old shirt... The picture of Ellen clutched in his hand.

DISSOLVE TO:

ROAD

Two joggers pass Maurice as he sees a flashing school sign. It is a suburban town. The fallen red and orange leaves cover every flat surface.

SUPERIMPOSE: ELKHART, INDIANA... MILE 598

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

A line of cars pulls around a semi-circle driveway. Maurice watches as parents drop off their children. A couple of ten year old boys walk by.

BOY

Nice sneaks.

Maurice realizes they're talking to him.

MAURICE

They are?

BOY 2

Sure man, High-Top Nike Cross
Trainers with heel supports and air
cushioned soles -- They're nasty.

The boys keep walking. Maurice looks down at his sneakers
with new-found pride.

After a while, Maurice's attention switches back to the cars.
One car in question catches Maurice's eye. A woman consoles
a small child who doesn't want to leave the car. She wipes
his tiny tears with her hand and hugs him tenderly. The
little boy's head cradled in her arms.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIFTEEN YEARS AGO - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The Parker house many years ago. The house semi-furnished.
Ellen carefully hangs her first bird photographs on the wall;
a striking aerial photo of a GOLDEN EAGLE. Wings spread,
soaring high over a mountain range.

MAURICE

I thought we both wanted the same
things.

ELLEN

I've changed my mind.

MAURICE

You can't change your mind.

Beat. Ellen takes a seat on the only sofa.

ELLEN

I want children.

MAURICE

You've just decided, is that right?

ELLEN

Yes.

Young Maurice is visibly upset.

MAURICE

Ellen, there are two kinds of
people in the world --

ELLEN

Please not, 'The two kinds of

people' speech.

MAURICE

... People that were made to be parents, and people who were not made to be parents... My parents, were people who were not made to be parents but had kids anyway. I don't want us to be that way Ellen.

ELLEN

You can change.

MAURICE

Face it Ellen, I'm not the type of person who reads bedtime stories. But you love me anyway.

ELLEN

(upset)
Don't be so sure.

Ellen fiddles with her dress. She bites her bottom lip as she tries not to cry.

ELLEN

(shaky voice)
What if something happens to one of us? We'll be all alone.

Maurice loses his hard demeanor and moves next to her. He lays his hand across her shoulder.

MAURICE

Nothing will happen to us. It's a bleak picture, I know, but we're going to be together till were old and grey and you don't remember my name anymore.

Maurice lifts her chin with his hand gently. She blinks her eyes and a tear rolls down her cheek. He takes a deep breath.

MAURICE

Let me think about it okay.

Ellen brightens up immediately.

MAURICE

I'm not saying anytime soon. I'm just saying that maybe we can consider it down the road sometime.

Ellen gives her patented glowing smile. She hugs him with all her strength. She whispers in his ear.

ELLEN

I love you Maurice Parker.

CUT TO:

EXT. INDIANA GRADE SCHOOL - DAY (PRESENT)

Maurice walks away from the school, shuffling through the piles of leaves that block the walkways.

A child and her father walk down the path towards him. Maurice looks away painfully. THE CHILD'S SOFT LAUGHTER POUNDING IN HIS EARS as he quickens his pace.

CUT TO:

INT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

JACKSON LIQUOR WHOLESALERS. For the kind of people who buy whiskey by the crate.

Maurice has his map unfolded over the cash register.

CASHIER

I can show you the main roads, but that'll add ten miles to your trip. Do you mind ten miles?

MAURICE

I mind.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE OF LIQUOR STORE

The parking lot of the store looks like a used truck lot. Every kind of supped-up truck one could possibly imagine is on display here.

Maurice passes a CANARY YELLOW FLATBED PICK-UP with a group of men drinking a newly purchased case of beer. Maurice gets about ten feet past them when he stops, hesitates and then heads back to them.

MAURICE

Excuse me, who's truck is this?

The man sitting on the hood of the truck, has dark hair and hasn't shaven in days. This unfortunate gentleman is named **DENNY**.

DENNY

Mine.

MAURICE

Are you and your friends planning on driving soon?

Denny gives Maurice a greasy curious look. He squints his glazed eyes.

DENNY

Yes we are. Who the fuck are you?

Maurice, doesn't look scared, in fact he looks angered.

MAURICE

You don't know me from Adam, but I want you to do something for me. I want you to wait until you sobered up before you get behind the wheel. I know this is out of the ordinary, but one man to another, would you do me that favor?

Silence. Then everyone in the group BURSTS OUT IN DRUNKEN LAUGHTER.

DENNY

Are you a preacher?

MAURICE

(seething with anger)

No, I just don't want anybody dying because I didn't say something when I had the chance.

Denny's face goes blank. No emotion. His steady gaze almost terrifying.

DENNY

I'll drive my truck shit-faced if I want to. You better turn around and walk away preacher. You don't know who you're talking to.

Maurice looks around at the hostile faces and decides on a retreat. Denny watches Maurice with predatory eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

Maurice practically hobbles his way down a road lined by towering pines. He stops to take a drink from his canister and keeps walking. The SOUNDS OF A CAR GROW IN THE DISTANCE. Maurice doesn't turn his back.

The CANARY YELLOW TRUCK pulls over the ridge with a load full of passengers. It gains distance on Maurice.

Maurice hears the ENGINE and waves HIS ARM IN THE AIR -- signaling for it to pass him. Maurice walks ten more feet before turning around.

Maurice's face instantly changes when he sees the demented grins through the windshield of the truck. Maurice turns and quickens his pace... The truck picks up pace... Maurice breaks into a run... The truck speeds up, passes Maurice and stops in front of him.

Panic fills Maurice as he watches the truck unload it's drunken passengers. Eyes scan the forest on either side for a way out. Maurice decides to stand his ground.

MAURICE

(to himself)

This is Indiana -- nothing's going to happen to you.

DENNY

You need a ride, Preacher?

The men walk up to Maurice.

MAURICE

No thank you I'll walk.

A tall lanky gentleman gestures to Maurice's shoulder bag with his beer can. Some beer sprays Maurice's feet with the gesture.

WIL

Where you coming from?

MAURICE

Look gentlemen, I'm late, I need to --

DENNY

I've been thinking -- who the hell is this preacher guy? Coming up to me and my friends? Looking like he wanted to kick my ass for drinking?

Denny gives Maurice that inhuman stare. Maurice is clearly frightened.

DENNY

Then I figured it. You're angry. You lost somebody, because some asshole was drinking.

Maurice is frozen.

DENNY

Maybe you lost a son? A sister? A wife?

Maurice looks up for a millisecond. Denny doesn't miss it.

DENNY

(stepping closer)

A wife?... Did someone piss drunk
run into your wife? Crushed her
like a bug. Snapped her bones?

MAURICE

That's enough.

Maurice is red with anger. Denny loves it.

DENNY

Oh the preacher's getting angry
again...

(Denny goes ice cold)

Tell me something. Did she die
instantly or did she feel every
torn muscle and shattered bone?
Were you there to help her? Or
were you safe at home when the
windshield sliced into her face --

MAURICE

I'll kill you!

Maurice swings. Denny easily avoids it. Maurice doesn't see
the first BLOW COMING, IT HITS HIM IN THE CHEST -- Maurice
gasps for air as he buckles to the dirt. Hands grab --
restrain. A POWERFUL KICK IN THE RIBS -- ANOTHER...
LAUGHTER... ANOTHER SET OF VICIOUS KICKS... The road and
forest begin to spin... A PAINFUL SLASH ACROSS HIS FACE...

Maurice prepares for the next blow... it never comes. RED
AND BLUE lights swirl... Maurice looks up, barely focusing --
a man leans over a car door... The image becomes clearer -- a
POLICEMAN stands poised -- gun aimed directly at the men
hovering over him.

POLICE OFFICER

(distorted and slowed)

Step away from him now!

CUT TO:

INT. INDIANA POLICE STATION - EVENING

OFFICER MERRIL GREY -- balances a phone on his shoulder as he
spreads a new coat of mayonnaise on his hoagie.

OFFICER GREY

Need an I.D. check on a Maurice A.
Parker...

Grey reads Maurice's license.

OFFICER GREY

Driver's number 22 184 877...

(listening)
He was assaulted by a group of men
just outside Elkhart, Indiana...

CUT TO:

INT. PHILADELPHIA POLICE STATION - EVENING

Sergeant Dally, the officer Adelle spoke to earlier, listens on the other end of the phone his mouth agape.

DALLY

How is he?... That's good.

Gesturing to a young officer at another desk to come over. Dally, cups the phone.

DALLY

Call Adelle Matlin... tell her we found her uncle.

CUT TO:

INT. PHILADELPHIA GAZETTE BUILDING - EVENING

The sea of desks are empty. One empty desk is lit -- Kris Reddy's desk. THE CRACKLE OF A SHORTWAVE/C.B. UNIT FLOATS THROUGH THE LARGE UNOCCUPIED ROOM from an adjacent room. The **VOICES OF DALLY AND OFFICER GREY ARE DISTORTED BUT AUDIBLE.**

WE MOVE TO the back room to find Kris writing furiously in front of an elaborate C.B. setup.

He jots down the words as fast as they're said:

"Maurice Parker... Elkhart... Route 80... Precinct 18..."

The transmission gets cut as the phone conversation ends. Kris quickly rolls the chair across the room and grabs a map off the shelf.

The map gets pinned under two coffee cups and a ceramic frog as Kris traces the route from Philadelphia to Indiana... He sits up straight in astonishment as his eyes hit the KEY of the map.

KRIS

Jesus -- he's walked six hundred miles.

Kris glances at the hairs on his arm and smiles.

CUT TO:

LATER

Kris at his computer and in the 'zone.' Fingers flying over

the keys passionately. On his desk is a cardboard box filled with letters all shapes and sizes on the verge of overflowing the top of the box. One the side of the box are the words, "Labor of Love - Fan Mail."

CUT TO:

INT. INDIANA POLICE STATION - MORNING

DAWN IN INDIANA -- the sun spills over the horizon.

CUT TO:

EXT. INDIANA POLICE STATION - MORNING

Maurice and Officer Grey are seated on the front stairs of the precinct drinking coffee when ADELLE MATLIN DRIVES UP.

Adelle steps out of a RENTED TOYOTA CELICA. Her tense -- frightened eyes betray her mental state for the past ten hours. She walks to the stairs.

GREY

Mrs. Matlin... good morning.

Maurice slowly gets up. Adelle is in shock as she looks at the stranger before her.

Maurice stands in a 'COLTS' football T-shirt, faded jeans and sneakers. His left cheek is black and blue, and his arm and side are bandaged.

ADELLE

Uncle Maurice, you're wearing sneakers?

MAURICE

High-top Nike Cross-Trainers with heel support and air-cushioned soles. They're nasty.

Adelle wasn't sure what that meant. She shakes it off and hugs Maurice. She is visibly relieved to have him in her arms.

GREY

My shift ended an hour ago.

Adelle notices the ROSE in Grey's hand. Grey catches her glance.

GREY

It's for my wife.

ADELLE

What's the occasion?

Grey looks to Maurice -- they exchange a knowing smile.

GREY

No occasion.

Adelle notices the WINK exchanged between Grey and Maurice.

GREY

You can use the conference room, if you want to talk.

ADELLE

That won't be necessary.

GREY

Fine.

ADELLE

We can talk on the way back -- I rented a car.

Beat.

MAURICE

It'll be kind of hard to talk, since you'll be in the car and I won't.

Adelle gives Maurice an angry glare -- Maurice holds his ground.

GREY

The conference room is down the hall on your right.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

File cabinets in the corners. A small rectangle table takes up ninety percent of the space in the room.

Maurice is seated -- his legs extended straight on another chair. Adelle paces the front of the room.

ADELLE

And your store? What about your new store? What about all your dreams?

MAURICE

I have new dreams now.

ADELLE

I don't accept that.

MAURICE

Maybe one day -- after you've been married twenty years you'll understand.

ADELLE

Uncle Maurice -- I spent all our frequent flyer miles on a one way ticket here... I have a rented car outside, just listen to me.

(beat)

Come back with me now, and if you still want to do something like this in a year -- maybe we'll plan a car trip across the country -- Gerald and I will come along --

MAURICE

I have to walk -- by myself -- all the way -- every inch.

ADELLE

It's impossible.

MAURICE

It's what she asked for... It's what I'm going to do.

ADELLE

She was being symbolic. What if she asked you to fly to the moon?

MAURICE

You'd be visiting me at Nasa.

Adelle changes gears. She takes a seat next to Maurice and studies his legs and tired face carefully before uttering the words.

ADELLE

(whispering)

What if you don't make it?

MAURICE

I'll make it.

ADELLE

If you really want to do this... plan it out. Rest up. Train for it. Build up your body. Plan every stop along the way. How much money? Time? Really do it properly. This is all so -- by the seat of your pants.

MAURICE

No it's not.

ADELLE

Why did you take the back roads here? They're not safe. You'd know that if you'd planned.

Beat.

MAURICE

I've all ready gone six hundred miles... I can't do it again.

ADELLE

If you can't redo these six hundred miles when you're rested and ready, how are you possible going to walk another two thousand-five hundred miles in your present condition?

Maurice is stumped. He looks unsure. He instantly looks on the verge of tears.

MAURICE

Nothing's going to happen.

ADELLE

Uncle, the way I was told, if that police car didn't happen down that road, you would be dead right now. That guy Denny, had jumped bail in another state, he's dangerous... They'll be other Dennys, if you don't plan.

Maurice stares down at the table -- the life draining from him with every word she says.

ADELLE

Ellen, deserves you to do this right. Really make it -- if you're going to do it. She deserves it.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

The RENTED TOYOTA CELICA turns out of the police station onto the main road.

Adelle holds a cushion in the air as she looks in the rearview mirror.

ADELLE

Do you want this? It's a long ride.

Maurice is stretched out in the back -- his legs propped up on a blanket. Maurice shakes his head "no" silently.

His sad eyes watching the passing scenery. The speeding car swallows up the miles effortlessly. Maurice watches the Jackson Liquor Wholesalers whiz by... The painful hills he climbed, gone, in an instant... The school where he watched the children being dropped off, swishes by in a blink... all those miles lost.

Maurice shuts his eyes in pain.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION/REST STOP - DAY

The rented Toyota Celica is parked at the convenience store. Maurice is seated in the back staring out at the eighteen wheelers that come in and out of the parking lot. He glances in to Adelle who is gathering food.

Maurice's dull eyes are about to shut when something catches his attention. He sits up and stares out the window with great intensity. Maurice watches as a large truck pulls into the parking lot, across it's side in blazing red --

"Jackson Liquor Wholesalers - Since 1945"

Maurice scans the area... gas station ATTENDANTS... A BEARDED HOMELESS MAN laying next to a heating unit... KIDS eating fast food on old picnic tables...

Maurice's gaze steadies on the TRUCK, as the driver fills the tank with gas.

CUT TO:

A PHONE BOOTH INSIDE THE CONVENIENCE STORE

Adelle is on the phone.

ADELLE

We'll figure everything out when we get there... Oh, he's going to need a lot of help with this... He wasn't even going to come with me, I had to tell him that he could do the walk later if he plans well... I know, but by that time I'll have gotten him some treatment... I just want to get back home before he changes his mind.

CUT TO:

CAR - LATER

Adelle gets in the front seat of the car keeping the bag of food on the passenger seat. She starts the car as she talks

into the rearview mirror.

ADELLE

You want something to eat?

She stares at Maurice covered in a blanket with his back to her... an unresponsive blob.

ADELLE

I know you're feeling a lot of emotions right now. It's okay to be mad. It's okay to feel helpless. It's part of the healing process. I understand. I do.

Adelle puts the Celica into drive and pulls out onto the highway.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ADELLE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Evening in Philadelphia. The rented Toyota Celica pulls into the driveway. The front door of the house opens. Gerald walks out to greet them.

A tired Adelle slips out of the car and hugs Gerald.

ADELLE

He was exhausted -- slept the whole way.

Adelle and Gerald move to the back door of the Celica. They open it and stare at Maurice covered by the blanket. Adelle shakes the blanket.

ADELLE

Uncle Maurice we're home... Uncle Maurice.

Adelle shakes Maurice, who stirs a little as he wakes. His feet slide out from under the blanket -- Adelle stares curiously at the ARMY COMBAT BOOTS that dangle out.

ADELLE

Uncle Maurice?

Adelle pulls aside the covers... THE HOMELESS MAN, from the gas station, sits up. ADELLE'S SHRILL SCREAM BLASTS THROUGH THE AIR. Gerald and Adelle stumble back as the large, bearded man struggles out of the car and looks around the quiet neighborhood.

HOMELESS MAN

So this is the City of Brotherly Love.

The homeless man raises his hand. He holds up MAURICE'S WELL POLISHED BOOK SOCIETY MEDALLION and kisses it lovingly.

Adelle and Gerald stare back speechless.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

JACKSON WHOLESALER'S PARKING LOT. The truck from the gas station, the only vehicle parked before the store.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

Maurice back on the road. His limp only slightly visible at this point in the day. The bandages rubbing him with every step.

The highway takes him around a beautiful bend of trees. THE AIR IS FILLED WITH THE SOUNDS OF BIRDS. Maurice spots a YELLOW WARBLER, a striking bird about eight inches long with vivid yellow feathers. It sits elegantly on a nearby branch. He walks towards it -- it stays in position. Closer. The bird chirps back at him. Maurice is within arms reach of the bird.

MAURICE

Ellen would have loved you.

Maurice looks closer -- and notices it's wings. The feathers bend back -- a dark area at the center.

MAURICE

How did that happen?

Maurice watches the bird hop around the branch -- unable to fly.

CUT TO:

INT. PARKER KITCHEN - FIFTEEN YEARS EARLIER (FLASHBACK)

The kitchen is a different color. The refrigerator and appliances are brand new. Ellen walks in -- something cradled in her hand. Maurice looks up from his paper to see Ellen move to the sink and lay a motionless bird on the counter.

ELLEN

(shaky voice)

It must've hit the window... I think its neck is broken.

MAURICE

Don't bring it in here -- it

probably has all kinds of diseases.

Ellen finds an eye dropper from the table and fills it with water -- she lets a few drops fall into the birds mouth.

CUT TO:

BEDROOM

Evening, just before bed. Maurice is reading. Ellen is monitoring the bird closely. It lays on the bedside table -- wrapped gently with a hand towel. A morsel of food is lowered into its mouth with a pair of tweezers. The bird stares blankly at the ceiling.

MAURICE

It isn't going to make it Ellen.
Let the poor thing go quietly.

ELLEN

It'll make it.

Her delicate hand rubs the bird's stomach.

CUT TO:

LIVING ROOM

The GRAPHIC IMAGES of the TV FLICKER on Maurice's face. He glances back to Ellen who talks to the bird cradled in her arms.

ELLEN

(softly)
You must miss flying. Being way up there in the clouds looking down at all of us. You miss that don't you? You miss playing with your friends and talking with them...

In the SOFT LIGHT of the lamp -- Ellen has transformed into a mother rocking her child to sleep.

CUT TO:

KITCHEN

Maurice is reading his paper.

ELLEN

Maurice! Maurice! Come out here.

Maurice looks through the window to see Ellen waving to him frantically.

CUT TO:

BACKYARD

Ellen points to the ground. The little bird awkwardly walks around the porch.

The bird's wings BURST into motion -- flapping hard -- catching the wind. Ellen jumps up and down, bursting with pride, as her little child takes flight.

MAURICE

I don't believe it.

Ellen hugs Maurice.

ELLEN

All he needed was love. Once you have that, you can do anything.

Young Maurice and Ellen watch the bird soar into the blue sky.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREAM - DAY (PRESENT)

Maurice is kneeling at a stream by the side of the road. He gently clears away the dirt from the Yellow Warbler's feathers.

MAURICE

You'll be all right. A couple days and you'll be up there again.

Maurice carries the bird back to the trees. He lays it back on the branch. He stares at it's beautiful coat with a smile.

MAURICE

Ellen would have loved you.

CUT TO:

INT. ADELLE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Adelle is on the cordless. Her fingers tapping on the kitchen table angrily. Gerald moves around her as he sets two plates at the table.

ADELLE

Yes I understand, it does sound humorous, but this is a very serious situation.

Gerald is cooking. He gently flips the chicken breast in a butter and garlic sauce.

GERALD

This smells good.

ADELLE

Why am I such an authority?

GERALD

(under his breath)

Here comes the resume.

ADELLE

I received my B.S. from the University of Pennsylvania, my P.H.D. from Bryn Mawr College. I worked three years at the Boston University School of Medicine, during which time I had articles printed in the "Journal of Educational Psychology", "American Journal of Psychology", "Psychology Review" and "Science"... So I think it's safe to say my opinion is valid.

Gerald brings the sizzling pan over and divides the steaming dish into both plates.

ADELLE

Look, please find him for me... Officer, I tried... but I brought back the wrong person.

Gerald quickly scoops some rice onto both plates. His mouth is watering as he goes for the utensils.

Adelle abruptly stands at her place.

ADELLE

Stop laughing!

Gerald gets into his seat at the table just in time to see Adelle angrily hang up the phone. She stares off into space before unconsciously cleaning the table. Adelle picks up both plates of food...

GERALD

Adelle --

Gerald's heart sinks as Adelle pops open the trash can with a tap of her foot and dumps the picture perfect meal into the garbage. She goes to the sink and rinses the plates completely preoccupied with her thoughts. She mumbles to herself as she shuts off the water.

ADELLE

He says he admires him.

Adelle storms out of the kitchen. Gerald sits at the empty

table with a fork in his hands. He shakes his head in disbelief.

CUT TO:

EXT. MIDWEST HIGHWAYS - DAY

The land is flat. From the roads one can see endless fields in all directions. When the wind blows, the crops bend in unison, changing the shape and texture of the land for a moment and instantly changing back with a snap of the wind.

Maurice takes in the beauty of the land through a painful grimace. Occasionally clutching his right leg in moments of extreme pain.

Maurice rests on an abandoned tractor by the side of the road and watches the wind change the fields. He closes his jacket as the gusts become stronger.

DISSOLVE TO:

HOTEL

The clock clicks past 11:30 am. Maurice is still in bed -- the curtains drawn. He crawls out from under the sheets and downs two pills with a glass of water. He looks bad. His face pale, his eyes at half-mast. He wipes unnatural sweat from his brow and melts into the bed again.

DISSOLVE TO:

STREET

Just after dusk. A small town's main road. Maurice quietly passes under the street lights.

He stares up and tightens the hood on his parka as the first SNOWFLAKE falls into the SHAFT OF THE STREET LIGHT. Soon thousands of flakes fall into the light...

DISSOLVE TO:

GAZETTE BUILDING

Kris fields calls frantically as the LIGHTS BLINK ANXIOUSLY on his phone. The front page of the Gazette is posted on his pin up board. It reads... "HE MARCHES ON..." Underneath is A PICTURE of Maurice standing outside his bookstore holding up THE BOOK SOCIETY MEDALLION proudly.

A teenage boy gets off the elevator and maneuvers an enormous bag over his shoulder... emblazoned across his back are the words "MAIL ROOM." The boy comes to Kris and empties the bag on Kris' desk without a word. Hundreds of letters cascade down swallowing the table top and covering Kris who stares in awe as the letters keep coming.

DISSOLVE TO:

MOTEL

Maurice is COUGHING PAINFULLY. He crouches over the edge of the bed and holds his side with every strain.

Maurice looks worse than ever. His hair and shirt are soaked with sweat. The coughing attack stops. Maurice take a couple deep breaths before laying back down.

His feet are visible -- sticking out from beneath the sheets. They look like someone has beaten them with a stick, swollen and bruised. They disappear under the sheets.

DISSOLVE TO:

SNOW COVERED ROADS

that stretch into a white oblivion.

SUPERIMPOSE: ELM CREEK, NEBRASKA... MILE 1,564

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Early morning. The branches of the trees are encapsulated in ice. The snow piled ten inches on every surface. Maurice, buried deep beneath three layers of clothes, looks around. His breath materializes with every step. He forces a weak smile at the magical landscape before him. White. Pure. Peaceful.

The SOUNDS OF A VOLVO STATION WAGON urges Maurice to the side of the road. As it passes a little girl waves from the passenger window. Maurice puts on a brave face and waves back.

Another CAR ENTERS the picture -- A DARK BLUE FIREBIRD rises over the hill in the opposite lane moving fast, too fast.

SLOW-MOTION as the Firebird skids over the ice and the snow -- the driver desperately trying to gain control... The mother in the Volvo hits the BRAKES as the Firebird spins into her lane... Maurice yells out.

MAURICE

No!

The cars IMPACT with a sickening CRUNCH -- BACK TO REAL TIME:

The Firebird spins into a guardrail, breaking through it and coming to a stop in a bank of snow.

The Volvo isn't so lucky. It flips from the impact...

sliding on its roof, driving through the snow, down the road... It comes to a rest a hundred feet away.

SILENCE. STILLNESS. The entire event took only seconds.

Maurice runs frantically after the Volvo. The windows are SHATTERED. Snow has packed into the over-turned car. No one can be seen inside the vehicle.

Maurice kneels down and punctures the wall of snow with his hand. His arm disappears up to the shoulder. His face grimacing with the strain. His arm comes out slowly...

A few MUFFLED SOBS ARE HEARD BEFORE the little girl breaks through the wall of snow and slides out of the window. She lets out a DESPERATE GASP for air as Maurice pulls her out by the wrist.

Maurice clears her mouth and face and watches as she coughs.

MAURICE

(panting)

It's okay. It's all over.

Maurice lays her gently against a snow bank, before moving to the other side of the car.

DRIVER (O.S.)

Is she okay?

Maurice looks up to see the driver of the Firebird walking towards him. He looks dazed.

Maurice doesn't waste another second and plunges his arm in the snow... deeper than before. His cheek pressed against the snow, almost laying flat on the ground.

MAURICE

(frantic)

Oh no... she's wearing a seat-belt.

Maurice fishes around... his teeth clenched... He lets out a POWERFUL GRUNT as he pulls back with all his strength -- a woman's WRIST appears first, then the tangled hair and then the body spills out onto the road next to Maurice.

The driver appears over the Woman and Maurice and loses it when he sees them.

DRIVER

It wasn't my fault. It wasn't my fault.

Maurice, out of breath, clears the woman's face and mouth -- no movement. No sound.

MAURICE

Come on... please...

Maurice holds her nose and breaths into her mouth...

MAURICE

Please...

She doesn't respond.

CUT TO:

A FRIGHTENING FLASH

The mother's UNCONSCIOUS face turns into ELLEN. Her lifeless eyes -- her bruised cheek and forehead. Her neck at an awkward angle. Maurice stares down at his wife in horror.

MAURICE

No Ellen... don't die...

CUT TO:

THE MOTHER

being revived by Maurice. He pushes her chest in counting... push, count, breath... push, count, breath...

The mother's BODY TWITCHES, slightly at first -- then obviously... The mother let's out a FEW PAINFUL COUGHS.

She takes a breath. Life quickly returns to her body. Maurice places her head in his lap and hugs her, lightly rocking back and forth. The tears streaming down his red face.

MAURICE

Everything's going to be fine
Ellen. I won't let anything happen
to you. I love you sweetie.
Everything's going to be different
now.

The SCENE BACKS OUT as Maurice comforts this stranger in his arms.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON

The police have descended on the scene. Traffic has been blocked off in both directions. The LIGHT thrown by the ambulances tints the snow and fields a THROBBING RED.

Maurice's face can be seen in the shadows of the backseat of a police car.

OUTSIDE THE CAR

OFFICER HANSEN AND OFFICER TANDY converse.

HANSEN

What's his story?

TANDY

His name is Maurice. He's dancing around everything else.

HANSEN

Red flag, man.

TANDY

If he's in trouble with the law -- fine. Not our problem. He yanked two people from a car wreck, let's give him some space.

Hansen looks in at the drawn, exhausted face of Maurice through the window. Hansen opens the back door.

HANSEN

Maurice, you need anything? Which way were you headed? We can drive you.

MAURICE

No thank you officer. I'll walk.

Hansen throws a sharp glance to Tandy. Hansen turns back to Maurice.

HANSEN

Grub? Food? How about food? Our dime at the local diner...

Maurice mulls this offer.

HANSEN

Come on man, you're a hero. In Nebraska we don't let hero's walk around with empty stomachs.

Beat.

MAURICE

... I need to be brought back here.

HANSEN

Deal.

CUT TO:

INT. DINER - EVENING

The end of the meal. Maurice sits in a booth across from

Hansen and Tandy. They watch as Maurice coughs violently into his napkin.

HANSEN

You look like shit Maurice.

Maurice takes a couple strained breaths.

MAURICE

Getting old.

TANDY

How long have you been footing it Maurice?

Beat.

MAURICE

Too long...
(looks around)
Excuse me gentlemen.

Maurice gets up and heads to the bathroom. Hansen and Tandy stare at Maurice's shoulder bag laying on his seat.

HANSEN

Red flags man.

TANDY

Not our problem.

HANSEN

Why so vague? Why so evasive? He could be somebody hot.

TANDY

Not our problem.

HANSEN

It's going to look beautiful when he turns out to be that animal who paid a visit to the Steadman's house.

TANDY

This guy's not a murderer.

HANSEN

If he is, half the town has seen us take him out for dinner like a couple of jack-asses.

That makes Tandy think.

HANSEN

If he's clean, he'll never know about it.

Tandy looks to the men's bathroom door.

TANDY

Do it quick.

Hansen instantly reaches over and begins rummaging through the shoulder bag. Hansen pulls out a little folder. He opens the folder to reveal an old certificate. Hansen shows Tandy the worn piece of paper.

HANSEN

A marriage certificate? Who the hell carries their marriage certificate around?

TANDY

Maurice and Ellen Parker... it was issued in Philly... Mr. Maurice Parker has come a long way from home. Why?

Hansen returns the certificate and folder to the bag and leaves the booth quickly.

CUT TO:

LATER

Maurice returns to the table to find only Tandy seated. Maurice sees Hansen in the phone booth at the far end of the diner.

TANDY

Hansen's whipped. Has to call his wife every two hours or she'll go ballistic when he gets home.

CUT TO:

PHONE BOOTH

HANSEN

P-A-R-K-E-R. Right. Get on the horn with Philly. Call me here.

CUT TO:

INT. PHILADELPHIA POLICE STATION - EVENING

Sergeant Dally packs his things to leave. He sees the light on LINE 1 LIGHT UP on his phone. He ignores it. The clerk sticks her head around the corner.

CLERK

Line one Sarg.

DALLY

I'm not here.

Dally zips his coat.

CLERK

It's the Nebraska state police.

DALLY

Nebraska?

CLERK

You know somebody named -- Maurice
Parker?

Dally freezes. He shakes his head as he unzips his jacket.

DALLY

(smiles)

That son of a bitch made it to
Nebraska.

Dally grabs the phone.

CUT TO:

INT. GAZETTE BUILDING - EVENING

The C.B. CRACKLES WITH THE VOICE OF SERGEANT DALLY AND THE
NEBRASKA POLICE.

MICHELLE, a very introverted intern, stares at the radio
astonished.

CUT TO:

A SMALL SIDE OFFICE

It now has "KRIS REDDY" etched on it's door. Kris looks up
from his desk at Michelle who stands in the doorway bright
red.

KRIS

What is it?

Michelle just points down the hall.

CUT TO:

OFFICE

Michelle scribbles down notes.

C.B./NEBRASKA POLICE

... He saved a little girl, and her
mother. Pulled them right out of
the car...

Kris stands, jaw hanging wide open.

KRIS

Where is he?

Michelle checks her notes.

MICHELLE

(very soft voice)

Umm, Elm Creek, Nebraska.

Kris practically falls over. Michelle scribbles down more quotes.

MICHELLE

This story is big huh?

KRIS

Mammoth.

MICHELLE

The Gazette's small huh?

Beat.

KRIS

What are you saying? This story is too big for this paper?

MICHELLE

(flustered again)

Umm, no. It's just that --

KRIS

God damn, you're right... You don't say much Michelle, but what you say is golden.

Kris' mind is racing as the C.B. conversation continues.

CUT TO:

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Hansen scoffs down his third dessert. Maurice stares at him oddly.

The PAY PHONE RINGS. Hansen jumps to his feet too quickly. He tries to recover.

HANSEN

(too excited)

I was expecting a call.

Hansen moves to the phone.

Tandy winks at Maurice with a smile.

TANDY

Whipped.

CUT TO:

PHONE BOOTH

Hansen listens carefully to the officer on the line.

OFFICER (ON PHONE)

... I'm on first name basis with half the city of Philadelphia... Hansen, apparently this guy Parker lost his wife and went a little fruity. I spoke with his niece, Adelle Matlin and she says to restrain him. That he's dangerous to himself. She says to call when we have him in the station.

HANSEN

Good work.

CUT TO:

EXT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

The ride progresses in silence. Hansen and Tandy in the front seat. Maurice's head is pressed against the back-seat window. His eyes begin to shut slightly as sleep overcomes him. The car goes over a BUMP. Maurice jars awake. He glances out the window to see a highway sign swish by in the **HEADLIGHTS. 'ROUTE 80 EAST'.**

East? Maurice looks around quickly at the passing scenery.

MAURICE

Where are you taking me?

Hansen and Tandy exchange looks.

HANSEN

I'm going to drop off Tandy at the station and then drop you back.

TANDY

That's all right isn't it?

MAURICE

Sure.

Hansen looks back to the road. The drive continues in silence. Tandy checks his watch just when a CLICK -- A HARD WIND -- AND A METALLIC SLAM in quick succession shakes the car.

HANSEN

What the hell was that?

Tandy looks back -- Maurice is GONE. The back seat empty. Tandy stares out the blackness of the back window.

TANDY

Shit! He jumped!

HANSEN

Jumped where?

TANDY

Out of the car. He jumped out of the god damn car!

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Maurice staggers through the naked trees. Thin trees every few feet with no branches. The snow ankle deep.

Maurice braces himself against a trunk, checking his hands. His vision blurs as he stares down at his scraped bloody palms.

The forest clears quickly into an open field. Far in the distance across the field of white is a small pointed building standing alone. The glow of a LIGHT can be seen through the windows.

Maurice trudges through the deeper snow. Stumbling many times. The frigid wind pushing him to his knees. Maurice keeps moving -- the field seems endless...

CUT TO:

DRIVEWAY

Maurice's feet hit the snow of the driveway, just as his legs buckle -- his face HITS the snow hard. He manages to roll over on his back with great effort. He stares up at the pointed building -- the dull light becoming duller... something blocks the light. A man. Maurice feels himself rise into the air as two powerful arms scoop him off the ice.

A PRIEST carries him into the doors of a CHURCH.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK ROOM OF CHURCH - NIGHT

A dimly lit cathedral. Six foot six, FATHER BERCHMAN walks down the center isle of the cathedral, through a cloth curtain and into a

BACK ROOM

where Maurice is sitting in a chair wrapped in a blanket.

MAURICE

What did they ask?

FATHER

If I had seen you. By the way I'm sorry about your wife. They told me.

MAURICE

Thank you... I'm sorry you had to lie. It must have been difficult.

FATHER

I asked the officers if you had committed some crime... If they had said 'yes', you would be speaking with them right now.

This is the father's own room. Very sparse as one would expect. He moves to his bureau and retrieves some pills.

FATHER

Take these, and if you're up to it, try to explain how it is you came to be sitting here.

Maurice follows the father's instructions and tightens the blanket around his shoulders.

MAURICE

I'm walking for my wife.

Beat.

FATHER

To where?

MAURICE

Pacifica, California.

FATHER

From where?

MAURICE

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

FATHER

I see.

Beat. The father nods as if this is not shocking news.

FATHER

Why?

MAURICE

Do you believe a person's soul lives on after their death?

FATHER

Most certainly.

MAURICE

And that that soul takes part of the person they were on this earth with them.

FATHER

That's a reasonable assumption.

MAURICE

I don't want my wife's soul having any doubts.

FATHER

Doubts? About what?

MAURICE

About my love for her.

The father nods with understanding as if everything became very clear with that statement.

FATHER

You don't have to prove anything to her.

MAURICE

I'm not proving to her. I'm showing her. And I know I don't have to. I want to. I've realized, love is about giving. I'm alive, I can still give to her. I want to give her everything I can.

The father studies this stranger before him with great admiration.

MAURICE

There are some people, including those officers, that are trying to stop me. They mean well. But they don't understand. I wouldn't either if I were them.

Maurice struggles with the last words. He slumps back -- physically drained.

The father gets up and takes the empty glass of water from

Maurice's hands.

FATHER

I want you to stay here a few days until you're better. You're no use to your wife in this condition.

The father moves for the curtain.

MAURICE

You think I'm crazy too.

The father turns and smiles warmly.

FATHER

I have spent my life dedicated to love. Love of God. Love of humanity. And here you are living through love. Bathing in it. Using its strength, its magic, its ability to overcome any barrier... If you are crazy, I hope my insanity is not far off.

Maurice's eyes well up instantly.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH - WESTERN HIGHWAY - DAY

Father Berchman wraps one powerful hand around a tiny silver cross dangling from his neck. The other hand waves high into the air at the shrinking figure of Maurice Parker walking through the snow.

DISSOLVE TO:

HIGHWAY

The long trek continues. The black tar of the roads peek out in spots as the SUN BEATS down on the flatlands. Maurice drapes his worn scarf around a melting snowman.

DISSOLVE TO:

RESTAURANT

We are looking inside a fancy Center-City Philadelphia restaurant. Adelle and Gerald are seated by an enormous bay window. A waiter comes to their table with their main course. Gerald watches the food being served with great anticipation.

Gerald's eyes drift out the window to the magazine stand on the sidewalk... He squints to see better. Realization hits hard... His eyes light up. He looks to Adelle and back to the magazine stand.

In a mad race for time, Gerald begins to devour the food on his plate. The waiter and Adelle watch him in shock. Adelle glances out the window. Her eyes squint... then light up. She jumps to her feet and grabs Gerald by the arm, a fork full of food drops to his plate. Gerald looks back at his full plate longingly as Adelle pulls him out of the restaurant.

The waiter looks out the window to the magazine stand. He squints.

CUT TO:

MAGAZINE STAND

The NEW YORK TIMES are hung like stockings around the border of the stand. On the front pages, a singular headline stands out among the others:

"A JOURNEY OF THE HEART"

A large PHOTO OF MAURICE is next to the headline.

DISSOLVE TO:

DINER

A red-headed waitress slices a credit card through the machine and waits... Green computer letters blink - "This account has been closed."

The waitress returns with the card -- she shakes her head "No" at Maurice who digs into his wallet for cash.

DISSOLVE TO:

MOTEL

Maurice slides two twenties across the counter to the motel manager. Maurice checks the remaining bills in his wallet... only a few bills left.

In the motel room we find Maurice sitting over the edge of a bed buckled over in a coughing attack. It finally stops. Maurice flops back to the pillows, completely drained.

DISSOLVE TO:

ROADS

The flatlands have vanished. The roads now serpentine through mountain ranges.

VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAIN RANGE; Maurice moves like a grain of dust over the black line of the road.

Maurice rests every half mile. He labors up every incline with ultimate effort. He braces himself with a branch serving as a make due crutch.

Maurice spots a small town nestled in the arms of the mountain range. He begins the journey to rest.

DISSOLVE TO:

GROCERIES

Maurice pays for his food with the last few bills in his wallet.

DISSOLVE TO:

ROAD

Another stick serves as a walking cane. The multi layers of clothes have been shed for a short-sleeve shirt. Maurice follows a dirt road that breaks free of the mountains and into the open country again.

SUPERIMPOSE: COALVILLE, UTAH... MILE 2,472

CUT TO:

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DUSK

A dust covered mailbox at the end of a long dirt driveway. Maurice wipes the mailbox clean with his hand. The name emerges like an ancient inscription from beneath the mud...
"CALDWELLS."

CUT TO:

FRONT DOOR

Maurice tentatively moving to the front door. His hand instinctively clutches his empty stomach.

The wind blows gently. Maurice shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath. He opens his eyes slowly to see a dinner table being set. Potatoes, gravy, fresh baked bread... floating through the half open window to Maurice's thankful smile.
THE SOUNDS OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS CAN BE HEARD INSIDE.

The first **LIGHT KNOCKS** go unheard with all the commotion. **HARDER.** The door squeaks open. Maurice puts on his best smile... the door opens wider -- no one stands before him.

BOY (O.S.)

Hi.

Maurice looks down to find an adorable little boy, black hair, big eyes and an even bigger grin. This is three year old ISAAC CALDWELL.

MAURICE

Well, hello.

ISAAC

I'm Isaac... I'm three.

MAURICE

I'm Maurice Parker... I'm much older than three. Are your parents home?

Beat. Isaac thinks.

ISAAC

You know what, I can play baseball with my brothers when I'm bigger.

MAURICE

Is that right?

ISAAC

You know what... I'm just little now, but I'll be big soon.

MAURICE

You'll probably be bigger than your brothers.

ISAAC

Yeah!

Isaac is happy with this thought.

Maurice looks up as MRS. CALDWELL comes to the door.

MRS. CALDWELL

Who are you talking to Isaac?

Mrs. Caldwell stops as she stares at Maurice.

MAURICE

Hello, I'm Maurice Parker. I'm just passing through and I need to conserve what little funds I have... I need some food and a roof to sleep under for one night... Now I don't look like much, but if there are any things that need to get done around the house --

Mrs. Caldwell doesn't listen, but instead yells behind the door.

MRS. CALDWELL

Dave... you're not going to believe who's here.

Maurice looks at her oddly. MR. CALDWELL comes to the door; his face lights up.

MRS. CALDWELL

This is Maurice Parker -- the one walking for his wife.

Mr. Caldwell is completely floored. So, for that matter is Maurice. Mr. Caldwell puts out his hand with awe.

MR. CALDWELL

If that ain't fate?... Hi, I'm Dave Caldwell. I do the copy for the anchor on the evening news down here.

MAURICE

Evening News?

MR. CALDWELL

We did a piece after your story ran in the New York Times.

Maurice is truly surprised.

MAURICE

New York Times?

Mrs. Caldwell ushers Maurice in the doorway by the elbow.

MRS. CALDWELL

Someone said they spotted you in town... Mr. Parker, you're a celebrity.

CUT TO:

INT. CALDWELL KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Caldwell family dinner... all twelve of them. Ten children talk and reach for food. Maurice sits at the end talking, enjoying and sharing. Isaac sits next to him proudly. Maurice has blended in as another member of this family.

CUT TO:

INT. CALDWELL GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

An inviting room. The kind prepared for visiting grandmothers and grandfathers to stay in.

Maurice checks himself out in the mirror... his borrowed pajamas fit nicely.

He moves to the window and stares at the moon lit

landscape... enormous, endless, dwarfing.

The rocking chair CREAKS as Maurice melts into it. He rubs his calves slowly, the pain evident in his face. His head leans back after a moment... on the verge of sleep.

The SOUND OF TINY FOOTSTEPS stirs him. He looks to the doorway to find Isaac standing quietly at the door in his baseball P.J.s.

MAURICE

I thought you were asleep.

ISAAC

You know what... I remembered you were here and I woke up.

Isaac walks silently to Maurice... Tip-toeing all the way.

MAURICE

Your parents would want you to be in bed.

ISAAC

You tell stories?

MAURICE

Oh no... I'm not good at that.
Very bad in fact...

Too late. Isaac climbs up into Maurice's lap with great effort. Maurice looks down at Isaac who waits patiently for him to begin.

MAURICE

I would be exceedingly boring.

Isaac waits.

MAURICE

I don't do these type of things.

Isaac -- still waiting.

MAURICE

See there are two kinds of people in this world.

(beat)

... Just a short one okay?

Isaac gets in position, cradled in Maurice's arms. Maurice searches for something to say.

MAURICE

There was a boy named Isaac who wanted to play baseball, but he was too small and no one would let him

play... but he kept practicing by himself -- waiting... He went to every game and sat in the stands with his glove.

ISAAC

You know what... maybe I ran onto the field and hit a home run.

MAURICE

Who's telling this story?

Isaac points to Maurice.

MAURICE

Good, now the team had this great big player -- Big Billy. He was the best. He had them in the World Super-Bowl-Championship of little kids baseball. But right before the game, the second best player on the team was suspended because he played a prank on a nice man who owned a book store... When that boy grew up he was convicted on burglary charges and spent fifteen years in prison -- where he belongs.

Isaac didn't understand that last part.

MAURICE

Anyway, Big Billy needed another player so he yelled into the stands. 'Who can play baseball?' And there was a little voice that yelled out, 'Me, I can play.' Everyone turned to see a little boy standing with a glove.

ISAAC

(beaming)
That's me.

MAURICE

Right. But everyone saw how small Isaac was and laughed... but not Big Billy. He stared at Isaac carefully and then told him to join the game. It came to the end of the game. It was the eleventh or twelfth inning or whatever is the last inning of a game...

ISAAC

Nine.

MAURICE

Okay nine. Big Billy's team was losing and he was on base. That's when Isaac came up. He could barely hold the bat... Big Billy winked at Isaac... The ball was pitched -- Isaac hit the ball hard. It soared up and out over the stadium. Everyone cheered. Isaac hit a home run and won the game. After the game, Isaac asked Big Billy why he let he play. Big Billy smiled and said, I wasn't always Big Billy, I was Little Billy first... Isaac and Big Billy went off after the game and read a classic book together. The end.

ISAAC

You know what -- that was a really good story... Tell it again.

Maurice has to smile as Isaac looks up anxiously.

MAURICE

There was a boy named Isaac who liked to play baseball...

WE BACK OUT as Maurice rocks back and forth in his chair. Isaac falling asleep in his arms.

CUT TO:

EXT. CALDWELL DRIVEWAY - MORNING

The family dog "Max", scurries up and down with great excitement. Max can sense something big is happening.

The Caldwell clan, one and all has gathered at the end of their driveway. Maurice is escorted out by Isaac who clings tightly to his hand. Mr. Caldwell meets Maurice halfway and pulls him aside.

MR. CALDWELL

That's a nice watch.

Maurice looks down at his beat-up Seiko.

MR. CALDWELL

I've always wanted a watch like that.

MAURICE

(unstrapping it)
It's yours.

MR. CALDWELL

No. I won't take it unless I pay for it... Let's see, that's a pretty nice watch -- I can see that.

Maurice watches him suspiciously as he pulls out an envelope from his jacket pocket.

MR. CALDWELL

Let's say I give you what's in this envelope for that beautiful watch.

Maurice is handed the envelope. He opens it to find a thick **PILE OF CASH, TENS AND TWENTIES.**

MR. CALDWELL

I really want that watch.

MAURICE

This isn't right.

MR. CALDWELL

This is my only chance to get a watch like that. It would mean a lot to me and my family. Please take it. It really isn't that much.

Maurice stares into the envelope emotionally and hands over the watch tentatively.

MAURICE

This is a loan.

Mr. Caldwell straps on the watch and then hugs Maurice.

The rest of the family say their good-byes.

Isaac won't let go of Maurice's hand as he walks out into the street.

MR. CALDWELL

Isaac, come back here.

Isaac just holds on tighter. After Maurice and Isaac have walked a few steps out into the street, Maurice kneels down.

MAURICE

I have to go now.

Isaac's bottom lip protrudes as he tries not to cry. Maurice has to hold back a few tears himself. He hugs Isaac tightly.

MAURICE

(whispers)

Why didn't I meet you fifteen years ago?

Maurice pulls away from Isaac slowly. Isaac runs to his mother's arms. Maurice waves good-bye to the Caldwells as he heads down the road.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Maurice stops, bends down to the road and picks up a TORN WHITE PAPER STREAMER that spiraled its way to his feet.

He looks ahead and finds both sides of the street lined with parked cars. Some of the cars are decorated with white streamers.

CUT TO:

OUTDOOR WEDDING

A beautiful canopy of flowers sits at the end of ten rows of lawn chairs. Maurice watches from near the cars. He smiles as the young bride and groom nervously say their vows. Everyone LAUGHS warmly as the groom stumbles over his lines.

CUT TO:

INT. CHAPEL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Moments before the ceremony. The guests are seated. The ORGAN is PLAYING.

CUT TO:

SIDE ROOM

Young Maurice sits on a chair in a tuxedo staring out the half-open door to an OLD MAN who tries to gain his balance by holding onto the wall. Maurice is upset. He runs his fingers through his hair.

THE DOOR OPENS wide as Young Ellen comes in. She is wearing her WEDDING GOWN. White lace, tight at the arms and waist -- she looks stunning.

ELLEN

What's wrong? They said something was wrong?

Maurice stares at his rented shoes.

MAURICE

I'm fine.

Ellen moves to him and kneels before him. She lifts his chin.

ELLEN

Everyone's here. Everything looks beautiful. They even got the white dove I wanted for the cake -- so what's wrong? What is it?

Maurice moves his gaze from her to the half open door.

MAURICE

It's him.

Ellen looks back.

ELLEN

Your father?

MAURICE

He's plastered.

ELLEN

That's okay -- really it is.

MAURICE

No it's not. He should be here with me now, not trying to find some fucking bottle of Johnny Walker. He's never been there for me. I've always been alone.

Maurice looks like he may cry.

MAURICE

I'm afraid Ellen... I'm scared of being alone again. What if one day you realize how boring I am? What if one day you realize you're not happy?

(beat)

I could have been alone before, but now you've changed things. I can't be alone anymore Ellen. I'm scared what's going to happen to me.

Ellen takes both his hands and squeezes them between hers.

ELLEN

The day I met you, I gave you my heart. Today, I give you my soul. Where ever you are, where ever you go, I will be with you. Maurice Parker, I promise --

(she shakes him with emphasis)

I promise, you will never be alone again.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTDOOR MARRIAGE - DAY (PRESENT)

The bride and groom run through a shower of rice into their limousine.

CUT TO:

INSIDE LIMOUSINE

They wave through the window as the car pulls away. They settle in and look to the seat across from them. On the seat is a fresh flower. Next to the flower is a note. The groom picks it up and shows it to the bride. It reads:

"CHERISH EVERYDAY TOGETHER"

It is signed "M.P."

The bride and groom look at each other curiously.

CUT TO:

ROAD

The limousine passes Maurice on the road as he walks.

CUT TO:

INT. GAZETTE BUILDING - DAY

A fax machine rolls out a tongue of information. Michelle, the intern, snatches it and jogs through the maze of desks.

CUT TO:

KRIS'S OFFICE

Michelle catches the tail end of a telephone conversation.

KRIS

-- Come on Pete, this is important, this is racism in our backyard... Aw, that's bull... just think about it, okay?

Kris hangs up.

KRIS

They're pushing my Jewish temple vandalism story to the Metro section...

Kris notices Michelle's familiar bright red face.

KRIS

What?

Michelle is completely flustered as usual.

KRIS

Michelle, breathe... that's it,
what is it, talk to me.

MICHELLE

(hands the fax over)
Umm, Coalville Utah.

Kris studies the fax before jumping up from his desk and moving to the wall. An enormous U.S. MAP covers three quarters of the wall. RED TACKS mark a trail across the United States, beginning with Philadelphia. Kris puts a red tack at the top right corner of Utah.

Kris notices through the open officer door that Frank and Seth are listening in. Kris nods to Michelle. Who immediately shuts the door on their view. Kris waves bye before it closes.

KRIS

He's taking highway 80 all the way.

Kris paces the room -- charged with excitement -- eyes occasionally stopping on the map. Michelle watches Kris' animated expressions.

KRIS

You know what this is, don't you?
It's a miracle. Not like... 'It was a miracle little Johnny passed his math test.' No! This is a real miracle... Turning water to wine kind of miracle. People should know about this, everyone, every single person... It's time for a blitz. Let's see what kind of TV interest we can generate.

Michelle enjoys watching Kris when he's like this.

MICHELLE

Umm, he's going to make it isn't he?

KRIS

Maybe.

Kris studies the map.

KRIS

But he hasn't hit the toughest miles yet.

CUT TO:

INT. ADELLE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The lights are out. The FLICKER FROM THE TV dances over Adelle and Gerald. Adelle is fast asleep. Gerald is having a late night sandwich. NIGHTLINE comes on the TV.

TV ANCHOR

What would you do for love? This is the question Americans are starting to ask themselves. The incredible tale of Maurice Parker's walk across the country has caught the imaginations of young and old.

Gerald sighs. He puts the sandwich on the plate and hands it to his left -- obediently. PAN TO LEFT to find Adelle wide awake now. She glares at the TV screen silently as she takes the sandwich and dumps it in the waste basket releasing some of her frustration.

A COMPUTER MAP OF THE U.S. trails Maurice's walk on the screen.

TV ANCHOR

At 44, this bookstore owner from Wynnewood Pennsylvania has tallied an estimated 2,400 miles. His latest appearance in Coalville Utah brought the spotlight of the country to that small town.

GERALD

Coalville Utah?

ADELLE

I can't believe it.

TV ANCHOR

Whatever has carried Mr. Parker through snow and rain and thousands of miles of this countryside, will have to carry him through the most dangerous part of his trek... The three hundred miles through the sweltering roads of Nevada...

ADELLE

My God.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A merciless sun beats down on a long stretch of highway. The black tar from the road melting slightly.

No sign of Maurice. WE SEE into the distance, not a soul in sight. WE LOOK to a hillside a hundred meters from the road. There we see a figure lying still in the shade of an overhanging rock formation.

Maurice has a towel over his eyes and his feet propped up on his shoulder bag. He is fast asleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

DUSK

The SUN TURNS RED for one brilliant moment before hiding behind the horizon. Like an alarm went off, Maurice wakes up and packs his things.

CUT TO:

ROAD

The MOONLIGHT outlines a line figure hobbling his way step by step with a walking stick.

The air fills with a POWERFUL RUMBLE. Maurice turns to see a wave of rocks and sand slide down a hillside to the road. They CAUSE A GREAT THUNDER that settles to dust. Maurice walks down the center of the highway away from the hillside.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAWN

THE FIERY NEVADA SUN BEGINS ITS ASCENT INTO THE SKY. Maurice looks bad. He's breathing heavy as he moves up a steep incline by the side of the road. His feet slide on the loose dirt. Maurice looks like he could collapse at any moment.

He makes it to the indentation in the hillside -- just enough room to lay down in the shade. Maurice lays out slowly. He pries off his sneakers, band-aids and blisters cover every inch of his feet. Maurice dumps the sand out of his sneakers and painfully pulls them back on. His eyes close as he tries to unbutton his jacket... too late he's asleep.

Maurice's bed is a rock that juts from the side of the hill... First WE SEE nothing, then some grains of sand escape from the crack where the rock meets the hillside. The CRACK **BECOMES SLIGHTLY LARGER -- PULLING AWAY FROM THE HILL BY A FRACTION OF AN INCH.** It stabilizes there.

Maurice unaware of his precarious situation sleeps twenty five feet above the ground.

CUT TO:

MID-DAY

Another sizzler. Temperatures in the nineties. The sun is directly overhead.

Maurice stirs in his sleep, moving closer to the edge of the rock.

A STEADY STREAM OF SAND POURS FROM THE CRACK...

A SLIGHT TREMOR...

THEN THE FRIGHTENING SOUND OF ROCK MOVING AGAINST ROCK...

Maurice wakes up as he begins to slide off... Hands scraping at the dirt... He SLIDES OFF THE ROCK... Feet and hands desperately trying to cling to the hillside... He picks up speed as he tumbles down... Maurice looks down in time to see a small jut in the rock hurtling towards him... no time for panic... SLAM! A SICKENING CRACK OF BONE as Maurice HITS the rock square in the ribs... Maurice flops down the rest of the slope like a rag doll... he comes to rest in the dirt, clutching his ribs. The sun beats down on his stunned eyes.

Maurice stares up at the dizzying slope. Sand still trickling down to a stop. He doesn't try to move for the first few seconds. His breathing increasingly erratic.

Maurice drags himself to sit upright. The sharp pains causing a distorted grimace on his face. A short rest, before working his way to his feet.

CUT TO:

HIGHWAY

Maurice uses a highway guardrail as a backrest. He takes a seat in the dirt. Maurice's hair is damp with sweat. His breathing relegated to slow gasps. His left hand covering his rib cage protectively. Blood begins to trickle through the spaces between his fingers.

Maurice closes his eyes for a moment, before his bent leg goes into spasms... Maurice is forced to straighten the leg instantly... jarring his tender rib cage... Maurice clings to the back of his thigh... Maurice is defeated... On the verge of tears.

He glances way down the road and spots a TINY CLOUD OF SMOKE miles away in the distance. A car is moving in his direction.

Maurice looks up into the DAZZLING WHITE SKY. Drops of sweat falling into his eyes.

MAURICE

(whisper)

It's over Ellen... I failed you again.

Maurice looks down the road at the cloud of dust growing

larger.

MAURICE

I tried Ellen, I really tried... I don't have the strength.

The cloud is now clearly a car... Maurice stares up into the sky again... The tears racing the sweat down his cheeks. Maurice YELLS TO THE HEAVENS.

MAURICE

You said I would never be alone!...
You promised...
(his yelling turns to
sobs)
... You promised.

Maurice's is interrupted by A SLIGHT RUSTLING BEHIND HIS HEAD. Maurice turns and looks through his tears...

There, a few feet from him, perched quietly and majestically on the guardrail is a GOLDEN EAGLE. It stands two and half feet tall. It spreads it's great wings. The feathers expand like a blanket, spanning six feet, and throwing a gentle shade on Maurice's face.

Maurice is frozen in wonder. The MAGIC of the moment glows in his eyes. Maurice's face gains life... The dark feathered eagle stands like a god before Maurice. The moment is breathtaking.

CUT TO:

ROAD

The car on the road, takes the last quarter mile in seconds... SCREECHING IT'S BRAKES at the sight of Maurice on the side of the road.

Maurice turns away from the bird as the car pulls up. The driver gets out and calls over the hood.

DRIVER

Hey, man are you okay?

Maurice's face filled with strength. He grins through the pain.

MAURICE

I'm fine.

DRIVER

What the hell are you doing out here? You need a ride somewhere?

MAURICE

No thank you.

The driver is concerned. He opens the driver door.

DRIVER

You by yourself?

Beat.

MAURICE

No.

This pacifies the driver somewhat. He nods and gets in the car. Maurice watches as the car pulls away.

He turns back to the guardrail -- the eagle is gone. Maurice looks up into the sky. The Golden Eagle is flying overhead... a tiny dot against the blazing sun.

Maurice struggles to his feet using the guardrail as support. Maurice takes his first step...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Suburbia. Rows of similar houses with small lawns and custom mailboxes. Beautiful trees line the streets creating a canopy over the roadway.

Two women sit on a swing on the front porch of a small suburban home. JANIS AND AMMIE'S conversation is cut in mid sentence.

JANIS

Who is that?

AMMIE

I don't know. What's the matter with him?

Janis and Ammie stare to the street where a sunburnt MAURICE staggers in a daze.

MAURICE'S POV

Maurice is on the edge of darkness... the trees and faces swimming -- mixed with the colors of red and blue cloth waving in the wind... Images come in and out of focus... two women walking towards him... Maurice clutches his head as the trees start to swim faster -- color, lights, houses...

DISSOLVING TO BLACK:

Maurice collapses in the middle of this suburban street. Janis and Ammie run to his side.

SUPERIMPOSED: "ROSEVILLE, CALIFORNIA... MILE 3,205"

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Maurice lays still on a hospital bed. His eyes slowly force themselves open.

NURSE (O.S.)

Good morning Mr. Parker.

Maurice turns his head to the side. A pretty woman in her late twenties, with LARGE LOCKS OF BROWN HAIR smiles back. This is STEPHANIE.

STEPHANIE

There are a lot of people worried about you.

MAURICE

(softly)
Where am I?

STEPHANIE

In a hospital.

MAURICE

Which hospital? Did you take me back?

Stephanie understands his worry.

STEPHANIE

You are in St. Vincent's Hospital in Roseville California. You've been here three days.

Maurice closes his eyes in relief.

MAURICE

Thank God.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

The room is crowded. Maurice is now propped up in a seated position. He tries to digest a set of fish sticks on a tray.

MAURICE

I can't believe you're here. I'm touched.

Maurice looks across to ADELLE AND GERALD.

MAURICE

Are you two planning kids?

ADELLE

Maybe later.

MAURICE

You should definitely have children. They're really special.

Adelle and Gerald are in shock. Maurice forks another fish stick with a smile.

ADELLE

I don't think you realize how serious this is Uncle.

MAURICE

How serious is it?

DR. RAY, who has been standing by the window listening, steps forward.

DR. RAY

You have two broken ribs, a punctured spleen and Acute Rheumatoid Arthritis.

Maurice gives a comforting smile to Adelle.

DR. RAY

The normal amount of build up in your arteries has been aggravated by over exertion. This is called, "Claudication," As a result, there isn't enough circulation to your body. That accounts for the discoloration in your extremities and the muscle spasms I'm sure you've encountered.

MAURICE

Can it kill me?

DR. RAY

It can, but it'll have to wait in line.

This surprises Maurice.

DR. RAY

We ran a C.T. and an M.R.I. We found bleeding in your brain. Your collapse was caused by "Transient Cerebral-Ischemia"... a sudden loss of blood circulation to the brain. In other words, Mr. Parker, you had a mild stroke.

There is dead silence in the room.

MAURICE

(scared)

I suppose I over did it.

Adelle moves over to Maurice's side and holds his hand.

MAURICE

What steps do we take now?

DR. RAY

We operate. We find the artery in the brain and close the bleeding...

I just did this procedure on a Senator and he's doing fine.

MAURICE

What are the odds? Do I have a fifty-fifty chance of surviving the operation?

DR. RAY

It's hard to say. It's a delicate surgery. There's no getting around the fact that it's a very high-risk situation.

Adelle strokes Maurice's hair. Maurice stares down at his food before looking up with great resolve.

MAURICE

Then it'll have to wait until I finish.

ADELLE

What?

MAURICE

I finish the walk, and then we may take all the chances we want.

The room is stunned. Adelle gets off the bed and collects herself.

ADELLE

Listen to me very carefully, because I don't want you to misunderstand me... The walk is over Uncle Maurice. Done. Finished. You've made it to California, it was a miracle, now let's try to save your life.

MAURICE

(louder)

I'm completing the walk. I'm

almost there.

DR. RAY

Okay, Maurice keep it calm...

(beat)

We can talk about this again, but just so you know, we have a guard on this floor who's sole job it is to keep an eye on you.

Maurice is crushed.

DR. RAY

There are a lot of people out there who would like to see you finish, including me, but I'm not willing to put your life in anymore risk than it is... We do the operation, and when you're better, you finish the walk.

The room is dead again. Maurice drowns in his thoughts.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

A small chapel. Stain glass windows overlooking the parking lot. Maurice sits in his wheel chair at the back of the room. A few other patients are scattered in the four small pews.

Maurice has his hands folded tightly and stares up at the statue of Mary. His concentration is broken as a man in a full black suit and black shirt sits next to him. Maurice nods at the priest.

PRIEST

Hello, Mr. Parker.

MAURICE

Hello.

PRIEST

How are you feeling?

MAURICE

Confused. I'm not sure what to do now. I'm not sure what he wants for me.

PRIEST

He wants to reward you... That's why I'm here.

MAURICE

(a little confused)

What do you mean?

PRIEST

I mean you've done a great thing.
You should be rewarded monetarily.

Maurice is lost.

PRIEST

What's your shoe size?

MAURICE

What? Who are you?

The priest reaches into his jacket -- for the first time WE SEE a Polo design on his shirt and a gaudy gold chain around his neck.

PRIEST

Clive Silver -- Marketing Executive
at Reebok.

Maurice stares at the card in disbelief.

CLIVE

We want you to do some spots for
us.

MAURICE

What the hell is this?

Some of the patients turn around.

CLIVE

I'm talking six figures, pay or
play -- for two spots. We want to
push a new line with you...
America's New Hero.

Maurice is flustered. He can't take this. His eyes become
desperate.

Clive waves his hands in the air excitedly.

CLIVE

Imagine grainy black and white
shots of long stretches of highway
-- quick cuts with a slow pounding
beat underneath... Then we see a
man walking up a steep incline --
it's you Maurice. We see shots of
you walking. Cut. Cut. Cut.
Fast... Music crescendoes -- Bham!
Close up -- and you say...
'Reebok, Because There's Nothing
You Can't Do.'

Clive finishes. He is surprised to find Maurice in tears. Clive is thrown totally off as Maurice stares at him angrily through streaming tears.

MAURICE

My wife is dead.

Maurice continues his powerful gaze until Clive looks away. Clive gathers his things and leaves the chapel without another word. Maurice drops his head into his hands and cries quietly.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A change of shifts. Stephanie gathers her things. She lifts her coat off the counter. Underneath is a paper. She spins the paper to face her. The headline reads, "The End of a Journey - Parker Hospitalized."

CUT TO:

HOSPITAL ROOM

Stephanie peeks into the dark room.

STEPHANIE

(whispers)

Good night Mr. Parker. I'll see you tomorrow.

Stephanie waits for a response from the motionless figure on the bed. She leaves the room a little disappointed.

WE MOVE CLOSER TO THE BED. We see Maurice laying still -- the battered photo of Ellen clutches to his chest.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL HALL - DAY

Stephanie is wheeling Maurice down the hall. Maurice has a glint of happiness in his eye. They move through the doors marked "Visitor's Area."

Maurice stretches a huge grin as KRIS REDDY gets up from a chair. Kris bends down and hugs Maurice emotionally.

KRIS

Tom Joad?

MAURICE

... The Grapes of Wrath.

KRIS

You're amazing.

CUT TO:

LATER

Maurice and Kris seated in the corner of the room.

MAURICE

I missed you Kris.

KRIS

I missed you to Mr. Parker.

MAURICE

Adelle told me, your writing is going well. The Crusader for social issues and all.

KRIS

You were right. From the heart is always better.

Beat.

KRIS

I drove by the bookstore -- it's boarded up now. There's a sign over the wood -- "Office space available."

The loss is evident on Maurice's eyes.

MAURICE

I haven't been too punctual with the rent.

KRIS

I was thinking you could open another store with investors. I'm sure a lot of people would want to get involved with you now.

Maurice forces a smile.

MAURICE

Actually, I'm not worried about my career right now... I'm more worried about how you're getting me out of here?

Beat. Kris glances at the hair on his forearm.

MAURICE

Are they standing?

KRIS

(running his hand over his

arm)
Saluting.

Beat.

KRIS

Come on Mr. Parker.

MAURICE

What, come on?

KRIS

I can't do it. I want you to finish, but I want you to live more.

Maurice sits back straight. He looks upset.

MAURICE

We do the operation after I finish. I can't risk not finishing... I thought you understood what I was doing.

KRIS

I do.

MAURICE

Why in God's name did you fly all the way here then?

KRIS

Don't do this.

MAURICE

... To look me in the eye and say what's important to you isn't as important to me? To tell me you know what's best? To tell me life is more precious than what I feel for my wife?

Kris gets very emotional. He rises from this chair.

KRIS

Mr. Parker, you can yell at me, if it'll help. But I'm not risking your life.

MAURICE

It's mine to risk.

Maurice turns to the window away from Kris.

KRIS

Your operation is scheduled for Friday. I'll be back before then.

Kris walks to the door and stops.

KRIS

She knows you love her Mr. Parker.
She knows now.

MAURICE

(not looking at Kris)
No more words. Until I touch the
ocean with my hands... it's all
just words.

Kris is tortured. He leaves the room.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL HALL - DAY

Maurice wheels himself into the hall from the waiting area. He looks around. His eyes lock on the EXIT SIGN over the door at the end of the hall. His eyes scan the area quickly. He immediately finds the guard on the floor staring at him. The guard nods ever so slightly as if to say, "I know what you're thinking." Maurice turns his attention to a small boy in a hospital gown, being scolded by a head nurse.

HEAD NURSE

You cooperate with us about taking
your medicine and maybe we'll talk
about candy.

The head nurse takes a chocolate bar out of the boy's tiny hands. The boy offers no response. Maurice watches curiously as STEPHANIE walks over and pats the boy's head. Maurice catches a small exchange -- Stephanie slips another candy bar into his pocket. The boy breaks into a warm smile. Stephanie puts her fingers against her lips and winks. Maurice takes this exchange in with great interest.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Stephanie steps into the room and prepares a tray of food. The SILHOUETTED FIGURE of Maurice seated near the bay window turns to face her.

STEPHANIE

You should be in bed.

The face stares back from the shadows. She feels him watching.

MAURICE

What do your friends call you?

STEPHANIE

Steph.

MAURICE

Do you have a car, Steph?

Beat.

STEPHANIE

You should be in bed...

Stephanie moves to Maurice... She stops short when his face comes into view. His eyes are raw -- red. His face puffy.

STEPHANIE

You're in pain.

MAURICE

I need your help.

STEPHANIE

They told me, you might try to talk me into something... You need to rest Mr. Parker... It's for your own good.

(beat)

I've been following your story for a long while. It's a beautiful thing you did.

MAURICE

You ever lose somebody Stephanie?

STEPHANIE

Mr. Parker, I'm supposed to give you your fish sticks.

Beat. Maurice melts her with his expression.

STEPHANIE

... My father.

MAURICE

Did you tell him everything you wanted to? Did you do everything you could while he was here?

She shakes her head "No" -- the tears welling up in her eyes.

MAURICE

If I don't do this Steph, my life isn't worth saving.

Maurice reaches out and squeezes her soft trembling hand.

MAURICE

Please, help me.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

Stephanie throws a nervous smile to the guard as she escorts a doctor down the hall... The doctor's oversized white lab coat almost drags on the floor as he tries to hide the pain of being on his feet. MAURICE PARKER studies a bogus chart in his hands. His new glasses, sliding off his nose. Beads of sweat -- revealing his agony.

CUT TO:

ELEVATOR

Three people in the elevator; Stephanie, Dr. Maurice Parker, and a female physician. The female doctor looks at Maurice curiously, studying his demeanor -- she can't place him.

The ELEVATOR DOORS OPEN on the third floor... The SOUND OF A TV FLOODS THE ELEVATOR COMPARTMENT. Maurice looks up in horror to see a close-up of his FACE superimposed on the TV screen seated on the receptionist's desk. A man gets on the elevator.

The female doctor stares at the TV as the doors close -- she immediately turns to Maurice... her view is blocked by the new passenger... the elevator progresses down 2... 1... The female doctor leans forward trying to get a glimpse of Maurice... THE BELL DINGS as the doors open on the ground floor.

Doctor Maurice Parker and Stephanie quickly exit... the female doctor stays in the elevator and watches carefully.

FEMALE DOCTOR

(yells)

Excuse me, doctor...

DOWN THE HALL... Maurice pauses and turns around -- fear etched across his face. The female doctor looks around the barren hall then turns back to Maurice.

FEMALE DOCTOR

Good luck.

The female doctor smiles as the doors shut. After a few moments of shock -- Maurice smiles back.

Stephanie yanks Maurice down the hall and out the EMERGENCY ROOM EXIT.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

A colorful canopy of leaves... a familiar torn American flag.
Stephanie's white VW Rabbit pulls to a stop.

MAURICE

This is it... This is where I fell.

He turns back to Stephanie who stares back at him emotionally.

STEPHANIE

I never thanked my father. He did
so much for me... I never thanked
him.

Maurice holds her sad face in his scared hands.

MAURICE

(whispering)
It's not too late.

Maurice gets out of the car painfully slow. He pulls his
shoulder back upright with a laborious breath. A sense of
pride returns to his face. He turns back to Stephanie and
catches a horrified look. He follows her stare...

She is staring at his shirt... He looks down to see a DARK
CRIMSON STAIN GROWING beneath the surface. He covers the
area with his hand.

MAURICE

You're going to have a lot of work
to do when I get back.

STEPHANIE

Someone should be with you.

Beat.

MAURICE

Someone is.

He gives her his best smile and begins shuffling his feet
over the loose gravel of the road... one step at a time.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL STAIRS - AFTERNOON

A black man -- grey, balding hair walks hurriedly up the
stairs. This is STAN NEWTON.

Keeping in step with Newton is a police officer. SERGEANT
EMORY, jet white hair, army cut, gives him an intimidating
appearance.

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE DOOR

Newton stops Emory before entering.

NEWTON

I'm afraid Mrs. Matlin is very upset.

Emory lets the warning sink in before opening the door.
Adelle's VOICE IS BOOMING.

CUT TO:

HOSPITAL ROOM

Adelle YELLS at Dr. Ray, a few nurses, and the guard who was on duty.

ADELLE

... "American Journal of Psychology", "Psychological Review", and "Science", so I think it's safe to say my opinion is valid.

She catches her breath.

ADELLE

How does a grown man who can barely walk, just stroll out?... This is not James Bond here, this is my uncle who owns a bookstore, and gets outwitted by grade school kids pulling pranks!

Adelle notices the new people in the room.

NEWTON

Mrs. Matlin, this is Sergeant Emory. He'll help us find your uncle.

Adelle walks up to Emory.

ADELLE

Let me tell you a story Sergeant. There was a patient of mine who had a Golden Retriever, Mac... She loved Mac, not like a pet, but like a family member. One day, she had to leave Mac with 'friends', and wouldn't you know it, Mac gets away and ends up falling into a sewer. My patient comes back -- goes nuts when she hears that Mac has been in the sewer for over 48 hours. Apparently the cop who found the

dog didn't want to get his pants dirty. And neither did anyone else. So of course, my patient decides to go in after it... she falls... breaks her hip and lands next to her dead dog, who died of toxic fumes down there...

Adelle looks around at all the engrossed faces.

ADELLE

The moral of the story is... She sued for a lot of money! She sued the friends, the city, and the officer for negligence on duty. She has no Mac, no happiness, but she's very rich now... That was a dog. We're talking about a human being...

(beat)

I hope everyone clearly understands the chain of events that will occur if something should happen to my uncle, whom I love more than you can possibly imagine... Now Sergeant I would like to know right now, if you're willing to get your pants dirty for my uncle?

Adelle and Emory have a staring contest. Adelle wins. Adelle stands alone in a room with four men, and she is clearly the one in charge.

The door flies open. A police officer walks in pushing KRIS REDDY through the door.

OFFICER

I found him sneaking up the back stairs with this.

The officer holds out a long coat and hat. Emory walks up to Kris.

EMORY

Did you help Mr. Parker leave this hospital?

Kris looks to the empty bed and smiles... a BIG SMILE.

KRIS

No... But I was going to.

Beat. Emory turns to the officer and ushers him to the door.

EMORY

Forget him. It's time to get our pants dirty.

Adelle smiles.

EMORY

I want three black and whites from here to Handley Avenue. And no communication with the station. The press monitors the transmissions.

KRIS

(a born actor)
They can do that?

EMORY

That goes for all of you. Not a word about this disappearance to anyone. Absolutely no press.

Kris smiles innocently.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Police vehicles roam the city streets -- slowing to a crawl at every white male over forty, walking the sidewalks.

CUT TO:

ADELLE

scanning the crowded intersections through the open window of her moving taxi.

CUT TO:

KRIS

patrolling the streets on foot. He stops at a hot dog vendor and flashes a picture of Maurice from his wallet. The vendor shakes his head, "No."

A COMMOTION BREAKS OUT ONE BLOCK DOWN... Kris spins in that direction... sees a crowd forming at the corner of the sidewalk... Starts toward them... Kris sees something through the thinner parts of the crowd... something laying on the sidewalk... A man! Kris' walk turns into a sprint.

Kris works his way through the growing crowd, puncturing the center of the circle... Kris gazes down at the man writhing on the concrete... A black man, shaking uncontrollably. A woman standing over the fallen man waves the crowd back.

WOMAN

He has Epilepsy, just give him room... An ambulance is on the way.

The crowd spreads out. Kris looks down at the unconscious man on the sidewalk sadly -- Kris' thoughts race. He moves on with newfound concern.

CUT TO:

INT. HOMELESS SHELTER - EVENING

A converted gymnasium. The room is splintered into rows of folding tables and chairs. Against the wall, is the serving stand. Groups of volunteers dispense sandwiches and soup.

IN THE CORNER

The room is crowded with homeless men and women and a few children. In the back we find MAURICE. In his old clothes, and tired disheveled appearance -- Maurice is virtually invisible in this crowd. He presses something to his injured side. His condition has worsened.

He eyes the entrance where a POLICE OFFICER walks in and moves to the serving counter. The officer asks the serving lady something, and shows her a picture. She shrugs her shoulders and continues serving. The cop takes one last look around the hundreds of hungry people leaving the room.

Maurice pulls up his hand from underneath his shirt. The napkin he was holding at his side is SATURATED WITH BLOOD. Maurice replaces it with a clean napkin.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

SUNRISE ON SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Emory rubs his eyes as the papers pile up on his desk. OFFICER KLEIN lays out the newspapers one after the other.

KLEIN

... L.A. Times -- 'He's Back.'...
San Francisco Chronicle -- 'Have
You Seen Maurice?'... New York Post
'Unstoppable!'

Klein lays the last paper on the table.

EMORY

Is that all?

KLEIN

No. The Mayor sent word, that he

wants this thing handled quickly,
before anything unfortunate
happens. He said he doesn't want
to be known as the 'Mayor of the
City Where Maurice Parker Died!'

EMORY

Is that all?

KLEIN

No. Mrs. Matlin's waiting for
you.

Klein opens the door. Adelle walks in and stands at a
distance from Emory. She looks beat. Her eyes are
bloodshot, and tired.

ADELLE

What happened with the museum
sighting?

EMORY

False alarm.

Adelle is visibly dejected.

EMORY

It's been a long couple of days for
all of us. So let me be honest.
If he hasn't turned up yet, he's
probably --

ADELLE

No... No.

EMORY

I spoke with Dr. Ray this morning,
and he said it was highly unlikely
that someone in his condition could
survive this long without medical
attention, let alone walk sixty
miles -- in fact his exact word
was, 'Impossible'.

Adelle fiddles with her coat.

EMORY

If I knew where he was, I'd get him
off the street, but I think it's
time that you, the Mayor, and
everyone else be braced for the
inevitable.

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNIPERO SERRA FREEWAY - DAY

The freeway is packed -- bumper to bumper. Cars standing still in the hot sun.

A hispanic man in his late forties, JUAN is seated in his Dodge Caravan when he sees someone in his rearview mirror. A man is using a stick as a cane. The struggling man makes his way along the shoulder very slowly.

Juan reaches over to his passenger seat and turns over the L.A. Times. Under the heading, "He's Back!" is Maurice's picture. Juan quickly rolls down his window as Maurice passes by on the shoulder.

JUAN

(yelling)

Hey, Maurice man -- keep going
buddy!

Maurice is startled at the man's yell, but then smiles when the words register. Maurice struggles forward.

Juan keeps yelling encouragements... This grabs the attention of other drivers who realize who is walking past them. One by one, car doors open and people call to Maurice.

OVERWEIGHT WOMAN

Don't stop Maurice!

YOUNG MAN

Go Mr. Parker!

Cars start to HONK... More and more people turn to see the commotion... The YELLING AND HONKING IS JOINED BY WHISTLES
AND CHEERS --

Maurice can't believe it -- he tries to smile but can't hold it. His face tightens with every step. His shirt is soiled with blood. He raises his hand and gives a weak wave to a woman who holds up her little boy through the sunroof of the car.

CUT TO:

A WCAU NEWS VAN

parked in the traffic. A NEWSREPORTER stares through binoculars.

REPORTER

Thank you God!

The crew quickly prepares their cameras and equipment. They move like lightning. In seconds they are shooting the crowd and their hero.

The air is CHARGED... THE NOISE GROWING, MORE AND MORE PEOPLE JOIN IN... LOUDER... People stand on top of their cars to get

a better view...

CUT TO:

A POLICE CAR

stuck in traffic. OFFICER DAWSON looks around as the PARADE OF NOISE SURGES TOWARDS HIM. He looks out his window and catches a GLIMPSE OF MAURICE LIMPING UP THE FREEWAY.

DAWSON

Sweet Jesus!

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Officer Klein busts into Emory's office just as Adelle is about to leave.

KLEIN

They found him.

Adelle is instantly charged with life.

KLEIN

Dawson's on the C.B. -- wants to talk with you Sarg.

CUT TO:

RADIO ROOM

Adelle and as many officers that will fit in the room are listening to the radio conversation.

EMORY

What's going on? Where is he?

Emory CLICKS TO LISTEN. THE SPEAKERS EXPLODE WITH HONKING AND CHEERING -- IT SOUNDS LIKE A CARNIVAL. DAWSON YELLS OVER THE COMMOTION.

DAWSON (V.O.)

He's just getting off 280. It's amazing Sarg... everybody's out of their cars and cheering him on.

EMORY

Shit, get him in your car and take him to St. Vincents.

Beat.

DAWSON (V.O.)

You ever see that concert footage of the Doors, Sarg?

Adelle and the room of officers look confused.

EMORY

What the hell are you talking about?

DAWSON (V.O.)

The Doors, the musical group. I saw a documentary where the police stopped one of their concerts, snatched Jim Morrison right off the stage... the crowd went frickin nuts -- they tore up the place -- it turned into a war.

(beat)

... I'm not stopping this concert by myself. And there's no way you're getting backup here -- it's jammed up for miles.

Emory is thinking fast.

DAWSON (V.O.)

Why don't we just let him finish Sarg?

Beat. Emory looks at Adelle's expectant face. He talks into the C.B. without taking his eyes off her.

EMORY

How does he look?

DAWSON (V.O.)

Like shit. He's bleeding heavily. He's having breathing problems and he's as pale as stone. If he wasn't moving, I'd swear he was dead.

Emory thinks. He talks to the other officers in the room.

EMORY

Bring him in. Now! If he dies out there, who the hell knows what that crowd will do...

(to himself)

Let alone the Mayor.

The room empties fast. Emory talks to Adelle.

EMORY

He'll be in a hospital within a half an hour.

Somehow, Adelle's face doesn't convey much confidence.

CUT TO:

INT. PACIFICA MALL - DAY

The shops are empty. The food court abandoned.

Close to five hundred people are huddled at the center of the mall. The HI-FI HOUSE has four large screen TV's in their bay windows and speakers on the outside of the doors to lure passing shoppers in.

All four sets have the same program on -- A NEWSBREAK on Maurice Parker. The crowd listening anxiously.

TV ANCHOR

... He's headed West on Sharp Park Road... Witnesses describe him as seriously injured.

A shock of concern shoots through the crowd.

TV ANCHOR

Lynn McCay and our Highway Cam -- has just spotted him...

The picture cuts to a HELICOPTER SHOT OF DOWNTOWN PACIFICA -- at first it just looks like an aerial of buildings, then the camera ZOOMS. It catches a tiny figure struggling through a street intersection.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Newspapers spiral through the air. Maurice stretches his neck up, squinting at the sun. The SILHOUETTE OF A HELICOPTER hovers above him. The NOISE is overpowering.

Maurice's fatigue grows, every muscle, every ounce of energy goes into each step. Maurice clutches the side of his head... the steps halted... hands trembling, teeth clenched, eyes squeezed shut. A surge of intense pain tries to buckle him... Maurice fights it off as he moves his feet again.

The helicopter SWOOPS above as he makes his turn onto a FINAL STRETCH OF ROAD adjacent to the BEACH.

Maurice stops dead in his tracks as he turns the corner to find a SEA OF PEOPLE WAITING FOR HIM. A momentous sight... people lined along the street for as far as the eye can see. **AN EXPLOSION OF YELLING, CHEERING CALIFORNIAN'S ENGULFS THE AIR** as they spot Maurice standing at the end of the street. The CROWD SURGES TOWARDS HIM.

Maurice is dazed... the noise, the pain, the faces swirl in his head as thousands of people surround him. Maurice is overwhelmed. He is about to collapse when someone takes hold

of his arm. Maurice turns to see KRIS REDDY STANDING NEXT TO HIM. In the midst of this chaos and growing madness. Maurice and Kris have an entire conversation with one emotional look.

The SOUNDS of SIRENS BREAK the moment. Kris turns to see two police cars turn on the street behind them.

Kris turns to Maurice.

KRIS

Don't stop walking.

Kris lets go of his arm and moves like lightning. He jumps atop a fire-hydrant and yells to the crowd.

KRIS

The police are here. They're coming to take Mr. Parker away. He needs our help.

Kris points to the squad cars inching their way up the street.

KRIS

Help Mr. Parker! Don't let them end the walk.

CUT TO:

THE SQUAD CARS

AS THEY COME TO A HALT as a wall of people stand in their way. The SPEAKER ON THE POLICE CAR BLARES THROUGH THE AIR.

SPEAKER

Step aside now! You are ordered to step aside now!

The people don't move. A WOMAN carrying a BABY makes the baby move her little hand in a waving gesture to the officers behind the wheel of the police cars. The officers look at each other in disbelief.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

The far end of the beach road. A POLICE CAR SCREECHES TO A STOP. Sergeant Emory and Adelle get out.

Adelle is completely blown away. She looks around at the PANDEMONIUM. Thousands of men, women and children celebrating with APPLAUSE AND CHEERS, HELICOPTERS IN THE AIR, camera crews standing on raised platforms. Adelle drinks in the ELECTRIC ATMOSPHERE with awe.

Emory yells orders into his WALKIE-TALKIE as Adelle breaks the outer edge of the crowd and disappears into the field of spectators.

EMORY

(yelling)

What the hell is going on? It's frickin wall to wall people and they're way too emotional. We need mucho backup -- now!... Officers are to bring in Mr. Parker on sight, don't ask questions, don't hesitate, bring him in... I want a barricade placed along the entire beach area... Now God damn it, now!

Emory CLICKS OFF and looks around at the growing crowd -- he turns to see a PUBLIC BUS UNLOADING PASSENGERS -- fifty more spectators rush off the bus and rush toward the crowded street.

EMORY

Holy shit.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Maurice stares down at the ground... willing each new step. **THE CHEERS AND WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT BLURRING INTO A UNDISTINGUISHABLE SOUND.**

Maurice looks up for a moment as something grabs his attention -- Maurice gasps for air as his eyes focus... The small faces become clearer... Maurice stands twenty feet from the entire population of PACIFICA HIGH SCHOOL. They cover one side of the street for an entire block. Stretched over their heads, held up by twenty students is a HUGE HAND PAINTED BANNER. Maurice reads the words:

"ELLEN IS WATCHING!"

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Trucks unload dozens upon dozens of blue-wooden barricades. An assembly line of officers place the barricades end to end at the place where the sand meets the pavement.

Emory yells orders as a new truck arrives.

CUT TO:

INT. NEWS MONTAGE - DAY

SHOTS OF THE PULSATING CROWD... GLIMPSES OF MAURICE MOVING

THROUGH THE CENTER OF THIS MASS. OVER THESE PICTURES WE HEAR
SNIPPETS OF VOICES OF TV ANCHOR PEOPLE, RADIO PERSONALITIES
AND ANNOUNCERS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, DISSOLVING INTO EACH
OTHER ONE AFTER THE OTHER...

TV ANCHOR (V.O.)

... Through ten states and over
three thousand miles...

TV ANCHOR 2 (V.O.)

... A bookstore owner from
Philadelphia Pennsylvania...

CUT TO:

FATHER BERCHMAN

the father that brought Maurice in out of the cold in the
Midwest, praying intensely in his chapel. AN OLD HAND-HELD
RADIO IS ON THE PEW NEXT TO HIM. He listens to the updates.

RADIO D.J. (V.O.)

... Ellen Parker killed by a drunk
driver September 2nd...

CUT TO:

MR. CALDWELL

Isaac's father, sitting in a TV station watching the monitors
as the feeds come in from California. Mr. Caldwell watches
with great emotion, eyes glued to the screen.

TV ANCHOR 3 (V.O.)

... A seven month odyssey through
the heart of the country...

CUT TO:

SERGEANT DALLY

the police officer from Philadelphia who worked with Adelle.
He listens with the rest of the precinct to a portable stereo
on a windowsill. The room is silent -- everyone hangs on the
words coming from the speakers.

RADIO D.J. 2 (V.O.)

... the power of the human
spirit...

CUT TO:

GERALD

in a hotel room. The TV FILLING THE ROOM WITH NEWS. Gerald
sits behind two large room-service carts of food. He takes a
big bite of a sandwich with an emotional smile to the

television.

TV ANCHOR 4 (V.O.)

... A life threatening condition,
Transient Cerebral Ischemia...

CUT TO:

ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL

where STEPHANIE watches in the jam packed recreation room with about thirty patients watching a TV screen mounted high in the corner of the room. Stephanie looks a mess, she's been crying for a while.

TV ANCHOR 5

... a journey he began by himself,
will end with a family of millions
at his side...

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

The BOISTEROUS crowd parts like a ripple effect as Maurice walks through. The eyes fall emotionally on him as he stares down at the ground trying to keep moving.

Maurice gasps harder now, his eyes stinging with drops of sweat falling from his brow. People in the crowd cover their mouths in shock as they get a clear view of him... His shirt soaked on one side with blood, his entire body shaking with pain, and exhaustion, his face hollow and pale -- ghostly.

Maurice stops in his tracks. He looks up at a wooden sign, worn from the years of salt water air. The sign reads:

"PACIFICA BEACH - 1/2 MILE"

Maurice's thoughts fade away from this place, this time...

CUT TO:

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - FIFTEEN YEARS AGO - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

WE ARE IN THE PARKER BEDROOM. The lights are off. The MOONLIGHT FROM THE WINDOWS BLANKETS Young Maurice and Young Ellen as they lay in bed. Ellen is cradled in Maurice's arms. She is awake and watching the shadows dance on the ceiling. She speaks in whispers.

ELLEN

What do you think heaven is like?

Maurice opens his eyes and stares at his beautiful wife.

MAURICE

I don't know.

ELLEN

I think it's a different place for each person.

MAURICE

Did you have a dream?

Beat.

ELLEN

I know where my heaven is.

MAURICE

Where?

ELLEN

Pacifica, California.

Maurice chuckles.

MAURICE

Why there?

ELLEN

When I was ten, my family lived in Pacifica for a year. I used to go to the beach everyday that summer. I never felt so happy, carefree. It was a magic place for me... That's where my heaven will be.

Beat.

ELLEN

Maurice?

MAURICE

Yes.

ELLEN

If I die, you'll know where to look for me?

MAURICE

Go to sleep Ellen.

ELLEN

No really, if God takes us away from each other, you know where to look now?

Beat.

MAURICE

(pacifying her)

The beach of Pacifica, California.

ELLEN

Good.

Beat.

MAURICE

Go to sleep Ellen.

Ellen smiles as she cradles deeper into Maurice's arms.
Husband and wife fall asleep together.

CUT TO:

EXT. PACIFICA BEACH SIGN - DAY (PRESENT)

Maurice snaps back to the present, the PAIN AND COMMOTION
come back in a tidal wave of reality.

Maurice wipes the tears in his eyes and tries to take a step.
Someone blocks his way.

ADELLE

Uncle Maurice, please, we have to
get you to a hospital.

Adelle looks at her wounded Uncle sadly. She touches his
shirt and her hand comes away with blood.

MAURICE

I have to finish first.

ADELLE

I won't let you die.

The inner circle of people bursts open, as KRIS BREAKS
THROUGH.

KRIS

Let him finish Adelle. He's almost
there.

ADELLE

(yelling)

He's almost dead. Can't you see
that! This has nothing to do with
you.

Maurice touches Adelle's cheek turning her attention back to
him. He barely manages to get the words out.

MAURICE

It has nothing to do with you
either... This is between Ellen and
me.

Beat. Maurice begins crying uncontrollably.

MAURICE

I'm begging you...

Maurice takes her hand and bends down putting his forehead to her hand as if getting blessings from her.

MAURICE

Let me do this for Ellen, let me do this for my wife.

Adelle's heart is breaking. She weeps openly as she straightens her Uncle to an upright position. She wipes the tears from his eyes with her hand gently.

AT THAT MOMENT THE INNER CIRCLE BREAKS OPEN AS TWO OFFICERS RUSH IN. They reach for Maurice.

ADELLE

Touch him, and they'll be a riot...

Adelle stands firm, the strength in her growing with each second.

ADELLE

... and I'll start it.

The officers are taken off guard. They look around at the countless sea of eyes on them. Adelle sees they won't do anything and moves to Maurice's side.

Maurice begins to walk again. Adelle to one side, Kris to the other and thousands of people following in step.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH FRONT - DAY

The wave of people led by Maurice walk toward the beach. The beach is blocked off by barricades all along it's perimeter. Police officers stand every ten feet along it's edge.

A young officer watches fearfully as the ocean of people move towards him. **OFFICER GANTZ TALKS INTO HIS WALKIE-TALKIE.**

GANTZ

He's coming. What should I do?

CUT TO:

SERGEANT EMORY

at the other end of the beach barricade, holding back hundreds of people trying to get to the beach. Emory holds his walkie-talkie and looks around at the sea of anxious faces. He makes eye contact with a woman in tears.

CUT TO:

OFFICER GANTZ

clicking off his walkie-talkie as the crowd presses up to the barricade. Officer Gantz is in awe as Maurice appears from the crowd -- looking like a ghost of war... a holy apparition. Maurice works his way painfully to Gantz.

Gantz looks into Maurice's pleading eyes. Maurice tries to say something, but nothing can come out...

Gantz turns away from Maurice and picks up one of the barricades. He makes an opening about three feet wide. Gantz turns back to Maurice, stands at attention, and steps aside.

GANTZ

(with unspeakable
admiration)

Watch your step Mr. Parker.

Adelle and Kris watch in amazement as Maurice **TAKES HIS FIRST STEP ONTO THE SAND.**

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

An empty beach. **ALL SOUND AND CHAOS DISAPPEARS. THE GENTLE HISS OF THE OCEAN FILLS THE AIR.**

The last fifty yards...

The steps in the sand, heavy, torturous. Each step, a step closer to her...

Maurice picks up the pace. His numb feet making prints in the sand. His lungs on fire...

Twenty feet left... Ten... Five...

The **COOL WATER** engulfs his feet and ankles. Maurice falls to his knees like a man falling before God.

Kneeling in the water, Maurice raises his hands to his eyes. The water spills between his fingers... clear, pure, magical.

Maurice **GASPS** hard as he falls onto his back. The water comes in and washes over him... Gasp harder... He's staring into the sky... Another wave of ocean gently blankets him... Gasp... He spots something above him, fluttering... his vision **BLURS... WHITE FLUTTERING... SLOW-MOTION. THE IMAGE CLEARS... Maurice smiles as he makes out the image of a WHITE DOVE FLYING ABOVE HIM...**

Maurice takes a short breath, very short. His body goes still -- his eyes stay fixés at one point... No more pain, no more loss, no more words...

The water washes over Maurice A. Parker...
Over his lifeless body...
And over his smile...

FADE TO BLACK.