UP IN THE AIR

screenplay by

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from the novel by

Walter Kirn
There is no “I” in team.

- Common Business Axiom

Secure your own mask before assisting others.

- Common Pre-Flight Instruction
A SPOTLIGHT reveals RYAN BINGHAM standing at a PODIUM.

He unzips a BACKPACK and sets it down beside him.

RYAN
How much does your life weigh?

Ryan pauses to let us consider this.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Imagine for a second that you’re carrying a backpack... I want you to feel the straps on your shoulders... You feel them?
(gives us a beat)
Now, I want you to pack it with all the stuff you have in your life. Start with the little things. The stuff in drawers and on shelves. The collectables and knick-knacks. Feel the weight as it adds up. Now, start adding the larger stuff. Your clothes, table top appliances, lamps, linens, your TV. That backpack should be getting pretty heavy at this point - Go Bigger. Your couch, your bed, your kitchen table. Stuff it all in... Your car, get it in there... Your home, whether you have a studio apartment or a two story house, I want you to stuff it into that backpack.

Ryan takes a beat to let the weight sink in.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Now try to walk.

We hear people around us chuckling. Ryan smiles. Reveal:

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

The kind that shifts between lower income corporate retreats and lower income weddings.

The few dozen people seem to be visualizing as told.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Kinda hard, isn’t it? This is what we do to ourselves on a daily basis. We weigh ourselves down until we can’t even move. And make no mistake – Moving is living.
We see nodding. People’s gears turning.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Now, I’m going to set your backpack on fire. What do you want to take out of it? Photos? Photos are for people who can’t remember. Drink some gingko and let the photos burn. In fact let everything burn and imagine waking up tomorrow with nothing.

(a beat of emphasis)
It’s kind of exhilarating isn’t it?
That is how I approach every day.

A titter through the crowd.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

A FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT is looking directly at us.

FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT
Do you want the cancer?

Turn to see RYAN looking back.


RYAN
Excuse me?

FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT
(same delivery)
Do you want the cancer?

Ryan furrows - What the hell is going on here?

The flight attendant raises her hand to reveal a CAN OF SODA.

FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT
The can, sir?

RYAN
Oh... No. Um, no thank you.

The flight attendant moves to the next aisle. Ryan takes a beat, then returns to his work.

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM, SUN CASUALTY - DAY

Two words - Subordinate chic.
Seated at a tiny table is RYAN. The Grim Reaper in a suit.

We see a series of REAL PEOPLE react to the news of being fired. They should be non-actors (actual victims of recent layoffs) that can react organically to the news with authenticity. Some are hurt. Others are upset and even abusive. The series concludes with...

STEVE (AN ACTOR)

... who’s on the verge of tears.

    STEVE
    Who the fuck are you?

FREEZE on Ryan.

    RYAN (V.O.)
    Excellent question. Who the fuck am I? Poor Steve has worked here for seven years.

FLASH IMAGES:

INT. STEVE’S CUBICLE - DAY

    RYAN (V.O.)
    He’s never had a meeting with me before...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Steve in a small meeting.

    RYAN (V.O.)
    ... or passed me in the hall...

INT. ELEVATOR BRIDGE - DAY

Steve passes a female coworker.

    RYAN (V.O.)
    ... or told me a story in the break room....

INT. BREAK ROOM - DAY

Steve laughs at a coworker’s story.
RYAN (V.O.)
And that’s because I don’t work here. I work for another company that lends me out to pussies like Steve’s boss...

INT. STEVE’S BOSS’S OFFICE - DAY

Steve’s BOSS sits at his desk. Subtitle reads - “A Big Pussy”

RYAN (V.O.)
... who don’t have the balls to sack their own employees. And in some cases, for good reason. Because, people do crazy shit when they get fired.

FLASH IMAGES:
Steve wipes off his boss’s desk.
Steve shreds sensitive documents.
Steve pours bleach into the communal coffee pot.
Steve loads an assault rifle. He stands up to get a view of his coworkers on a coffee break.

BACK TO:

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Steve is trying to hold it together.

RYAN (V.O.)
And that’s where I come in.

STEVE
What did I... do? What could I have done differently here?

RYAN
This is not an assessment of your productivity. It’s important not to personalize this.

Steve scoffs at this.

Ryan slides Steve a PACKET.
RYAN (CONT’D)
Steve, I want you to review this packet. Take it seriously. I think you’re going to find a lot of answers in there.

STEVE
(dismissive)
Oh, I’m sure it’s going be really helpful.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Look, anybody who ever built an empire, or changed the world, sat where you are now. And it’s because they sat there that they were able to do it.

And just for a moment, Steve looks hopeful.

RYAN (CONT’D)
I’m going to need your key card.

STEVE
Right...

Steve begins removing it from his wallet.

RYAN
Take the day. Put together your personal things. Talk to your co-workers. Tomorrow, go out and get some exercise. Go for a jog. Give yourself routines and pretty soon you’ll find your legs.

Steve nods and gets up to leave. Just as he’s about to walk out, he stops and turns back.

STEVE
Wait, how do I get in touch with you?

RYAN
Don’t worry. We’ll be in touch soon. This is just the beginning.

Steve nods and exits the room.

RYAN (V.O.)
I’ll never see Steve again.
INT. RYAN’S ROOM - PHOENIX HILTON - DAY

The choreography of Ryan’s packing is worthy of Tchaikovsky.

A coat slides off a hanger... A travel toothbrush folds closed like a switchblade... A briefcase clicks onto a roll-away bag... A hand flips a light switch without looking.

INT. LOBBY, PHOENIX HILTON - DAY

Ryan is at the check out desk.

CHECKOUT GIRL
Do you have your Hilton Honors Card with you?

Ryan smiles... “Do I?”

He hands it to her, close enough to camera, that we get a nice big close up of it. She runs the card and the screen pops up with information that makes her blush.

CHECKOUT GIRL
Oh my God... Do you like, live, at the Hilton?

Ryan nods in faux modesty.

EXT. OUTDOOR CAR RETURN, HERTZ RENT-A-CAR - DAY

Ryan pulls up to one of the spaces marked with the #1 GOLD PRESIDENTS CLUB emblem. He hops out and a uniformed man with a handheld device begins to punch in the license plate number.

Ryan pulls out his HERTZ PRESIDENTS CLUB CARD and places it nice and close to lens so we can see it.

The card slides through the handheld device and we see the DIGITAL NUMBER increase by a few thousand points.

INT. MAIN CONCOURSE, PHOENIX SKY HARBOR INTL AIRPORT - DAY

The automated GLASS DOORS slide open. Ryan enters the concourse and takes a deep breath of the temperately controlled air. He has arrived.

RYAN (V.O.)
This is where I live.

Subtitles - “Airworld”
Ryan skips the long lines and steps directly into the AAdvantage Executive Platinum line.

Glorious close-up of Ryan’s AAdvantage Executive Platinum CARD sliding through the AUTOMATED MACHINE. Were it any sexier, we’d hear a moan. Maybe we even do.

Immediately, the AIRPORT CLERK registers and perks up.

AIRPORT CLERK
Pleasure to see you again, Mr. Bingham.

RYAN (V.O.)
When I run my card, the system automatically prompts the desk clerk to greet me with this exact statement.

We see it again...

AIRPORT CLERK
Pleasure to see you again, Mr. Bingham.

Ryan nods back to the clerk.

RYAN (V.O.)
Had my status simply been gold or God-forbid, silver. I might have gotten a hello or a smile... Maybe.

Ryan continues to hit buttons, swiftly checking in.

RYAN (V.O.)
Loyalty is earned and rewarded with these small touches. It’s these kinds of systemized friendly touches that keep my world in orbit.

A ticket begins printing. Ryan snaps it up.

INT. SECURITY – PHOENIX SKY HARBOR INTL AIRPORT – SAME

Ryan steps up and observes his line choices. He finds a few Asian businessmen and hops in behind them.

JUMP CUT TO:
RYAN MOVING THROUGH THE SECURITY SCREENING

It’s a beautiful choreographed ballet of a bag handle collapsing, shoes coming off, a laptop going in a separate tray, wallet and watch sliding into a shoe, a boarding card sliding into a back pocket... both hands always moving, performing separate actions... It really is gorgeous.

INT. AMERICAN ADMIRALS CLUB - SAME

Ryan enters and presents his ADMIRALS CLUB CARD. It has a hologram. The ADMIRALS CLUB HOSTESS immediately smiles.

ADMIRALS CLUB HOSTESS
Welcome back, Mr. Bingham.

Ryan walks past a stack of newspapers on the way to the buffet, the whole time framed by an enormous window overlooking the tarmac.

RYAN (V.O.)
All the things you probably hate about travelling - The recycled air. The artificial lighting. The digital juice dispensers and mini pizzas stacked to their heat lamps are the warm reminders that I am home.

With that comment, Ryan slides into a leather club seat. A DIGITAL DISPLAY reads: “Thank You For Your Loyalty”.

He opens his briefcase and pulls out his ITINERARY. He scans it. We see a string of flights, car rentals, and stays at Hitons. Then, something makes him frown. He pulls out his cell phone and dials...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ASSISTANT’S DESK, CTC - DAY

Ryan’s assistant, Kevin, is not happy to be there.

KEVIN
Ryan Bingham’s office.

RYAN
You have me in a Dodge Stratus in Kansas City.

KEVIN
They are completely out of all full sized sedans...
RYAN
(interrupts)
Did you?...

KEVIN
(not the first time)
Yes, I reminded them of your remarkable #1 Gold Club status and years in the program. They are moving mountains to see you in a Sebring.

RYAN
Fair enough. Any other messages?

KEVIN
Your sister Kara called. Needs to speak urgently about your sister’s wedding. I told her you were midair and not even I knew your final destination.

RYAN
Well done.

KEVIN
And you got an invitation to speak at GoalQuest in Vegas.

Ryan pauses.

RYAN
GoalQuest twenty?

FLASH IMAGE:

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

We push in on an EASEL with a SIGN that features RYAN’S HEADSHOT. Underneath his name, it reads: “What’s In Your Backpack?”

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM, HOTEL - NIGHT

Ryan delivers his speech with a smile.

RYAN (V.O.)
Every once in a while I do speaking engagements. Motivational kind of stuff. But GoalQuest... We’re talking major Tony Robbins shit.
INT. ADMIRALS CLUB - SAME

Kevin examines the invitation emblazoned with a big "XX".

KEVIN
It’s got a hologram. They’re calling it Dos Equis. That’s some pretty major Tony Robbins shit there.

RYAN
Talk about burying the lead.
(exhales)
I’ll check in when...

KEVIN
Hold on, I have Craig Gregory for you...

RYAN
I... ah, fuck...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CRAIG GREGORY’S OFFICE, CTC - DAY

Four words - Store-bought sports memorabilia.

CRAIG GREGORY
How’s the road warrior?

RYAN
Twenty minutes from boarding into a world of bliss.

CRAIG GREGORY
Great numbers out of Phoenix. You know Big Auto is going to drop another 10K this month.

RYAN
No kidding?

CRAIG GREGORY
Yeah, Christmas came early. Wish I could have you in five places at once. I need you back in Omaha by the end of the week.

RYAN
I thought you needed me everywhere.
CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
We got something big - Game changer.

RYAN
I don’t know why you ever bring me in. Wherever I go, the money follows. Let me plant seeds, they’ll grow to Oaks.

Craig checks out a CUTE INTERN.

CRAIG GREGORY
I’m thinking of planting seeds right now.

RYAN
What are we talking about here?

CRAIG GREGORY
You’ll see.
(changes directions)
Today, I took my first crap in two weeks. Hallelujah.

RYAN
That’s me, hanging up on you.

CRAIG GREGORY
Good. I love that sound.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

Ryan sits one row behind the bulkhead. Left side. Aisle.

RYAN (V.O.)
To know me is to fly with me. I’m the aisle, you’re the window - trapped.

Reveal - A man next to Ryan. Some BUSINESSMAN between cities. He talks, drink in hand, but we don’t hear him.

RYAN (V.O.)
We start chatting, impersonally at first. Our moderate politics, our sinking opinions on the American service industry.
BUSINESSMAN AND RYAN MAKING SUGGESTIONS

RYAN (V.O.)
You recommend a hotel in Tulsa. I tip you off to a rib joint in Fort Worth.

BUSINESSMAN TELLS A JOKE. HIS HANDS GESTURE.

RYAN (V.O.)
You tell me your best joke. I’ve heard it before, but listen anyway.

Ryan laughs out loud.

TURBULENCE. THE BUSINESSMAN TIGHTENS HIS SEAT BELT.

RYAN (V.O.)
Nothing like turbulence to cement a bond. Soon you’re telling me about family.

THE MAN SPEAKS ABOUT SOMETHING THAT OBVIOUSLY DISTURBS HIM.

RYAN (V.O.)
Your wife just went back to work but you can’t intervene because you sure could use the extra paycheck and besides, last June she read some book and woke up one morning a feminist.

THE MAN LEANS BACK, ARMS CROSSED, WITH A FAR OFF LOOK.

RYAN (V.O.)
And that if your windfall ever came through, you’d quit and spend the rest of your days restoring vintage speedboats.

(saying it with him)
The water. That’s where you belong.

EXT. TARMAC, DALLAS FORT WORTH AIRPORT – DAY

Their PLANE LANDS.

INT. BOEING 757 – DAY

As the plane begins to taxi to the gate, both Ryan and the Businessman pull out their cards.
RYAN (V.O.)
We exchange cards and slot them next to countless others.
The dull bell “dings” to let us know it’s safe to stand. Ryan and the Businessman get up and open the overheads.

RYAN (V.O.)
Fast friends aren’t my only friends, but my best friends.

INT. CONCOURSE, DALLAS FORT WORTH AIRPORT - DAY
Ryan and the Businessman walk next to each, now completely ignoring each other as if they never shared a word.

RYAN (V.O.)
Sad? Not really. We’re a busy bunch. I’m peaceful. I’m in my element here. I suppose I’m a sort of mutation, a new species. I live between the margins of my itineraries.

Ryan and the Businessman reach a point that separates - CONNECTING FLIGHTS go left / LONG TERM PARKING goes right.

They share an awkward smile with a nod, then head in their separate directions.

INT. BROOKS BROTHERS, DALLAS FORT WORTH AIRPORT - DAY
Ryan is checking out TIES when his cell phone rings. He checks the I.D.- UNAVAILABLE. He weighs it for a second.

RYAN
(picks up)
Hello?

KARA (O.C.)
Hi Ryan.

Ryan mouths a silent “fuck”.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KARA’S KITCHEN - NIGHT
Kara is Ryan’s sister. Her home overflows with books, photos, family collectables, and kid’s artwork.
RYAN (V.O.)
Every family has one person who is
the glue. The one who keeps the
genealogy in check. That’s my
sister Kara - The glue.

It just so happens that Kara is GLUING her daughter’s school project mobile together.

RYAN
Hey Kara.

KARA
How are you holding up?

RYAN
Just fine. You? The kids?

KARA
(lying)
Missy’s outstanding. Matthew made varsity. How’s the road?

Ryan exits the store and we realize we are in...

INT. CONCOURSE, DALLAS FORT WORTH AIRPORT - DAY
Ryan hops onto a PEOPLE MOVER.

RYAN
Couldn’t be better.

KARA
That’s good. So, Ryan?

RYAN
(cautious)
Yeah?

KARA
I didn’t even want to have to ask you for this, because I know how you are about... doing things for others...

Ryan rolls his eyes.

KARA (CONT’D)
But we’re coming in on three weeks to go for Julie’s wedding and there’s something we could really use your help on.
RYAN

Yeah.

KARA

We’ve been sending people these kits so they can print out photos of Julie and Jim on cardboard, and take photos of them in interesting places kind of like that gnome in the French movie.

RYAN

Why?

KARA

(sighs)

Because it’s Julie’s wedding... and she thinks it’s fun. Does it matter why?

RYAN

How is Julie?

KARA

Would you call her? She thinks you’ve turned to butter - Disappeared. You’re awfully isolated, the way you live.

RYAN

Isolated? I’m surrounded.

KARA

Your assistant told me you’re going to be in Vegas.

RYAN

Did he?

KARA

Can you get a photo of the cut-out in front of the Luxor Pyramid?

RYAN

That place is a shit hole. No one stays there.

KARA

Jesus, Ryan, I’m not asking you to check in. Can you just take a stupid photo?

RYAN

I’m going to try my best.

KARA

Well, thank you for trying your best.
INT. BAR LOUNGE - HOUSTON HILTON - EVENING

Ryan sits at one of the couch & table set-ups. He’s going over some paperwork. He notices an attractive professionally dressed woman, ALEX, sifting through her purse. She sets a pair of car keys with a MAESTRO TAG on the table.

RYAN
You’re satisfied with Maestro?

ALEX
Yeah, I am.

RYAN
They’re stingy with their miles. I like Hertz.

ALEX
Hertz keeps its vehicles too long. If a car’s over twenty-thousand miles, I won’t drive it.

Ryan is intrigued.

RYAN
Maestro doesn’t instant check out. I like to park and go.

ALEX
Hertz doesn’t guarantee Navigation.

RYAN
Funny, you don’t seem like a girl who needs directions.

ALEX
I hate asking for directions. That’s why I get a Nav.

RYAN
The new outfit, Colonial, isn’t bad.

ALEX
Is that a joke?

After a beat.

RYAN
Yes.

ALEX
Their kiosk placement is a joke.
RYAN
Never have available upgrades.

ALEX
(passionate)
It’s basically a fleet of shit boxes – Don’t know how they’re still in business.

RYAN
(I love you)
I’m Ryan.

ALEX
Alex.

RYAN
So are you going to join me?

She breaks into a smile.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BAR LOUNGE - HOUSTON HILTON - LATER THAT EVENING

Empty glasses litter the table. Ryan and Alex have taken over a couch and have the contents of their wallets spread out – All MEMBERSHIP CARDS.

RYAN
(grabs one of Alex’s cards)
Maplewood Card? How dare you bring that into this palace.

ALEX
Hilton offers equal value and better food – But the Maplewood gives out warm cookies at check in.

RYAN
They got you with the cookies?

ALEX
I’m a sucker for simulated hospitality.

RYAN
There’s actually an industry term for that. It’s a mixture of faux and homey. It’s faumey.

Alex grabs Ryan’s AMERICAN CONCIERGE KEY CARD.
ALEX
Oh my God. I’ve heard about these, but never seen one in person. Is this a...?

RYAN
Concierge Key. Yeah.

ALEX
I love the weight.

RYAN
Graphite. I was pretty excited the day that puppy came in.

ALEX
I’ll say. I put up pretty pedestrian numbers. Sixty thou a year, domestic.

RYAN
(trying)
That’s not bad.

ALEX
Don’t patronize me. What’s your total?

RYAN
That’s a personal question.

ALEX
Oh please...

RYAN
(playful)
I hardly know you.

ALEX
Show some hubris. Impress me.
(suggestive)
I bet it’s huge.

RYAN
You have no idea.

ALEX
Come on...
(holds her hands eight inches apart)
Is it this big?
(extends a few inches)
... this big?
RYAN
Let’s just say I’ve got a number in mind and I haven’t hit it yet.

Alex smiles, fair enough. Admires the CONCIERGE KEY CARD.

ALEX
This is pretty fucking sexy.

RYAN
I hope it doesn’t cheapen our relationship.

ALEX
We’re two people who get turned on by elite status. We may have to settle for cheap.

RYAN
There’s nothing cheap about loyalty.

Alex looks into Ryan’s eyes and gives him unspoken permission to take her right there and then.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ryan and Alex walk down a curved corridor, suppressing laughter. There’s no adult way to go back to somebody’s hotel room. Once at the door, Ryan tries his KEY CARD, but it doesn’t work.

He reaches into his pocket and comes up with five other key cards from recent trips.

RYAN
I really have to start throwing these out.

He tries a couple.

ALEX
We can always use that room with the ice machine.

Ryan chuckles. He finds the right key and opens the door.

INT. RYAN’S SUITE, HOUSTON HILTON - LATER THAT NIGHT

Everything is scattered from a marathon Fuck. Ryan and Alex are laying on the bed, sprawled out on their backs like murder victims.
RYAN
Good call on the towel rack.

ALEX
Thanks. I liked how you burritoed me in the sofa cushions.

RYAN
I was improvising.

ALEX
Too bad we didn’t make it to the closet.

RYAN
We got to do this again.

JUMP CUT TO:

TWO LAPTOPS SIDE BY SIDE

RYAN
I’m in Newark on the 12th, Madesto on the 13th, Oklahoma City on the 15th.

ALEX
Any Southwest? I’m swinging through Albuquerque the week of the 16th?

RYAN
No, but I’ll be in Florida by the 20th.

ALEX
Miami?

RYAN
Ft. Lauderdale.

ALEX
That’s nothing.

RYAN
Forty minutes.

They simultaneously type each other into their calendars.

ALEX
I should probably go back to my room so I can wake up in my bed.
RYAN
I think that’s the lady like thing to do.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT
Ryan drops Alex off at her door. She flips the “do not disturb” on her door handle and kisses Ryan good night. The door closes. Ryan smiles to himself.

EXT. HOUSTON HILTON - NEXT MORNING
Sprinklers doing their job. One’s broken.

EXT. HOUSTON HILTON - MORNING
Looking through the first floor window, we see Ryan doing laps in the pool.

INT. LOBBY, HOUSTON HILTON - MORNING
Ryan gets a shoe shine.

INT. LOBBY, HOUSTON HILTON - DAY
The CLERK swipes Ryan card.

EXT. CAR DROP OFF - MAESTRO RENT-A-CAR - DAY
A CAR RETURN CLERK slides Ryan’s card through a device.

INT. CHECK IN DESK, BUSH INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT - DAY
Ryan SWIPES his FREQUENT FLIER CARD through the automated machine.
A FEMALE DESK ASSISTANT notices the number, looks up at Ryan, and has a tiny orgasm right there.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY
Ryan looks out the OVAL WINDOW to the landscape of Omaha.
RYAN (V.O.)
Last year, I spent three hundred twenty two days on the road.

INT. KISS-N-FLY, EPPLEY AIRFIELD - DAY
Ryan wheels passed a couple that leaps into each other’s arms.

RYAN (V.O.)
Which means that I had to spend forty three miserable days at home.

EXT. RYAN’S APARTMENT BUILDING, OMAHA - DAY
Ryan steps up to an upscale building with little character, searching for his keys at the bottom of his bag. Finally finds them and opens the front door.

INT. ELEVATOR, RYAN’S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY
Ryan presses his floor, when a NOSEY NEIGHBOR slides in.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
Ryan?

RYAN
(doesn’t know his name)
Hi...

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
Feels like it’s been months, busy man. We missed you at our Summer party.

RYAN
Yeah, sorry I couldn’t be there.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
We’ve been trying to get a vote on the new landscaping. Can I e-mail you the plans...? We’d love to get a final tally.

RYAN
It’s fine. Really. I’ll go with the majority.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
Sometimes I forget that you even live here. You could probably save money and move into a hotel.
RYAN
(dead serious)
I looked into it, but the IRS requires a permanent address for employment. Otherwise, they classify you as a vagrant.

Ding! - Ryan gets off at his floor.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
Oh.

INT. RYAN’S APARTMENT, OMAHA - DAY

Ryan walks in and sets his bag down. Reveal - the place is empty... Like empty, empty.


WOMAN’S VOICE
Hey neighbor.

Ryan turns to find Dianne, a pretty woman just shy of forty.

RYAN
Hey yourself.

They hug - It’s just intimate enough to know they’ve violated the rules of sleeping with your neighbors.

DIANNE
(hand over a package)
I signed for this while you were gone.

RYAN
Thanks. Hope it wasn’t a bother.

Ryan opens it and finds the CUT-OUT of his sister Julie and her fiance Jim. It’s an eighteen inch card stock photo of Jim hugging Julie from behind.

DIANNE
(re: photo)
They seem happy.

RYAN
It’s my sister. She’s getting married. Haven’t met the guy yet.

DIANNE
Lots of luck.
RYAN
I know, right?

They share a smile. Then, Dianne goes to leave.

DIANNE
It’s good to see you. Feels like a while this time.

RYAN
Hey, you want to come over tonight?

Dianne gets a little uncomfortable.

DIANNE
Actually, I kind of started seeing somebody.

RYAN
Oh, that’s... that’s great.

DIANNE
Yeah, we’re having drinks tonight if you want to come over.

RYAN
That’s okay... I think I’ll settle in.

Dianne gives a smile/nod and exits. Ryan take another long look at the CUT-OUT. He shakes his head.

EXT. CTC HEADQUARTERS, CTC - MORNING

A downtown midsize high rise.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The company has piled in, standing room only. Assistants and interns watch through the windows.

Craig addresses the group including his own superiors.

CRAIG GREGORY
Just thrilled to have everyone under one roof. Welcome home boys.

A couple odd looks from road warriors a decade his senior.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
I know there’s are lot of whispering about why we’re all here.

(MORE)
CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
Retailers are down twenty percent.  
Auto industry is in the dump.  
Housing market doesn’t have a heart. This is our moment. It’s one of the worst times on record for America... and I don’t want to be standing here two years from now, wondering how we missed this window of opportunity.

A strangely encouraged response from the group.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
Now, last Summer we received a dynamite young woman by way of Cornell. She challenged us with some big ideas. My first reaction was, who does this kid think she is? But when I started to give a listen, I was pretty knocked out. So now, with a little peek into our future - Natalie Keener.

Natalie stands up.

NATALIE
If there’s one word I want to leave you with today, it’s this...

Natalie clicks on her POWER POINT PRESENTATION.

POWER POINT SLIDE: “GLOCAL”

Everyone including Ryan attempts to pronounce it.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Glocal.

POWER POINT SLIDE: “GLOBAL ---> LOCAL”

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Our global must become local.

POWER POINT SLIDE: A slide shows PEOPLE X 250.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
This company keeps twenty three people on the road, at least two hundred fifty days a year. It’s expensive and it’s inefficient. When I came to Craig three months ago with this, he told me, and quite astutely – it’s only a problem if you have a solution.

(MORE)
NATALIE (CONT’D)
Well, today I stand before you with jus that.

She turns around and fires up her monitor. Sitting in a video conference session is a young man in a suit.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
You all know Ned in reception.

Various people say hello to Ned.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Today, I’m going to fire Ned.
(aside)
Sorry, Ned. I’m sure H.R. will hire you back this afternoon.

Ned smiles. People chuckle in the conference room. One guy jokes “Don’t count on it.”

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Ned could be any employee in any one of our client’s locations worldwide. Strategy packets would be shipped in advance. Ned would be given a seat and find one of our transition specialists waiting for him.

Natalie turns to the monitor and proceeds to fire Ned. It is a pretty dry process and lacks Ryan’s charm.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Mr. Laskin, the reason we’re having this conversation today is your position is no longer available.

NED
(from a script)
I don’t understand. I’m fired?

NATALIE
Hearing the words “You’ve been let go” is never easy. Change is always scary. But consider the following -
(using Ryan’s line)
Anybody who ever built an empire, or changed the world, sat where you are now. And it’s because they sat there that they were able to do it.

RYAN
(quietly)
That’s my fucking line.
NED
Well, what happens now?

NATALIE
This is the first step of a process that will end with you in a new job that fulfills you.

NED
Yeah, but, how does it work?

NATALIE
I want you to take that packet in front of you.

Ned picks up the packet.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Review it. All the answers you’re looking for are inside. Start filling out the necessary information and before you know it, you’ll be on your way to new opportunities.

Ned starts to peruse the packet with fake interest.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Now Ned, I’m going to need you to go back to your desk and start putting together your things. As a favor to me, I’d appreciate it if you didn’t spread the news just yet. Panic doesn’t help anybody.

NED
I understand.

NATALIE
Have a good day, Mr. Laskin and good luck with your future.

NED
Thank you.

Ned gets up and goes to leave.

NATALIE
Give it up for Ned.

People clap and tease him a little.
POWER POINT: An animation of one monitor becoming multiple monitors, all tied into a central switch board in the middle of a map of the country.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
You can start the morning in Boston, stop in Dallas over lunch and finish the day in San Francisco. All for the price of a T1 line. Our inflated travel budget is eviscerated by eighty-five percent... And most importantly to you guys on the road... No more Christmases in a hotel in Tulsa... No more hours lost to weather delays... You get to come home.

Ryan is in a state of silent panic.

INT. CRAIG GREGORY’S OFFICE, CTC - MOMENTS LATER
Ryan enters and stops short.

RYAN
Tell me you’re not taking this seriously.

CRAIG GREGORY
Yeah, that’s why we brought the entire company in from the road - Because we’re not taking this seriously.

RYAN
It doesn’t make any sense. It’s... (searching) ... completely impersonal.

CRAIG GREGORY
Who am I even talking to?

RYAN
There’s a methodology to what I do. A reason why it works.

CRAIG GREGORY
Ryan, Coke and IBM have been doing it for years. Just like anything, there’s a few months of transition, but everyone settles in.

RYAN
Who are you taking off the road?
A beat.

CRAIG GREGORY
You don’t get it. You’re grounded, Ryan. Everyone is. It’s done.

RYAN
Okay, what we do here is brutal and leaves people devastated, but there’s a dignity to the way I do it.

CRAIG GREGORY
Stabbing people in the chest instead of the back?

Ryan rolls his eyes.

Craig’s door opens and Natalie pops her head in.

NATALIE
You wanted to see me?

Craig goes to wave her off.

RYAN
Yeah, why don’t you come in.

Natalie is confused but takes the chair next to Ryan.

CRAIG GREGORY
Great job in there, Nat.

NATALIE
Thank you. How’s everyone taking it?

Natalie and Ryan hold a look for a second.

RYAN
(to Natalie)
Look, I appreciate your... zeal. And you have some good ideas. But you know nothing of the realities of my job. Sure, you can set up an iChat... but you don’t know how people think.

NATALIE
Actually, I minored in psychology.

CRAIG GREGORY
Nice.

RYAN
(to Natalie)
Okay kiddo, fire me.
Ryan, stop it.

She’s going to be doing this on a regular basis. You don’t want to know if she can fire somebody?

She just fired Ned.

My dog could fire Ned.
    (to Natalie)
Fire me.

Ryan.

It’s okay, I got this.

Ryan and Natalie turn to face each other.

Mr. Bingham, I regret to inform you that your position is no longer available.

Who the hell are you?

My name is Miss Keener and I’m here today to discuss your future.

My future? I don’t know you. The only person who can fire me is Craig Gregory.

Mr. Gregory hired me to handle this for him.

Handle what? Handle me? Mr. Gregory hired me and he’s the only one who can fire me. I’m going to talk to him.

Ryan gets up. Natalie gets up too.

Mr. Bingham...
RYAN
You can’t follow me... You’re on a computer screen. Remember?

NATALIE
(frustrated)
Ryan...

Ryan sits back down.

RYAN
Try again. Fire me.

NATALIE
I just did.

RYAN
Actually, you didn’t. Now, fire me.

CRAIG GREGORY
Stop it, Ryan.

NATALIE
(ignores Craig)
Mr. Bingham, I’m here today to inform you that your position is no longer available.

RYAN
I’m fired?

NATALIE
Yes, you’re fired.

RYAN
(aside)
Never say fired.

NATALIE
You’ve been let go.

RYAN
Why?

NATALIE
(breaks the moment)
This is a mythical situation. How could I possibly know why?

RYAN
You never know why. Why doesn’t matter.
NATALIE
(back on track)
It’s important not to focus on the “why” and rather to spend your energy thinking about your future.

RYAN
I’m going to spend my energy on suing you if you don’t give me a reason that you’re firing me.

NATALIE
Mr. Bingham, the reason is not important.

RYAN
Oh, so you’re firing me without grounds.
(to Craig)
Now, I really have a lawsuit.

CRAIG GREGORY
Ryan, I think we know what you’re trying to say...

NATALIE
 stil in character)
Don’t take this personally, Mr. Bingham.

Ryan stops.

RYAN
Personally?
(quiet and calm)
This is the most personal situation you will ever enter. So before you try to revolutionize my business, I’d like to know that you actually know my business.

INT. RYAN’S OFFICE, CTC - DAY

Ryan is staring out his window watching a plane take flight.

Craig enters.

CRAIG GREGORY
Hell-of-a-way to welcome her to the team.
RYAN
Am I the only one who sees that by
automating our own business, we’re
making ourselves irrelevant.

CRAIG GREGORY
(frankly...)
No... We’re making you irrelevant.

Ryan shoots a look.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
Hey, don’t blame me. Blame fuel
costs. Blame insurance premiums.
Blame technology.
(a beat)
Watch yourself, Ryan. You’re too
young to be a dinosaur...

RYAN
I’m not... I’m not a dinosaur.

CRAIG GREGORY
I want you to show her the ropes.

RYAN
What do I know about what happens
around here? Have Ferguson do it.

CRAIG GREGORY
I’m not talking about here.

A beat as Ryan registers what Craig means: The Road.

RYAN
No.

CRAIG GREGORY
Hey, you seem pretty confident that this
girl doesn’t know what she’s doing...

RYAN
Excuse me. I just don’t think a
MySpace page qualifies you to
rewire an entire company.

CRAIG GREGORY
Great. Well, here’s your chance.
Show her the magic. Take her
through the paces.

RYAN
I’m not a fucking tour guide.
Craig cups one of his hands and places a FOLDED POST-IT between his fingers like a ship’s sail.

CRAIG GREGORY
(re: his hand)
This is the boat.

Craig raises his other finger far away.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
(re: his finger)
This is you.

A beat of Ryan taking in this ridiculous illustration.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
Do you want to be in the boat?

RYAN
Yes. Alone.

CRAIG GREGORY
Ryan, we’re ringing the bell. Rounding everybody up. If you want to stay out there a little longer, you can. But you’re not going to be on your own. (begins to leave) Let me know.

Ryan churns.

INT. RYAN’S APARTMENT - DAY

Ryan is packing his ROLL-AWAY BAG. It is practiced and systematic. He’s just about finished, when he notices the CUT-OUT of his sister’s engagement photo.

He tries placing it in the open bag, but it is immediately clear that the photo is two inches too long. He tries putting it on an angle, but that doesn’t help.

RYAN
Huh.

Ryan centers the cut-out again and tries to ZIP around it, but he can’t get the zipper around the HEADS of the photo. For a moment, it almost seems like he’s assaulting their tiny head with the zipper handle. Doesn’t help.

A moment of silent frustration.

CUT TO:
THE ROLL-AWAY

Being pulled through an airport. The little heads of Ryan’s sister and her fiance are poking out the top of the bag. The two zippers have been closed on either side of them as though they were tiny passengers peeking out the sunroof.

INT. EPPLEY AIRFIELD, OMAHA - MORNING

Ryan cuts right through the crowd, wheeling his carry-on towards the automatic check-in machines.

Ryan stops when he notices NATALIE saying goodbye to her BOYFRIEND - a kind of Hollister looking guy in his mid-twenties. He’s not thrilled by the public affection. After a beat, they break and he exits.

Natalie sees Ryan and starts dragging her LARGE SUITCASE towards him. The SCRAPING against the terrazzo sends a shiver up Ryan’s spine.

She arrives and sets the heavy bag down with a CLUNK. Ryan stares at her travel case for a beat then up to her.

NATALIE
What?

CUT TO:

A ROW OF ROLL AWAY BAGS

INT. LUGGAGE STORE, EPPLEY AIRFIELD - MORNING

Ryan pulls one out and tests the action.

NATALIE
I really like my luggage.

RYAN
That’s exactly what it is. Luggage. (off of Natalie’s look)
You know how much time you lose by checking in?

NATALIE
I don’t know, maybe five minutes waiting for...
RYAN
Thirty five minutes per flight. I travel two hundred seventy days a year. That makes one hundred fifty seven hours... That’s Seven Days.
(points to her luggage)
You ready to throw away a whole week on that?

INT. TERMINAL FLOOR, EPPLEY AIRFIELD - MORNING
Natalie is attempting to repack her new bag in the middle of the airport. Ryan helps by throwing a couple things out.

INT. SECURITY, EPPLEY AIRFIELD- MORNING
Ryan spots various “bad lines”, then sees a group of Asians.

RYAN
Bingo. Asians.

Ryan starts walking.

NATALIE
You can’t be serious.

As they pass the first line - A FAMILY OF SIX.

RYAN
Never get behind people travelling with infants. I’ve never seen a stroller collapse in less than twenty minutes.

Second Line - AN ELDERLY COUPLE

RYAN (CONT’D)
Old people are worse. Their bodies are littered with hidden metal and they never seem to appreciate how little time they have left on Earth.

Third Line - A COUPLE MIDDLE EASTERN GUYS.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Five words. Randomly selected for additional screening.

They enter the fourth line behind the Asians.
RYAN (CONT'D)
Asians. They’re light packers, treasure efficiency, and have a thing for slip-on shoes. God love‘em.

NATALIE
That’s racist.

RYAN
I’m like my mother. I stereotype. It’s faster.

INT. SECURITY, EPPLEY AIRFIELD MOMENTS LATER
Ryan is just fastening his belt, having just gone through security, when we hear a beeping go off. Natalie is trying to find the metal on her body that has set off the machine. She also has forgotten to take her laptop out of her bag. It’s a mess.

INT. BOEING 757 – MID FLIGHT
Ryan is sketching a theoretical book cover for “The Backback”. Natalie is working on an Excel Document on her laptop – She’s a loud tapper... Hitting the keys with violent strokes. It draws Ryan’s attention and a raised eyebrow.

RYAN
Are you upset at your laptop?

NATALIE
No. Why?

RYAN
Fats Domino had a lighter touch.

NATALIE
I type with purpose.

RYAN
What are you working on so furiously?

NATALIE
I’m building a work flow of firing techniques. Questions & responses. Actions & reactions. A script that works kind of like a tributary, taking you through the steps of firing someone.

RYAN
Who is it for?
Theoretically, you could put it in the hands of anybody and they could be downsizing immediately. All they have to do is follow the steps.

Natalie, what is it, you think we do here?

We prepare the newly unemployed for the emotional and physical hurdles of job hunting while... Minimizing potential legal blowback?

That’s what we’re selling. But it’s not what we’re doing.

Okay, what are we doing?

Our job is to make limbo tolerable - To ferry wounded souls across the river of dread and humiliation to the point at which hope’s bright shore is dimly visible...

(frankly)
And then to stop the boat, shove’em in the water, and make them swim while we row back to the palace of their banishment to present the employers with our bills.

That was really impressive. You rehearse that?

Ryan zips through the wandering types as Natalie tries to keep up. Ryan’s phone rings. He sees the caller ID. Smiles.

I got to grab this. I’ll meet you at the rental lot.
Natalie nods and keeps moving. Ryan picks up.

RYAN
Hey, I was hoping I’d hear from you.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Alex is on her cell phone as a junior behind her folds a portable projector screen.

ALEX
I’m in Hotlanta. I need a rib joint recommend bad.

RYAN
(smiles)
Fat Matt’s. Bring a bib.

Ryan turns into an elevator well to talk.

ALEX
You haven’t called.

RYAN
You know, I didn’t know what was appropriate...

Alex stops. She moves to a quieter place.

ALEX
Ryan, I’m not some waitress you banged in a snow storm. The word “Appropriate” has no place in our collective vocabulary. I’m the woman you don’t have to worry about.

RYAN
This sounds like a trick.

ALEX
Next time you’re worried about manners – Don’t. If you want to call – Call. Just think of me as yourself... only with a vagina.

Ryan lights up... This woman fucking rocks. Then recovers.

RYAN
When am I going to see you?
ALEX
I’m out of Hartsfield, into IAD,
then a connection at ORD into SDF.

RYAN
(compassionate)
Oh... sorry.

ALEX
Tell me about it.

RYAN
How long is your layover in O’Hare?
They’ve got multiples into SDF...
Think you could push?

ALEX
(smiles)
I can push.

Joy.

INT. ELEVATOR, BOTTLING COMPANY - DAY
Ryan and Natalie ride, briefcases in hand. Natalie is swaying
back and forth. Ryan notices. Is she nervous? Excited?

Ding - The elevator door opens.

INT. RECEPTION, BOTTLING COMPANY - DAY
Ryan and Natalie enter the door to find a reception desk on
an empty floor. Scattered telephones sit on the ground where
desks used to be. A few desks in one corner are still manned.

Natalie tries not to show: It’s all becoming very real.

RYAN
(to desk girl)
Ryan Bingham, from CTC.

The desk girl looks up from her work. She knows who they are.

INT. CUBICLE CITY, BOTTLING COMPANY - DAY
Ryan and Natalie pass rows of cubicles. Heads begin to pop up
to see their arrival. Natalie accidentally makes eye contact
with one guy, then quickly shifts her gaze forward.
INT. WINDOWLESS CONFERENCE ROOM, BOTTLING COMPANY - DAY

Ryan and Natalie sit next to each other at a polyurethane conference table.

RYAN
All you have to do today is watch and listen. When I talk about the strategy packet. You hand them one of these...

Ryan points to a stack of packets.

NATALIE
You ever find it strange that termination comes with a packet.

RYAN
Everything important in life comes with a packet.

MONTAGE OF MORE REAL PEOPLE REACTING TO BEING FIRED

A SERIES OF REAL PEOPLE sit down across from Ryan and Natalie

RYAN
Thank you for coming by. As you’re probably well aware, this is a tough economic climate and your company is not immune.

REAL PEOPLE tighten up as they begin to catch on.

RYAN
While I wish I was here with better news, the reason you and I are meeting is this is your final week of employment here.

REAL PEOPLE blame all sorts of people and situations that they personally hold responsible.

RYAN
This is not a time to look for blame. Your position simply no longer exists.

REAL PEOPLE respond further. Some are enraged. Some are polite. One is even grateful.

RYAN
I understand why you are saying these things.

(MORE)
RYAN (cont'd)
It’s perfectly natural to feel
this way. I want you to take the
next week to explore this strategy
packet...

Ryan nods to Natalie who we now see begrudgingly HANDING
PACKETS to all of the REAL PEOPLE we’ve already met.

RYAN
Fill out the skill set work
sheet... Use the hopes and dreams
diagram... And the tree of
aspirations.

We SEE the “TREE OF ASPIRATIONS” sheet.

RYAN
(with emphasis)
The answers are all in there.

We see more packets getting handed out as Ryan repeats...

RYAN
The answers are all in there.
(another person)
The answers...
(another person)
The answers...
(another person)
... are-all-in-there.

CUT TO:

BOB (AN ACTOR) PRESENTING A PHOTO OF HIS CHILDREN

BOB
And what do you suggest I tell
them?

BOB. Dry red eyes from tears of rage stare down the lens.

Natalie can’t hold back any longer.

NATALIE
(a suggestion)
Perhaps you’re underestimating the
positive effect your career transition
may have on your children.

Ryan looks at Natalie like she’s out of her mind.

BOB
Positive effect?
NATALIE
Well, tests have shown that children under moderate trauma have a tendency to apply themselves academically as a method of coping.

BOB
Go fuck yourself. That’s what my kids’ll think.

Natalie shrinks. Ryan immediately covers.

RYAN
Your children’s admiration is important to you?

BOB
Yeah. It was.

RYAN
(frankly)
Well, I doubt they ever admired you, Bob.

Bob looks up shocked and pissed.

BOB
Hey asshole, aren’t you here to console me?

RYAN
I’m not a shrink, Bob. I’m a wake up call. You know why kids love athletes?

BOB
Because they screw lingerie models.

RYAN
No, that’s why we love athletes. Kids love them because they follow their dreams.

BOB
Yeah, well I can’t dunk.

RYAN
But you can cook.

Natalie looks to Ryan – Where is he going with this?

BOB
What are you talking about?
Ryan picks up Bob’s resume.

RYAN
Your resume says you minored in French Culinary Arts. Most students work the frier at KFC. You bussed tables at Il Picatorre to support yourself. Then you got out of college and started working here. (looks up at Bob) How much did they first pay you to give up on your dreams?

BOB (flat)
Twenty seven thousand a year.

RYAN
At what point were you going to stop and go back to what made you happy?

Bob simply shrugs.

RYAN
Do you believe in fate, Bob?

BOB
Fate?

RYAN
Yeah. You know, the mysterious ways in which we wind up doing the things we were meant to do.

BOB (offering)
I met my wife at a gas station.

RYAN
Exactly. Well, I think fate is telling you to do something, Bob.

Bob looks up and meets eyes with Ryan.

RYAN (CONT’D)
I see guys who work for the same company their entire lives. Clock in. Clock out. Never a moment of happiness. (pauses for effect) Not everyone gets this kind of opportunity.

(MORE)
RYAN (CONT'D)
The chance for rebirth. If not for yourself... Do it for your kids.

Bob’s eyes begin to water again. He’s a changed man.

Ryan shoots Natalie a look - Hand over the packet.

Natalie jumps to attention and hands Bob a packet.

INT. LOBBY, ST. LOUIS HILTON - NIGHT

There’s a BUSINESS WOMAN waiting in the regular line. Ryan walks right past her and gets into the ELITE LINE. They are now both first in their respective lines for the counter.

The woman looks over at Ryan and sighs. Natalie holds back, confused by Ryan’s actions and wanting to avoid confrontation.

The DESK CLERK frees up and gestures for Ryan to step forward. Ryan begins wheeling his bag forward. Meanwhile, the woman lifts her hand in outrage.

BUSINESS WOMAN
I’ve been waiting ten minutes. He just waltzes in and gets to cut in line.

DESK CLERK
We reserve priority assistance for our Hilton Honors members.

Ryan grabs a BROCHURE for ELITE MEMBERSHIP off the desk and hands it to the business woman.

RYAN
You should look into it - The promotions are great...

The woman bats it out of Ryan’s hand onto the floor.

BUSINESS WOMAN
Fuck off.

Ryan looks back at the desk clerk and smiles. The desk clerk swipes his card.

Ryan’s DIGITAL NUMBER bumps up another thousand points.

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM, ST. LOUIS HILTON - EVENING

Natalie is washing her hands, when she stops to look at herself in the mirror.
After a beat, she hears someone CRYING in one of the stalls. She goes to see if the woman is okay, then stops herself - *Maybe I fired her.*

She grabs a paper towel, dries off her hands, and leaves.

**INT. RESTAURANT BAR, ST. LOUIS HILTON - EVENING**

Natalie sits back down at the table a little visibly shaken.

**RYAN**

You okay?

**NATALIE**

(covers quickly)

Yeah. Fine.

Just then, their food arrives... And there’s a lot of food. Natalie’s eyes move back and forth trying to figure out why there seems to be three main courses and a bunch of sides.

**NATALIE**

Hungry, much?

**RYAN**

Our expense account allots for forty dollars each on dinner. I plan on grabbing every mile I can.

**NATALIE**

Okay, you got to fill me in on this mile business. What’s that all about? Are you talking like frequent flier miles?

Ryan gives Natalie a look - *Is she ready for this information?*

**RYAN**

Your really want to know?

**NATALIE**

(mock serious)

I’m dying to know.

**RYAN**

I don’t spend a nickel, if I can help it, unless it somehow profits my mileage account. I’m not talking hotel rooms and rental cars either, but internet services, cell phone, music downloads, teleflorists. The works. I shop them according to the miles they pay and I pit them against each other for the most value.
NATALIE
So, what are you saving up for?
Hawaii? South of France?

RYAN
No, it’s not like that... The miles are the goal.

NATALIE
That’s it? You’re saving to save?

RYAN
Let’s just say I’ve got a number in mind and haven’t hit it yet.

NATALIE
Wow. Seems a little abstract. What’s your target?

RYAN
I’d rather not.

NATALIE (teasing)
It’s a secret target?

RYAN
It’s ten million miles.

NATALIE
Huh. Isn’t ten million just a number?

RYAN
Pi is just a number.

NATALIE
I guess we all need a hobby.

Ryan looks back at Natalie – *Hobby?*

NATALIE (CONT’D)
Oh hey, I didn’t mean to belittle your collection. I get it. Sounds cool.

RYAN
I’d be the seventh person to do it. More people have walked on the moon.

NATALIE
Do they give you a parade or something?
RYAN
Lifetime Exec Platinum status. You get to meet the Chief Pilot, Maynard Finch. And... They put your name on the side of a plane.

NATALIE
Men get such a hard-on from putting their name on stuff... You guys don’t grow up - You just need to pee on everything.

RYAN
Now, who’s stereotyping?

NANCY
Fear of mortality. It’s like Yes, you’re going to die one day.

RYAN
And why do you suppose that’s singular to men?

NATALIE
Probably cause you can’t have babies.

Ryan can’t help but laugh a little.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
If I had that many miles, I’d just show up at the airport, look up at one of those big destination boards, pick a place and go.

This idea sinks in for a second with both of them.

INT. RYAN’S ROOM, ST. LOUIS HILTON - NIGHT

Ryan is laying in bed wearing a Hilton bathrobe. He’s reviewing his sister’s wedding invite when his BLACKBERRY BUZZES on the night stand. He reaches over to check it. It’s a text message:

Alex: “Can’t fall asleep.”

Ryan types back:

Ryan: “Me too. Just laying here.”

INTERCUT WITH:
INT. ALEX’S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Alex is in a t-shirt, lying in bed. She types away at her BLACKBERRY and presses SEND.

Ryan’s BLACKBERRY BUZZES again.

**Alex:** “You should rub one out.”

**RYAN**
(chuckles)
Thanks for the advice.

Types back.

**Ryan:** “Only fair if you do too.”

BLACKBERRY BUZZES again.

**Alex:** “Way ahead of you.”

**RYAN**
Man alive.

**Ryan:** “Call me next time so I can listen.”

**Alex:** “;) Have sweet dreams about me.”

Ryan smiles. He stares at the message for a second, then sets the blackberry down and turns off the light.

EXT. LAMBERT FIELD, ST. LOUIS - DAY

Natalie is standing with a camera in her hands, giving directions.

**NATALIE**
Left, left, left, left... one more inch... and stop.

Reveal: Ryan is placing the CUT-OUT of Julie and Jim.

The camera POV makes it look like Julie and Jim are standing in front of St. Louis International Airport.

**NATALIE**
I don’t get it.

**RYAN**
My sister is cooky. She thinks this is charming... Like the gnome thing.
NATALIE
No, I mean... why would your sister want a fake photo in front of the St. Louis Airport?

RYAN
She should be so lucky to visit Lambert Field. The Wright Brothers flew through there...

(points out the conical main terminal)
The domed main terminal was the first of its kind. A precursor to everything from JFK to DeGualle.

NATALIE
(lame)
Wow. Pretty sweet.

Natalie takes the photo.

RYAN
Why she wants dozens of reminders of all the places she hasn’t been is beyond me.

NATALIE
Well, I’m sure she’s going to be crushed for having missed this airport.

RYAN
Look - Before Lindbergh could cross the Atlantic, he took off from one of those runways... Ever wondered why they call it the Spirit of St. Louis?

NATALIE
(quickly)
No.

Ryan goes to say something, but Natalie is already gone.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, WICHITA SECURITIES COMPANY – DAY

Ryan and Natalie sit stoically as a YOUNG ASIAN GUY rants about why they are idiots to fire him.

YOUNG ASIAN GUY
... And another thing...? You know how fucked this place is without me? You know how fucked this place is without me? Fucked in the ass, man.

(MORE)
I am the one thing preventing this place from being totally fucked in the ass.

The young asian guy snaps up one of the PACKETS and leaves, slamming the door behind himself.

RYAN
Sometimes, they just need to vent.

NATALIE
Please, for the love of God, can I fire the next one?

Ryan gives it some thought.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, WICHITA SECURITIES COMPANY - LATER

A professional African-American woman wearing a smart suit sits down at the conference table.

Natalie sits up.

KAREN
I’m here to be fired, right?

NATALIE
We’re here to talk about your future.

KAREN
You don’t have to sugar coat it. I get the drill. What are they offering?

NATALIE
Inside the packet you’ll find a clearly worked out severance package.

KAREN
Give me the bullet points.

NATALIE
Three months pay. Six months medical. A full year of placement services through our company, CTC.

KAREN
Placement services? How generous.
NATALIE
Commonly, it takes one month of searching for every ten thousand dollars you expect to earn in salary.

KAREN
So I could be looking for a while.

NATALIE
Not necessarily...

KAREN
Oh, don’t sweat it. I’m pretty confident about my plans.

NATALIE
(spirits lifted)
Oh yeah?

KAREN
Yeah. Can you tell me? Is high tide in the morning or the evening?

NATALIE
I don’t know. Why?

KAREN
There’s this beautiful bridge by my apartment. I need to figure out what time to jump off it.

Natalie begins to tremble.

EXT. WICHITA SECURITIES COMPANY COURTYARD - DAY

Natalie bursts out the doors and sits on a bench. She’s freaked out. Ryan is five steps behind her. He puts a hand on her shoulder.

RYAN
People say these things all the time. It comes with the trade.

NATALIE
They do?

RYAN
Sure. People are always saying crazy stuff. They get worked up.

NATALIE
She was so calm.
RYAN
(not quite sure)
I think that’s a good sign.

NATALIE
So they don’t actually ever do it?

RYAN
No... it’s just talk.

NATALIE
How do you know? Do you follow up?

RYAN
I mean, no, nothing good can come of that, but I don’t think you should worry about it.

Natalie is clearly still worried.

RYAN (CONT’D)
This is the job. Taking people at their most fragile moment and setting them adrift.

BEGIN MONTAGE

A PLANE PULLING BACK ITS GATE AND TAKING OFF
WHITE COLLAR PEOPLE ARE HANDED PACKETS
RYAN AND ALEX ENTERING A NEW HOTEL ROOM. THEY’RE BECOMING MORE COMFORTABLE WITH EACH OTHER

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY
Looking out the window at the passing landscape.

Over the pastures and roads, we see GRAPHIC WHITE LINES AND NUMBERS denoting each mile as they click by.

Ryan tears a page out of AMERICAN WAY MAGAZINE outlining their mileage program and hands it to Natalie.

GARDENER DRIVES A RIDER MOWER ACROSS A TINY STRETCH OF GRASS

INT. HILTON HOTEL LOBBY - EARLY MORNING
Ryan turns a corner to find Natalie talking to her computer screen with headphones on.
She’s having an iChat with someone, but we only hear her side of the conversation. Ryan decides to listen in for a second.

NATALIE
I’ll be back soon. Not really sure how long this whole exercise is supposed to last. He’s fine... It’s hard for these guys to accept change, you know.
(listens, rolls eyes)
I... I’m not even going to answer that... No, I can’t even think of him that way... He’s old.

Ryan frowns. Checks a mirror.

A NEW OFFICE - MORE EMPLOYEES REACT TO BEING LAID OFF

WE SEE SHOTS OF VARIOUS SLICES OF THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE FROM THOUSANDS OF FEET IN THE AIR

EXT. MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

A 757 touches down on the runway.

MUSIC BEGINS TO FADE AS THE MONTAGE COMES TO A CLOSE ON...

RYAN’S HEADSHOT - sitting on an EASLE.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, WICHITA HOTEL - AFTERNOON

Ryan stands before a similar crowd as the opening of the film.

RYAN
Okay. This is where it gets a little difficult, but stay with me. You have a new backpack... but this time, I want you to fill it with people. Start with casual acquaintances, people around the office, friends of friends and work your way to the people you trust with your most intimate secrets. Now move into family members - cousins, aunts, and uncles. Get your sisters and your brothers and you parents. Get them all in that backpack. And finally your husband or wife or boyfriend or girlfriend. Get them in their too.
A titter through the crowd. For the first time, we see Natalie near the side, watching.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Don’t worry. I’m not going to ask you to light it on fire.

Light laughter.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Feel the weight of that bag. Make no mistake, your relationships are the heaviest components of your life. Feel the straps cutting into your shoulders. All those negotiations and arguments and secrets and compromises.

Ryan lets the weight sink in.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Now set that bag down.

You can feel the relief in the room.

RYAN (CONT’D)
You don’t need to carry all that weight.

Noticeable agreement.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Some animals were meant to carry each other. To live symbiotically over a lifetime. Star-crossed lovers. Monogamous swans. We are not one of those animals.

Ryan focuses towards his conclusion.

RYAN (CONT’D)
The slower we move, the faster we die. We are not swans. We’re sharks.

INT. ANNEX, WICHITA HOTEL - AFTERNOON

Ryan has finished his session and is talking to eager stragglers. Ryan accepts a business card and elaborates on one of his theories.
Meanwhile, down the hall, Natalie is finishing a phone call. She looks shell shocked. She closes her phone and pockets it in silence.

EXT. TARMAC, MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

AN AMERICAN AIRLINES PLANE touches down.

EXT. MIAMI BOULEVARD - DAY

We’re following a HILTON SHUTTLE down a street of PALM TREES.

INT. HILTON AIRPORT SHUTTLE - AFTERNOON

Natalie and Ryan ride back to the airport. We catch them mid-conversation as Natalie drills Ryan on his theory.

    NATALIE
    Never...?

Ryan smiles to the few other riders as if apologizing.

    NATALIE (CONT’D)
    You never want to get married?
    Never want kids?

    RYAN
    Is that so bizarre?

    NATALIE
    Yes. Yes it is.

    RYAN
    I don’t see the value.

Natalie sighs.

    RYAN (CONT’D)
    Sell it to me.

    NATALIE
    What?

    RYAN
    Sell me marriage.

    NATALIE
    I... Uh... How about love?

    RYAN
    Pff...
NATALIE
Okay. Stability?

RYAN
How many stabile marriages do you know?

NATALIE
Someone to talk to, spend your life with?

RYAN
I’m surrounded by people to talk to. I doubt that will change.

The shuttle stops and everyone goes to grab their bags.

INT. LOBBY, MIAMI HILTON - DAY
Ryan and Natalie enter, still having the same conversation.

NATALIE
How about just not dying alone?

Ryan stops to address this.

RYAN
Starting when I was twelve, we moved each one of my grandparents into a nursing facility. My parents went the same way.
(a beat)
Make no mistake. We all die alone.

Ryan turns, thinks of something, then turns back.

RYAN (CONT’D)
adding)
Those cult members down in San Diego with the white sneakers and little Dixie cups of Kool-Aid. They didn’t die alone.

Natalie looks steamed.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Just saying - There’s options.

Out of nowhere, Natalie starts crying.

RYAN
(almost silent)
Oh fuck.
Natalie is now balling in the middle of the lobby.

    NATALIE
    Brian left me.

    RYAN
    Oh, hey... I...

Ryan goes to hug Natalie and she simply folds into his arms – A mop of tears. Ryan looks around for a place to set her down. Instead, he finds...

ALEX - Who gives a questioning look to the young sobbing girl.

    RYAN
    Hi. Alex this is Natalie. Natalie, this is my... friend, Alex.

    ALEX
    I should give you both a moment.

Natalie attempts a recovery. It’s not graceful.

    NATALIE
    No, it’s fine. I’m fine. Just stupid emotions.

Natalie gives Alex a firm handshake.

    ALEX
    Maybe a drink?

Ryan goes to challenge the idea, when...

    NATALIE
    Now we’re talking.

Natalie leads the way. Alex and Ryan exchange quick hellos.

CUT TO:

THE SCREEN OF NATALIE’S CELL PHONE

TEXT READS: “I Think it’s time we c other people”

INT. BAR LOUNGE - MIAMI HILTON - MOMENTS LATER

The three share a booth. Natalie is sipping a drink. She seems to have settled a little.
ALEX
He broke up with you over text message?

RYAN
(soft dig)
That’s kind of like firing people over the internet.

Both Natalie and Alex shoot Ryan a look.

ALEX
(re: the ex-boyfriend)
What a weasely prick.

NATALIE
Yeah, but what does that make me? Someone who falls for a prick?

ALEX
We all fall for them. Pricks are spontaneous, unpredictable, and fun. And then we’re surprised when they turn out to be pricks.

NATALIE
I followed him to Omaha.

RYAN
You did?

NATALIE
I had a job waiting for me in San Fran, when he got an offer from ConAgra. He told me we could start a life together. So I followed him.

RYAN
To Nebraska.

NATALIE
I look in the mirror and I just see compromise... I’m supposed to do something.

ALEX
You’ll do plenty.

NATALIE
I just can’t... I thought I’d be engaged by now.
   (catches herself)
   No offense.
ALEX
It’s alright.

RYAN
None taken.

NATALIE
When I was sixteen, I thought by twenty three, I would be married, maybe have a kid... Corner office by day, entertaining at night. I was supposed to be driving a Grand Cherokee by now.

ALEX
Life can underwhelm you that way.

NATALIE
Now I have my sights on twenty nine, because thirty is just way too... apocalyptic. I mean, where did you think you’d be by...

Natalie catches herself, having no idea how old Alex is.

ALEX
It doesn’t work that way.

RYAN
At a certain point, you stop with the deadlines.

ALEX
They can be a little counterproductive.

NATALIE
I don’t want to say anything that’s... *anti-feminist*. I mean, I really appreciate everything your generation did for me.

ALEX
*(my generation?)*
It was our pleasure.

RYAN
Well done.

NATALIE
But sometimes it feels like no matter how much success I have, it all won’t matter until I find the right guy.

ALEX
You really thought this guy was the one.
NATALIE
Yeah, I guess. I don’t know. I could have made it work. He just really fit the bill.

RYAN
The bill?

NATALIE
I always imagined he’d have a single syllable name like Matt or John or... Dave. In a perfect world, he drives a Four Runner and the only thing he loves more than me is his golden lab. Oh... and a nice smile. (back to Alex and Ryan) How about you?

This catches both Alex and Ryan off guard.

RYAN
I’m not sure if...

NATALIE
I meant Alex...

RYAN
Right.

ALEX
Huh, let me think for a sec. (mulls it over)
Well, by the time you’re thirty four, all the physical requirements are pretty much out the window. I mean you secretly prey he’ll be taller than you.

Ryan smiles.

ALEX (CONT’D)
Not an asshole would be nice? Just someone who enjoys my company. Comes from a good family - You don’t think about that when you’re younger. (thinking)
Wants kids... Likes kids... (MORE)
Wants kids. Healthy enough to play catch with his future son one day.

We can tell Ryan is taking a serious interest in this.

ALEX (CONT’D)
Please let him earn more than I do.
That doesn’t make sense now, but believe me, it will one day. Otherwise it’s just a recipe for disaster.
(reaching)
Hopefully some hair on his head...? But it’s not exactly a deal-breaker anymore. Nice smile... Yep, a nice smile just might do it.

Alex looks to Ryan. He has a nice smile.

NATALIE
Wow. That was depressing.

Alex and Ryan react - It’s not that bad.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
I should just date lesbians.

ALEX
Tried it. We’re no picnic ourselves.

Natalie looks worse than when the conversation started.

NATALIE
I don’t mind being married to my career, and I don’t expect it to hold me in bed as I fall asleep.
(looks up)
I just don’t want to settle.

ALEX
You’re young. Right now you see settling as some sort of failure.

NATALIE
It is. By definition.

ALEX
Don’t worry, by the time someone is right for you, it won’t feel like settling... And the only person left to judge you will be the twenty four year old girl with a target on your back.
Natalie cracks a smile.
Ryan looks to Alex. They’ve grown closer.

INT. LOBBY LOUNGE, MIAMI HILTON – DAY
Ryan, Alex, and Natalie wheel their ROLL-AWAYS towards the elevator.

    NATALIE
    So, what’s the plan for this evening?

Ryan and Alex share an uncomfortable silence.

    NATALIE
    What...? Oh, is it illicit?

    RYAN
    (quickly)
    No...

    ALEX
    It’s nothing like that.

    NATALIE
    We are in Miami.

    RYAN
    ... We were going to hit that party for the tech conference in the hotel.

Natalie notices a group of SOFTWARE TYPES mingling with badges around their necks.

    NATALIE
    I didn’t know you could just attend those...

    ALEX
    Well, I mean...

    NATALIE
    (eyes widen)
    You’re going to crash it?

    RYAN
    I mean, I don’t know if... 

    ALEX
    More money than they know
    These guy put on a quite a party...

    NATALIE
    No, I get it. I’m in!
INT. CONFERENCE CORRIDOR, MIAMI HILTON - NIGHT

Ryan, Alex, and Natalie confidently walk up to the CHECK-IN TABLE and take BADGES.

They turn the corner. Alex reads Natalie’s badge.

ALEX
Jennifer Chu?

NATALIE
Oh shit!

RYAN
It’s going to be fine.

INT. SOFTWARE CONVENTION PARTY, MIAMI HILTON - NIGHT

Corporate color balloons. Lots of guys in LOGO POLOS. That great hip hop song from 1998 is playing over the PA.

We find Ryan, Alex, and Natalie at a stand up table. They’re now wearing badges. Natalie is pretty tipsy at this point.

RYAN
(to Natalie)
You okay there?

NATALIE
Oh yeah... This was a great idea.
(to Alex)
You are so pretty. You’re exactly what I want to look like in fifteen years.

ALEX
Thank you, Natalie.

A CONFERENCE LEADER steps up to an on stage MIC.

CONFERENCE LEADER
How’s everyone doing out there?!

People cheer. So do Ryan, Alex, and particularly Natalie.

CONFERENCE LEADER
I’m going to need you to all put your hands together for a very special guest - YOUNG... M... C!

The opening beats of the 90’s jam “Bust-A-Move” blast over the speakers and sure enough, now-40-year-old rapper, Young MC steps out and starts rapping.
YOUNG MC
THIS HERE’S A TALE FOR ALL THE
FELLAS... TRY TO DO WHAT THOSE
LADIES TELL US... GET SHOT DOWN
CAUSE YOU’RE OVERZEALOUS... PLAY
HARD TO GET, FEMALES GET JEALOUS...

Everyone goes crazy and starts dancing.

Ryan and Alex make it out to the dance floor. They’re awful
dancers, but they’re having fun.

RYAN
Think she’ll be okay?

ALEX
Look...

Natalie has already found a dancing partner, who can’t
believe his luck. She’s all over him. Ryan smiles.

EXT. BOAT - NIGHT

A nice two story yacht that was obviously purchased before
the bubble popped. Inside the galley, a group is playing
karaoke. NATALIE, wearing BADGES like Mardi Gras beads, is
singing “Time After Time”.

Meanwhile, near the back, Ryan and Alex sit with their legs
hanging off the back of the hull.

ALEX
Back home, I don’t get to act the way
I do with you.

RYAN
That’s why I don’t have a “back home”.

ALEX
I know. You’re so cool. “Mr. Empty
Back Pack”.

Ryan emotionally stumbles.

RYAN
You know about the back pack?

ALEX
I googled you.

RYAN
You did?
ALEX
It’s what us modern girls do when we have a crush.

RYAN
Did it bother you?

ALEX
Well, that depends. Is the bag empty because you hate people or just the baggage they bring along?

RYAN
I don’t hate people. I’m not exactly a hermit.

ALEX
You just don’t want to be tied down? The whole responsibility thing.

RYAN
I don’t think it’s even that... I... First time I ever flew, I was sixteen.

ALEX
You’re not going to answer? You’re just going to tell me a story?

RYAN
(smiles, continues story)
It was January and I had just gotten my driver’s license. The lakes were frozen over, so we piled into my car and hit the ice to do donuts. When, out of nowhere, I hit a soft spot and the hood of my car tilted up and I was sinking backwards into the water.

ALEX
Jesus...

RYAN
I literally started to drown. Within a few seconds, I black out. Then, I wake up in the sky. I’m in a helicopter, laying on a stretcher. This guy in a uniform is telling me I was minutes away from dying.

ALEX
Oh my God.
RYAN

Right?

(relives it for a second)
So just as we’re hovering over the hospital, I sit up. And from there, I could see the whole western horizon. We’d been flying twenty minutes. Twenty minutes to reach a city I’d thought of as remote, halfway across the state... a foreign capital.

(A beat)
My parents had taught me we lived in the best place on Earth, but now I could see the world was really just one place and comparing didn’t make much sense. And I remember thinking - Don’t tell me this isn’t an age of miracles. Don’t tell me we can’t be everywhere at once.

The idea settles in. Ryan returns to the point.

RYAN

I don’t know what originally sparked the back pack. I probably needed to be alone. Recently, I’ve been thinking that maybe I needed to empty the bag before I knew what to put back in.

And now they kiss. It’s notably different from their previous kisses. Now, when they lock lips, we are reminded why people kiss in the first place.

Then, all of a sudden, the lights go out on the boat. The motor has stopped. Ryan and Alex look back to find the software dude stepping out of the galley, drunk.

SOFTWARE DUDE

Hey... I think we’re out of gas.

Ryan and Alex look out to shore... about 500 yards away. For whatever reason, they just start cracking up.

EXT. PONTOON BOAT - NIGHT

Ryan and Alex are huddled under a blanket in the corner of the rubber boat as it putters its way to shore.

Cold, soaked, and smiling.

Natalie and David are there too... still kissing.
EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Everyone gets out of the boat in the cold knee deep water and splashes up to shore.

INT. LOBBY, MIAMI HILTON - NIGHT

Ryan and Alex followed by Natalie and her make-out buddy, soaked from the knee down, holding their shoes, scamper into the hotel on the balls of their feet.

INT. RYAN’S HOTEL ROOM, MIAMI HILTON - NEXT MORNING

Ryan’s eyes flutter awake to see Alex getting dressed.

RYAN
Hey, you’re up...

ALEX
Got to fly stand-by and make a meeting in Milwaukee.

RyA
(disappointed)
Oh... Okay.

ALEX
(notices, teasing)
Oh, no. I made you feel cheap.

RyA
Yeah, all right... Just leave the money on the dresser.

ALEX
(sweetly)
I’ll text you later so we can swap schedules.

Alex gives him a peck. Ryan takes her wrist so she can’t leave.

RyA
I can’t remember the last time I enjoyed spending time with someone as much as you.

ALEX
Neither can I.

They kiss again and he lets go. Alex leaves and the door closes. Ryan just lays in bed for a moment.
INT. CAFE - MIAMI HILTON - MORNING

Ryan and Natalie have a quiet breakfast. Natalie looks pretty worse for wear.

In the background is a TRAVELING SALESMAN rolling calls. He perks up for each message then goes back to being miserable.

Meanwhile, after a little silent eating...

NATALIE
Last night got a little out of hand. I said things... I don’t remember everything I said. I just didn’t want you to think...

RYAN
Just relax. It was nice to see you cut loose. So, did you wake him up or slip out?

NATALIE
What?

RYAN
This morning... Your new friend. Did you wake him for an awkward good bye or just slip out so he could feel like a whore.

NATALIE
(not proud)
I... just left.

RYAN
Protocol is always tricky.

NATALIE
I didn’t know what was right.

RYAN
Sometimes there really is no right thing to do.

This doesn’t comfort her.

EXT. OCEAN BOARDWALK, MIAMI - DAY

The walkway overlooks a large MARINA filled with giant YACHTS. Ryan and Natalie are doing the photo thing with the CUT OUT of the engagement portrait again.
NATALIE
What happened to Alex?

RYAN
Had to skip town early to make a meeting.

NATALIE
That’s too bad. Where does she live?

RYAN
Chicago.

NATALIE
You thinking of going to see her?

RYAN
I don’t know. We just don’t have that kind of relationship.

NATALIE
What kind of relationship do you have?

RYAN
It’s, you know. Casual.

NATALIE
Sounds pretty special.

RYAN
It works for us.

NATALIE
Think there’s any future there?

RYAN
Never thought about it. What’s going on here?

NATALIE
Really never thought about it?

RYAN
(a good lie)
No.

NATALIE
How can you not think about these things? How does it not even cross your mind that you might want to have a future with somebody?
RYAN
It’s simple, you know that moment when you look into someone’s eyes and you feel them looking right into your soul, and the whole world goes quiet for a second.

NATALIE
(finally, a break through)
Yes.

RYAN
Right. Well, I don’t.

NATALIE
You’re an asshole.

Natalie knocks over the CUT OUT and stands up.

RYAN
Oh come on, I’m just dicking around. I need your help...

NATALIE
Don’t you think it’s worth giving her a chance?

RYAN
A chance to what?

NATALIE
A chance at something real?

RYAN
Natalie, your definition of “real” is going to evolve as you get older...

NATALIE
Would you stop condescending for one second? Or is that one of the principles of your bullshit philosophy?

RYAN
Bullshit philosophy?

NATALIE
The isolation? The traveling? Is that supposed to be charming?

RYAN
No, it’s simply a life choice.
NATALIE
It’s a _cocoon of self-banishment._

RYAN
Wow. Big words.

NATALIE
Screw you.

RYAN
Well, screw you too.

NATALIE
You’ve set up a way of life that basically makes it _impossible_ for you to make any human connections. Now, somehow, this woman runs the gauntlet of your ridiculous “life choice” and comes out the other end with a smile – Just so you can call her casual. Jesus. I need to grow up? You’re a twelve year old.

Natalie begins walking away.

RYAN
I don’t have a gauntlet of...

A GUST OF WIND suddenly blows the CUTOUT across the boardwalk into the OCEAN.

RYAN
... Fuck!

Ryan goes running after the cutout. He climbs down a GANGWAY to a dock that is closest to the CUTOUT, which is beginning to sink in the filthy water.

Ryan reaches... and reaches... and just as he’s got a finger tip on the photo... FALLS IN.

INT. BATHROOM, MIAMI HILTON – DAY

Ryan, still damp from the ocean, is drying the CUTOUT with a hair dryer.

INT. CONCOURSE, MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – DAY

We’re following the CUTOUT HEADS popping out of the ROLL-AWAY like earlier, only now they are slightly faded and bent from their trip in the harbor.
EXT. TARMAC, MIAMI INTERNATIONAL - DAY

We’re watching Ryan through the window of the plane. He almost looks trapped.

EXT. TARMAC, DETROIT INTERNATIONAL - DAY

The plane lands amidst snow.

INT. RENTAL CAR, DETROIT HIGHWAY - DAY

Ryan and Natalie drive in silence. The weather is frigid.

RYAN
These Detroit guys can be tough. They’ve been getting hammered. Don’t get distracted. Stick to the simple stuff. Get the packet in their hands and get them out the door.

EXT. DETROIT CAR PART COMPANY - DAY

A one story brick building. There’s an inch of snow on the ground. Ryan and Natalie enter the building in silence.

INT. DETROIT COMPANY - DAY

Ryan and Natalie check in at the front desk.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, DETROIT COMPANY - DAY

The door opens. Ryan and Natalie enter, when they both see something and immediately stop short.

Sitting on the conference table is a COMPUTER set up for a VIDEO CONFERENCE.

Framed up in a WINDOW on the screen is CRAIG GREGORY.

CRAIG GREGORY
Welcome to Detroit.

Natalie and Ryan exchange a look.

RYAN
What’s going on here?
CRAIG GREGORY
I’ve been getting those great numbers over the last few days. Thought we should nut up and give this a try.

RYAN
We could use a little more time.

CRAIG GREGORY
Gotta leave the nest at some point.

RYAN
This is a real company, Craig. We’re here to do some damage.

CRAIG GREGORY
I know. Good thing we brought our best. So let’s stop screwing around, alright?

Ryan sighs.

RYAN
Just give me a minute to prepare and get my things together.

CRAIG GREGORY
I was thinking Natalie takes this one.

Natalie, once confident, now takes pause.

RYAN
She’s hardly ready for this.

CRAIG GREGORY
I’ve been watching her. She’s great.

RYAN
(re: the webcam)
This is a whole other animal...

CRAIG GREGORY
I mean, she created it. Natalie, you not up for it?

NATALIE
I’m... I’m game.

CRAIG GREGORY
Atta girl.
INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, DETROIT COMPANY - MOMENTS LATER

Ryan and Natalie have a moment aside.

RYAN
Just remember, don’t apologize. Don’t tell them how hard this is for you. Today is one of the worst days they will ever have. What we feel doesn’t even compare.

NATALIE
Got it.

RYAN
Just keep it professional. You’re going to do fine.

INT. CRAIG GREGORY’S OFFICE, CTC - LATER

Craig is leaning back in his office chair, watching Natalie on his monitor.

INT. ALTERNATE CONFERENCE ROOM, DETROIT COMPANY - DAY

An unsuspecting man in his mid fifties enters the room and takes a seat at a COMPUTER TERMINAL.

(for the remainder of the scene, we will intercut between Natalie’s room and the FOV of the man’s iChat session.)

NATALIE
Hello, Mr. Samuels. My name is Natalie Keener.

SAMUELS
(checking out the PC)
What’s going on here?

NATALIE
I wish I was here with better news, however your position here at Deckers is no longer available.

SAMUELS
What are you talking about?

NATALIE
You’ve been let go.
SAMUELS
What, just like that? I can’t believe... Who are you?

NATALIE
My name is Miss Keener. I am here to tell you about your options...

SAMUELS
I work here for seventeen years and they send some fourth grader in here to can me? What the fuck is this?!

Ryan fights the urge to jump in. He is sitting next to Natalie, but just out of view of the camera.

NATALIE
It’s perfectly normal to be upset. However, the sooner you can tell yourself that there are greater opportunities waiting for you...

SAMUELS
Greater opportunities? I’m fifty-seven-fucking years old!

Mr. Samuels is now on the verge of tears. Eyes red.

NATALIE
Anybody who ever built an empire, or changed the world, sat where you are now. And it’s because they sat there that they were able to do it.

We remain in the room with Natalie and Ryan, but we hear Mr. Samuels crying. It’s loud and embarrassing. It’s coming from the next room. He’s literally on the other side of the wall.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
There’s a packet in front of you.

Samuels picks up the packet and opens it.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
I want you to take some time and review it.

Samuels begins to leaf through.

NATALIE (CONT’D)
All the answers you’re looking for are inside those pages.

(MORE)
The sooner you trust the process, the sooner your next step in life will unveil itself.

Samuels puts down the packet. The tears still coming slowly.

I need you to return to your office now and begin to put together your personal things.

Samuels doesn’t move. He’s just sitting there in a daze.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Samuels.

No reaction. Just more silent tears. Natalie is getting nervous.

Mr. Samuels? There’s nothing else we can discuss now. (and again)
Thank you for your time.

Ryan fights the urge to break in as Natalie continues to lose her composure.

Craig leans into his computer, watching intently.

Mr. Samuels... Mr. Samuels... MR. SAMUELS...

Finally, Samuels breaks from his daze. He looks up and around for a second, then gets up and leaves.

Natalie catches her breath. A second later, Samuels passes their room, visible through the conference room windows. They watch as he walks away.

You did good.

Natalie nods.

You okay? Want me to take over.

No, I’m alright.

Natalie pulls out a LIST OF FORTY NAMES. The amount of people is daunting. She crosses off the first name.
EXT. PARKING LOT, DETROIT CAR PART COMPANY - AFTERNOON

We find Natalie standing next to the rental car. She’s staring into a snow drift. Her eyes say everything - She just grew up.

Meanwhile, Ryan is on his CELL. We catch the end of his conversation with Craig.

    RYAN (CONT’D)
    ... We just got out here. That was one place. I think we need to try a few more...
        (listens)
    Maybe there isn’t a difference, but it’s comforting to know we’re in the next room.
        (listening)
    I know you don’t give a shit about my comfort.
        (listens)
    We could just use a little more time. That’s all I’m saying.
        (listens)
    Right... Right.
        (shakes his head)
    Yeah... Alright... Uh huh. Bye.

Ryan hangs up.

    RYAN (CONT’D)
    He thought you did a great job. You did - I was real proud of you.

    NATALIE
    Thanks.

    RYAN
    We’re being pulled off the road.
        (clarifying)
    We’re going home.

    NATALIE
    For good?

    RYAN
    That’s what it looks like.

A moment of mixed emotions.

INT. RYAN’S ROOM, DETROIT HILTON - NIGHT

Ryan is holding the LARGE EMBOSSED ENVELOPE of his sister’s WEDDING INVITATION.
He pulls out the RESPONSE CARD, looks at the line for extra guests, then sets it down. He pulls out the actual INVITATION. It looks inexpensive. Sighs.

INT. NORTH TERMINAL, DETROIT AIRPORT - MORNING

Ryan and Natalie ride the MOVING WALKWAY. Something is on Natalie’s mind. She speaks up.

NATALIE
I’m sorry about what I said about Alex. I was out of line.

RYAN
It’s alright. I understand.

NATALIE
I mean, who am I to be doling out relationship advice?

RYAN
It’s fine.

NATALIE
You going to be okay?

RYAN
What do you mean?

NATALIE
In Omaha?

RYAN
Oh, I don’t know.

NATALIE
It’s better than you’d think.

They get off the moving walkway and stop at a GATE that reads “Omaha”. Something off screen grabs Ryan’s attention.

Ryan begins to walk off. Pulls out his BLACKBERRY and dials.

NATALIE
Ryan, where are you going?

RYAN
Grabbing another flight... Something I need to take care of. I’ll see you in, uh... at home.

Ryan disappears in the crowd.
EXT. PARKING LOT, LAS VEGAS - DAY

We’re looking at the LUXOR PYRAMID.

RYAN (O.C.)
Okay, start walking it in from the left.

ALEX enters frame, carrying the engagement CUT OUT.

ALEX
I have to admit, when you asked me to meet you in Vegas... I thought we’d gamble, make out in a heart shaped jacuzzi, maybe see one of those weird French Canadian circus shows.

RYAN
There’ll be plenty of time for all that.
(directing the photo)
One more foot to the left.

Alex obliges. She checks out the engagement photo.

ALEX
How do you feel about the wedding?

RYAN
I’m fine, I guess.
(directing the photo)
Okay great... walk away.

Ryan takes the photo.

Alex picks up the engagement photo.

ALEX
They’re a cute couple.

RYAN
Think so?

ALEX
Yeah, they’ll make cute kids. If they’re lucky, maybe look a little like you.

Alex and Ryan look at the photo together for a second.

RYAN
How do you like Wisconsin in February?

ALEX
Who doesn’t?
(sweetly)
(MORE)
I like it if you’re there. Besides, I know a killer burger in Milwaukee.

RYAN
Northern Wisconsin.
(clarifying)
What are you doing this weekend?

This quickly registers... He’s inviting me to the wedding.

ALEX (CONT’D)
No...

RYAN
What? I haven’t even...

ALEX
I can’t.

RYAN
Why not?

ALEX
I couldn’t.

RYAN
I’m being serious.

ALEX
You want me to be your date?

RYAN
Well... Yeah.

ALEX
To a wedding... Jesus, Ryan. Your sister’s wedding?

RYAN
It’s not like I know her that well.

ALEX
I’m just not sure if it’s appropriate for me to...

RYAN
Look. You know. I’m not the wedding type. But for the first time in my life... I don’t want to be that guy, alone with his drink. I want a dancing partner. I want a plus one. And if you can stomach it, I’d like it to be you.
A long thoughtful beat. Alex sighs.

ALEX
Okay.

RYAN
Really?

ALEX
Yeah, I can’t believe I... Yeah, I’m in. When is it?

RYAN
I feel like we should kiss or something.

ALEX
Then kiss me.

They do.

INT. BAGGAGE CAROUSEL, MILWAUKEE AIRPORT - DAY

Two ROLL-AWAYS side-by-side, moving through the terminal.

Ryan and Alex walk in unison. They share a smile. Almost like they can’t believe they’re getting away with something.

They pass a LARGE AIRLINE ADVERTISEMENT featuring MAYNARD FINCH in uniform. “We Value Your Loyalty.”

EXT. DRIVEWAY, CHALET SUITES - DAY

Ryan’s rental car pulls into the CHALET SUITES driveway. It’s halfway between a Swiss Lodge and a Best Western. Just a little sadder. A yellow sign reads “Welcome Miller-Bingham Wedding Guests!”

INT. LOBBY, CHALET SUITES HOTEL - DAY

Ryan and Alex approach the check-in lines. Of course, there’s an elite membership line, but they can’t use it.

Ryan is forced to stand in a queue of three people while a CHECK-IN LADY just stands at her computer at the elite line.

RYAN
(to the CHECK-IN LADY)
Are you available?
Ryan steams.

INT. CORRIDOR, CHALET SUITES - DAY

Ryan and Alex walk down the long hallway. They’ve been given a room at the end. Just as they’re entering their room, the door across the hall opens revealing a woman in her early forties with a basket of laundry. It’s Ryan’s sister KARA.

KARA
Ryan?

Ryan turns and stops. It’s been a while...

RYAN
Kara...

They hug. It’s a strange hug. Awkward but heartfelt.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Alex, this is my sister Kara.

KARA
Well, hello.

ALEX
Hi.

KARA
(quite frankly...) Ryan has told me nothing about you.

RYAN
Kara, what are you doing at a hotel?

KARA
Fuck, I was hoping I wouldn’t have to... Yeah, uh, Frank and I are trying out a trial separation.

RYAN
You’re not staying at the house?

KARA
There was an extra room on hold here, so I just took it for the weekend.
RYAN
Oh, okay.

KARA
Yup. So, you guys are dating?

Ryan and Alex fumble over each other.

RYAN
Um...

ALEX
It’s not exactly...

KARA
Hey, don’t worry about it. We’re all getting a little old to be calling someone girlfriend... I remember when mom used to call Jack her boyfriend. It drove me up the wall. Boyfriends are for kids...
(mock announcing)
And I’m just a divorcee!

An awkward beat in the corridor of the Chalet Suites.

RYAN
So, the rehearsal dinner?

KARA
Yeah, I’ll see you two there.

Kara humps the laundry basket down the hall.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, CHALET SUITES - DAY

Ryan and Alex settle in. There’s a cheap basket with a pink ribbon tied sloppily around some cellophane. In the basket is a packet, outlining the wedding weekend.

RYAN
There’s a packet.

ALEX
What in life is worth doing that doesn’t have a packet.

RYAN
Um, I love you?

Ryan is kidding, but not really. They play it off as a joke, but can’t help feel the weight of this “moment”.
INT. CLUB ROOM FIRESIDE LOUNGE, CHALET SUITES - EVENING

A group of tables have been slid together for the rehearsal dinner. Ryan and Alex find the dinner in full swing.

Ryan’s sister JULIE, the bride, waves wildly.

        JULIE
            Oh my God, Ryan!

She hops up and gives him a hug.

        JULIE (CONT’D)
            You must be Alex. You are so beautiful. Kara was right. Did you get the basket?

        ALEX
            The basket was very lovely.

        JULIE
            Tammy wrapped all of them.

Tammy waves.

        JULIE (CONT’D)
            Ryan, you look so grown up.

        RYAN
            Me? You’re the one getting married.

        JULIE
            I know, right? You haven’t even seen my ring.

Julie shows off her ring. It’s not quite balanced and seems to favor quantity over quality.

        JULIE (CONT’D)
            (proudly)
                Jim designed it.

JIM raises a hand. This is Julie’s husband-to-be and we can tell immediately that Ryan isn’t thrilled.

Ryan thinks of something. He pulls out the 5X7 PHOTOS they took of the JIM & JULIE CUT OUT.

        RYAN
            I brought those photos you were asking for...
JULIE
(lights up)
Oh great! They go over there.

Julie points to a table and Ryan walks over. When he gets there, we see almost a hundred photos pinned to a map of America. It’s overwhelming. All of a sudden, his effort seems miniscule.

Ryan begins to pin his photos on the map over the cities where they were taken. He backs away to see it as a whole and his addition has already become invisible.

Ryan returns to the conversation with his sister and Alex.

RYAN
There were quite a few already up there. Almost couldn’t find room.

JULIE
I know, isn’t it great how everyone chipped in?

RYAN
What gave you the idea to do something so...

ALEX
(helps)
... Substantial?

JULIE
Well, Jim has a lot of our nest egg invested in this real estate venture right now. So when we went over our finances, a honeymoon just didn’t seem affordable this second... So I thought... Hey, just because we can’t travel doesn’t mean we can’t have pictures.

The idea of this lands on Ryan pretty hard.

ALEX
It was a great idea.

JULIE
Thanks.

CUT TO:
AN HOUR LATER

Ryan is stuck with Jim, talking real estate. Alex is having a chat with the brides maids about local relationship drama.

JIM
It’s sixty acres up against the foothills. I subdivided the old Lazy W Ranch and took a nice slice for myself.

RYAN
Sounds nice.

Jim makes an exhale noise that means “you bet your ass”.

JIM
Homes will go in the high fours.

RYAN
Must be a nice development.

JIM
(correcting)
It’s a community, not a development. The concept is turn-key everything. You buy a maintenance contract with the home. We’ll whack your weeds, we’ll even change the light bulb. Furniture? You buy your own or choose a package. Seamless traditionalism, yet all the perks.

RYAN
Nice.

Ryan and Alex make eye contact. There’s a joy in their connection amongst the ramblings of their company.

JIM
We all need a place to call our own. This is America. This is what we were promised.

RYAN
That’s a nice touch.

JIM
What?

RYAN
That bit at the end about promise... I like it.
JIM  
(a little embarrassed)  
Thanks.  
(leading)  
So, you still renting that one-bedroom?

RYAN  
I gave it up.  

JIM  
(surprised)  
You own now?

RYAN  
No.  

JIM  
But you’re looking?

RYAN  
Not really. No.  

The conversation stalls out.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, CHALET SUITES - NIGHT

Everyone is leaving. Tammy grabs Julie’s hands.

TAMMY  
Can you believe it’s tomorrow?! How are you going to sleep?

JULIE  
I don’t know!

TAMMY  
You want some Xanax?

RYAN  
I don’t think that’s for sleeping.

JULIE  
No, I’m good. I’ll have some warm milk. That should do the trick.

Jim comes walking by with a box of flower arrangements from the tables inside that are going to be reused at the wedding.

JIM  
One more box...
ALEX
I’ll get it.

RYAN
You sure?

ALEX
Yeah, yeah...

Alex steps back in and for the first time in who knows how many years, Ryan, Kara, and Julie are alone together.

RYAN
Jim seems like a good guy.

JULIE
Yeah, I know... Isn’t he great?

KARA
He’s going to make a great husband.

There’s a moment where they just look at each other and giggle a little. Just the three of them.

RYAN
Hey, Julie, I was thinking... with dad not being... Well, I didn’t know if you had someone to walk you down the aisle...

JULIE
Oh, yeah, Jim’s uncle is going to do it.

KARA
(uncomfortable)
He’s been really supportive.

RYAN
Oh... Oh, great. Just wanted to make sure you were covered. So I should get there at...

JULIE
Guests are arriving around 5ish. Things get going at 530. So you know, around then. It’s easy. Just come down the elevator.

Alex comes out with the second box. Ryan notices and grabs the flowers from her and sets them in Jim’s luxury pick-up truck.
INT. CORRIDOR, CHALET SUITES - NIGHT
Ryan, Alex, and Kara arrive at their adjacent rooms. Key cards slide in simultaneously. Alex heads in. Ryan stops.

RYAN
Hey Kara?

KARA
Yeah.

RYAN
Can you believe she’s getting married already? She’s just a kid.

KARA
No Ryan. Actually, she’s 37 years old. She’s barely squeaking by.

RYAN
Oh.

KARA
Yup. Sleep tight.

FADE TO:

EXT. RYAN’S OLD HIGH SCHOOL - NEXT MORNING
The rental car pulls up into the empty lot. Snow on the ground. It’s cold.

Ryan and Alex walk up the steps and try the door of the main building – it’s locked. Ryan shrugs.

ALEX
That’s all you got?

Alex starts walking down the side of the building, looking for an open window. The third one opens a crack. She slides her HOTEL HONORS CARD in and opens the latch.

RYAN
Are we really doing this?

ALEX
Give me a boost.
INT. CLASSROOM, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Alex slowly wedges herself headfirst through the window. Ryan climbs in after her. He immediately recognizes his surroundings.

RYAN
I took geography in here.
(pointing)
That was my seat.

ALEX
You ever fool around with one of your teachers?

RYAN
No. You?

ALEX
Not until college. Come on, show me around.

They head for the door.

A TEAM PHOTO OF A HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL TEAM

A finger reaches and points to a teenage face.

RYAN (O.C.)
That’s me.

INT. HALLWAY, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - NEXT MORNING

Ryan and Alex are huddled at the trophy case.

ALEX
You played basketball?

RYAN
Point guard. Don’t act so surprised.

ALEX
I didn’t know you were such a jock.

EXT. LOADING DOCK, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Ryan and Alex walk passed a concrete ledge.

RYAN
My first fight.
ALEX
How’d it go?

RYAN
Got my ass kicked.

INT. STAIRWELL, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY
Ryan shows an area behind the stairwell.

RYAN
This is where we used to go to make out.

ALEX
Very romantic.

CUT TO:

RYAN AND ALEX KISSING UNDER THE STAIRWELL

EXT. SOCCER FIELD, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY
Alex and Ryan sit tight like teenagers on the team bench.

ALEX
I’m really happy I came here.

The school soccer team takes the field for practice.

RYAN
(to the team)
Go Cougars!

Players look back at him strangely.

Ryan’s phone rings.

RYAN
(checks caller ID)
It’s Kara.

The first thing we hear is crying in the background.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CHURCH - DAY
Kara is on her cell phone. Behind her in the deep background, we see bridesmaids consoling Julie.
KARA
Ryan, where are you? We’re having a meltdown here.

RYAN
What’s wrong? What happened?

KARA
It’s Jim. Can you get back here? We need your help.

RYAN
Yeah, of course...

EXT. CHURCH - DAY
Ryan’s rental car pulls up in front. He hops out and Alex takes the driver’s seat.

ALEX
I’ll grab your suit.
(adding)
Good luck.

INT. ENTRY, CHURCH - DAY
Ryan immediately spots Julie sobbing and being consoled by her bride’s maids. The groomsmen are huddled in another corner, embarrassed and confused. Kara splits from the brides maids and takes Ryan aside.

RYAN
What happened?

KARA
Jim’s got cold feet.

RYAN
Today?

KARA
That’s how cold feet work.

RYAN
What do you want me to do?

KARA
Talk to him.

RYAN
You want me to talk to him?
KARA
Hey, it’s either you or me. You know my record. I’ve already struck out once.

RYAN
I haven’t been to bat. I haven’t been in the dugout.

KARA
Don’t you talk for a living? Motivational type stuff?

RYAN
I tell people how to avoid commitment.

A beat.

KARA
What kind of fucked up message is that?

RYAN
It’s a philosophy.

KARA
It’s stupid.

RYAN
Hey, it might have helped you.

A beat of stalemate.

KARA
Come on, Ryan. You haven’t been around much. Fuck, you basically don’t exist to us. I know you want to be there for her... Well here it is. This is your chance.

Ryan takes a breath.

INT. SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOM, CHURCH - DAY

Ryan quietly steps in to find Jim, half dressed in a tux reading the children’s book “The Velveteen Rabbit”. Jim sniffles. Ryan goes to leave, when...

JIM
Ryan?

RYAN
Oh, hey Jim.
JIM
You ever read this?

RYAN
Yeah, it’s pretty powerful stuff.

JIM
I’ll say.

RYAN
Kara mentioned you were having some... thoughts?

Jim puts down the book.

JIM
I don’t think I can do this.

RYAN
Okay. What makes you say that today?

JIM
I was just laying there last night in bed and I couldn’t sleep. I was thinking about the wedding and the ceremony and all. Us buying a house and moving in together. Having a kid... Having another kid...
(begins to snowball)
... Thanksgiving, Christmas, spring break, football games, all of a sudden they’re out of school, getting jobs, getting married, And then, you know... I’m a grandparent. I’m retired. Before you know it - I’m dead... and I just kept thinking... “What’s the point?”

Ryan gulps. Fuck.

JIM (CONT’D)
(now asking Ryan directly)
I mean what is the point?

RYAN
The point?

JIM
Yeah, I mean, what am I starting here?

RYAN
(dancing)
It’s marriage... it’s the most beautiful thing on Earth... you know, what everyone aspires to...
JIM
You never got married.

RYAN
That’s true...

JIM
You never even tried.

RYAN
Well, it’s hard to define “try”.

JIM
You seem happier than most of my married friends.

Ryan takes a beat.

RYAN
Jim, I’m not going to lie. Marriage can be a pain in the ass. And you’re kind of right - All of this is just stuff on the way to your eventual demise.

CUT TO:

KARA EAVESDROPPING AT THE DOOR WITH A LOOK OF COLD FEAR

BACK TO:

RYAN (CONT’D)
We are all on running clocks that cannot be slowed down or paused and they all lead to the same place. Some guys leave marks that last beyond their own mortality. Not guys like you and me... But some. But even those footprints disappear. (a beat) There isn’t a “point”.

Jim sinks a little.

RYAN (CONT’D)
I’m not the guy you’d normally want to talk to about all this stuff... But think about it - your favorite memories. The greatest moments of your life? Were you alone?
JIM
(thinks about it)
No... I guess not.

RYAN
I don’t want to sound like a Hallmark card, but... Life? It’s better with company.

Jim nods.

RYAN (CONT’D)
Come to think of it... Last night, the night before your wedding, when all this shit was circling through your head... Weren’t you two sleeping in separate rooms?

JIM
Yeah, Julie went back to the apartment and I was all alone in that big honeymoon suite...

Jim chuckles to himself.

RYAN
Kind of lonely?

JIM
Yeah.

RYAN
Hey. Everybody needs a copilot.

This resonates with Jim and he can’t help but smile.

JIM
That’s a nice touch.

RYAN
Thanks.

JIM
What’s the mood like out there?

RYAN
It’s not good... Emotional.

JIM
What should I do?

RYAN
(twinkle in his eye)
Go get her.
INT. ENTRY, CHURCH

Jim walks over to the huddle of bride’s maids. They part and let him in. He kneels at Julie’s feet...

JIM
I’m sorry I’m such a fuck up...
Will you be my co-pilot?

Julie gives him a perplexed look before smiling and falling into his arms. Tears and smiles spread amongst the girls.

Kara walks over to Ryan and pats him on the shoulder.

KARA
Welcome home.

MONTAGE BEGINS AS A SERIES OF IMAGES:

- Ryan and Alex getting dressed in a little kitchen in the church. They’re in a hurry and a little sloppy, but there’s a crooked joy in their faces.

- Jim standing at the alter with the priest getting a pat on the back from his best man.

- Julie getting walked to the alter by Jim’s uncle. They pass Ryan, who looks on proudly.

- The priest gives his blessings.

- Jim raises Julie’s veil. They kiss.

- Wedding attendees file into the Chalet Suites Banquet Hall.

- Ryan and Alex mingle with their table.

RYAN
Hi, I’m Ryan.

WEDDING GUEST
I’m your cousin... Harold.

RYAN
Oh, hey!

- Ryan and Alex dance like teenagers.

- The band does a cheesy choreographed dance step.

- Jim makes a speech. He is not good at public speaking, but the guests are generous with laughter.

- Tammy has her tongue down a groomsmen’s throat.
- Ryan pulls Kara onto the dance floor. She rests her head on his shoulder and they slow dance.

- Jim and Julie make their farewell and run off.

- Ryan and Alex help pick the center pieces off the tables.

- Ryan and Alex get into the elevator together. She’s wearing his jacket. We’re about to see them kiss, when the elevator door closes.

INT. CONCOURSE, MILWAUKEE AIRPORT - MORNING

Ryan and Alex stand between their gates. One sign reads OMAHA. The other sign reads CHICAGO.

ALEX
When am I going to see you?

RYAN
You’re just going to have to come and visit.

ALEX
So settled down. You’re not going to change on me...

RYAN
Same guy. Just one address.

We hear a boarding announcement for Chicago. Alex begins to step away to her gate.

ALEX
Call me if you get lonely.

A beat. And then...

RYAN
... I’m lonely.

Alex turns for her gate and joins the crowd. Ryan goes to say something. He has an impulse... but he finally ignores it and gets in line under the sign that reads “OMAHA”.

CUT TO:

INT. RYAN’S APARTMENT, OMAHA - EARLY EVENING

The door opens and Ryan wheels in his Roll-Away. He walks over to the window, parts the blinds and checks out his awful view.
We see Ryan opening some mail. We see Ryan laying in bed.

It’s quiet. It’s alone.

INT. CTC HEADQUARTERS, CTC - DAY

Natalie is giving Ryan a tour of the new ONLINE FIRING AREA - A series of cubicles with YOUNG GUYS ON HEADSETS. She is in her element and very proud of her work.

NATALIE
... Some guy sits down in a conference room somewhere and a server routes their session to one of our termination engineers.

RYAN
You don’t actually call them that.

NATALIE
I prefer “terminators”, but it bumped with legal.

RYAN
Really? I can’t imagine why.

NATALIE
They follow a workflow that can take them through anything from a standard dismissal to a violent aggressor.

RYAN
Are they actually on line, right now?

NATALIE
No, they’re beta-testing. Role-playing. We go live at the end of the month.

  (catches one of the guys making a mistake)
Kyle, you’re running through the events too quickly. You have to give them time to acknowledge each statement. Okay? It’s a legal thing.

Ryan can only watch.

INT. RYAN’S OFFICE, CTC - DAY

Ryan is sitting at his desk. He puts on a HEADSET.

RYAN
This is ridiculous.
INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, CTC - ANOTHER DAY

Craig is leading a meeting. Ryan seems focused on something on his laptop. We see his screen: An itinerary for GoalQuest.

EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP - DAY

One of the GIANT DIGITAL MARQUEES reads: “GOALQUEST XX”

INT. GREEN ROOM, GOALQUEST - DAY

Ryan sits on a sofa, holding his BACKPACK. A slick GOALQUEST HOST enters the room.

GOALQUEST HOST
You ready to rock?

Ryan nods and gets up.

INT. CONVENTION HALL, LAS VEGAS - DAY

Ryan stands in the wings. He takes a breath, then steps out in front of a sea of people.

The GOALQUEST XX stage is like nothing we’ve seen yet. Large and professional. Blue Banners hang from the ceiling. Digital projectors show Ryan’s Headshot - What’s In Your Backpack?

Ryan sets the BACK PACK on a table and quickly unzips it.

A breath.

RYAN
Last year, I flew three hundred fifty thousand miles. The moon is only two fifty.

A long beat. Uncomfortable. Ryan looks at the back pack.

RYAN
Imagine for a second that you’re carrying a backpack... I want you to feel the straps on your shoulders... You feel them?

Ryan isn’t feeling them. He is not inspired. He isn’t believable. He’s barely even there.
RYAN
Now, I want you to pack it with all
the stuff you have in your life.
Start with the little things.

Ryan is trying, but he can’t find the will to do this.

RYAN
The... um... The stuff in drawers
and on shelves.

Ryan takes a beat. He just stares at the backpack and thinks
about all the things he has removed from it... And then...

RYAN
Excuse me.

And with that, Ryan leaves the stage. Handlers try to figure
out what Ryan is doing. The Host runs for the mic.

GOALQUEST HOST
(to Ryan)
What the fuck are you doing?
(to crowd)
Okay, everyone just relax. We’ll
have your next guest out in a sec.

EXT. CONCOURSE, MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan hustles past SLOT MACHINES until he is actually jogging.

INT. BOARDING GATE, MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan runs up to a gate. He’s the last one to board.

INT. BOEING 757 - NIGHT

Over Ryan’s shoulder, through the window, we see Chicago
below as the flight begins its descent.

INT. CORRIDOR OF LIGHT, CHICAGO O’HARE AIRPORT - NIGHT

Ryan on the PEOPLE MOVER under the ceiling of NEON LIGHTS.
Peaceful music emits from hidden speakers. Ryan walks briskly
past idle riders.
EXT. RENTAL CAR SATELLITE KIOSK, CHICAGO - NIGHT

Ryan hurriedly signs a hand-held device, hops into a SEDAN and speeds off. The RENTAL CAR ASSISTANT suddenly realizes...

RENTAL CAR ASSISTANT
Hey, you forgot to give me your Devotion Club card!

EXT. TOWNHOUSE, CHICAGO SUBURBS - NIGHT

Ryan steps out of his rental car and approaches the door of the townhouse - checking the address against a piece of HILTON STATIONARY.

Ryan stops, knocks, and puts on a smile.

We hear Footsteps. The door unlocks and opens revealing ALEX. She’s wearing sweatpants and glasses. She’s at home. She looks different.

RYAN
Surprise.

But there’s something else. Alex is in shock... She’s frozen. Something’s wrong. Ryan’s smile begins to melt.

A man’s voice calls from inside.

MAN’S VOICE (O.C.)
Honey, who’s at the door?

A couple kids run by through the background, giggling. A man chases after them.

Alex is still speechless. Her eyes are angry and apologizing all at the same time.

Ryan just stands there. Emotionally bleeding to death.

ALEX
(almost inaudible)
What are you doing here?

Ryan begins to step away. He turns and heads for his car, dropping the flowers.

Alex’s husband becomes visible just as she’s shutting the door.

ALEX’S HUSBAND
Who was that?
ALEX
... just some guy who was lost.

Ryan gets in his rental car and drives off.

EXT. CHICAGO HILTON - NIGHT

We’re watching Ryan through his window from far away... almost as if looking through binoculars. He sits on his bed, tie undone, holding a glass with an inch of scotch on his knee.

INT. RYAN’S SUITE, CHICAGO HILTON - MORNING

We see quick glimpses of Ryan getting ready. Crappy little COFFEE MAKER crappily brewing. Crappy hotel BAR OF SOAP crappily lathering. Crappy HAIR DRYER crappily blowing.

EXT. AIR TRAIN, CHICAGO O’HARE AIRPORT - MORNING

Ryan is on the phone with Alex.

RYAN
How could you lie to me?

ALEX
What were you thinking - Just showing up at my door like that?

RYAN
What do you mean? I wanted to see you. I didn’t know you had a family - Why didn’t you tell me that?

ALEX
Come on, I thought we signed up for the same thing.

RYAN
Try to help me understand. What is it you signed up for?

ALEX
I thought our relationship was perfectly clear. You’re...

(MORE)
RYAN
I’m an escape?

ALEX
You know, a break from our normal lives... A parenthesis.

RYAN
I’m a parenthesis?

ALEX
Seriously, Ryan? I can’t believe we’re having this conversation. I mean what do you want?

Ryan stumbles on this. What does he want?

ALEX (CONT’D)
You don’t even know what you want. I’m sorry that I ruined your night... But you could have seriously screwed things up for me. That was my family. That’s my real life.

RYAN
I thought I was a part of your real life.

ALEX
(sighs)
Look, Ryan. I’m a grown up. I don’t hold a grudge. When you’re ready to be an adult and see me again, just give me a call.

Ryan can’t quite believe what he’s hearing. There’s only one thing he can do. He hangs up.

EXT. ESCALATOR, CHICAGO O’HARE AIRPORT - MORNING

Ryan is walking when his phone buzzes. He checks the DISPLAY - CTC Calling. He presses IGNORE.

INT. TICKET DESK - CHICAGO O’HAIRE - DAY

Ryan walks up to the TICKET DESK. He is more lost than usual. There is something plucky about the TICKET AGENT.

PLUCKY TICKET AGENT
Welcome back, Mr. Bingham.
RYAN
Yeah, right, you got me in 2C?

PLUCKY TICKET AGENT
Of course. Left side aisle, non-bulkhead. Just like you like it.

RYAN
What’s got you so fucking happy?

The plucky agent fades a bit, then tries to recompose.

PLUCKY TICKET AGENT
Your boarding card, Mr. Bingham.

Ryan takes the ticket and exits.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

Ryan sits doing nothing. Others around him play Sudoku, read trashy paperbacks, work on laptops. Ryan just stairs at the stitching on the seat in front of him. When...

“Bing”

PURSER
Ladies and gentlemen, we have a special announcement to make.

Passengers look up.

PURSER (CONT’D)
Our pilot has just informed me that we are passing over the city of Mesa... which might not mean much to most of you, but means a lot to one of our fliers today, because he just hit TEN... MILLION... MILES...

RYAN
Oh no...

The Gershwin theme song for the airline rains down from the overhead speakers. Passengers clap. Flight attendants gather at Ryan’s seat with big smiles and champagne.

Ryan doesn’t even react. He’s just stunned.

The flight attendants separate just enough for a man in a bomber jacket to squeeze through. It’s Maynard Finch, the Chief Pilot from the commercial.

MAYNARD FINCH
(to Ryan)
That seat taken?
Maynard gives a little salute to his flight attendants, then slides by Ryan to the window seat.

MAYNARD FINCH
You’re the youngest yet to hit twenty mil. Don’t know where you found the time...
(remembers)
Oh right, here you go.

Maynard pulls out a MEMBERSHIP CARD. It’s actually been stamped from platinum.

MAYNARD FINCH (CONT’D)
Seventh card we’ve made. Small club. We really appreciate your loyalty.

It has a pair of wings around “Member Number 7”. Ryan holds it between his fingertips... Catches his own reflection.

RYAN
You know how many times I’ve thought about this moment? Played out the conversation I’d have with you right here.

MAYNARD FINCH
Really? What did you want to say?

A long beat.

RYAN
You know, I... I can’t remember.

MAYNARD FINCH
That’s alright. Happens to all of us.
(attempts chit chat)
So, where you from?

Ryan looks at him straight in the face.

RYAN
I’m from here.

INT. RYAN’S OFFICE, CTC – NEXT DAY

Ryan picks up the phone at his desk. He removes his new TEN MILLION MILE CARD and dials a number off the back.

AIRLINE OPERATOR
Hello, Mr. Bingham.
RYAN
Oh, how did you know it was me?

AIRLINE OPERATOR
This is your dedicated line. We reserve them for our most loyal and dedicated fliers.

RYAN
Oh. I’d like to transfer some of my miles. Can you open up an account under Jim and Julie Miller?

AIRLINE OPERATOR
Certainly. How many miles would you like to transfer?

RYAN
How many miles would it take to circle the globe?

AIRPORT OPERATOR
We have our “around-the-world” tickets. They’re five hundred thousand miles each.

RYAN
Sounds perfect.

Craig enters Ryan’s doorway.

CRAIG GREGORY
Got a second?

RYAN
(to the airline operator)
I’m going to have to call you right back.

Craig takes a seat across from Ryan.

CRAIG GREGORY
What happened to you yesterday? I was trying to reach you all day.

RYAN
I got tied up in... personal stuff. What’s going on?

An uncomfortable beat.

CRAIG GREGORY
Do you remember Karen Barnes?

Ryan doesn’t.
CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
She was part of a thirty person reduction a few weeks back in Wichita. Natalie fired her.

RYAN
No, I fire dozens of people a day.

CRAIG GREGORY
She killed herself. Jumped off a bridge.

RYAN
Fuck.

CRAIG GREGORY
(agrees)
Yeah.
(formality)
Do you remember anyone giving you any signals of anything? Depression?

RYAN
They’re all depressed. We’re firing them.

CRAIG GREGORY
Hey, look, you know I have to ask.

RYAN
No, I don’t remember anything. Of course they’re upset. You never think that...

CRAIG GREGORY
Wasn’t any woman who gave you any indication...? Anything?

Ryan remembers her.

RYAN
No, nothing that stands out.
(a thought)
Is Natalie alright? Is she coming in?

CRAIG GREGORY
Natalie quit.

Ryan isn’t surprised.

RYAN
Just like that?

CRAIG GREGORY
Text message.
Ryan stifles a laugh.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
Yeah, real fucking nice, right? No one has manners anymore.

RYAN
She say where she was going?

CRAIG GREGORY
Nah. She was pretty upset.

RYAN
I should give her a call.

CRAIG GREGORY
(business)
I need you back in the air.

Ryan doesn’t react.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT’D)
Did you hear me? I thought you’d be thrilled.

RYAN
I’m fine. What about video conferencing?

CRAIG GREGORY
CTC is pausing on the whole new media front for a moment. Giving it a little more thought. Getting our work horses back out doing what they do best.

RYAN
How long are you sending me out?

CRAIG GREGORY
We’re going to let you sail and sail. Send us a postcard if you ever get there.

Ryan absorbs this. Nods.

INT. OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

A MANAGEMENT LEVEL GUY sits at his desk. Bay Area sports paraphernalia on the wall.

MANAGER
So, what happened?

We turn to reveal Natalie.
NATALIE
How exactly do you mean?

MANAGER
You graduated top of your class. You seemed to have your pick of employment... Including right here. Instead, you went to Omaha... to fire people for a living.

NATALIE
(obvious cover)
It’s challenging work.

MANAGER
I can’t imagine doing that day-in-day-out. Not in this climate.

NATALIE
(after a beat)
... I followed a boy.

The manager smiles to himself.

MANAGER
Everybody does at one point or another.

The manager raises a letter - It’s Ryan’s letter.

MANAGER
This guy says I’d be lucky to have you.

INT. RYAN’S OFFICE, CTC - DAY

Ryan writing the letter. We hear what he’s writing...

RYAN (V.O.)
To whom it may concern, I can’t even count the number of people I’ve fired in my lifetime. So many, that I’ve forgotten what it’s like to actually hire somebody. We’ve never met, but I know you’d be lucky to have Natalie Keener. My advice? Take her and don’t look back. She’ll be the best decision you’ve made in a long time.

INT. OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO - DAY
The manager puts down the letter and reaches out a hand.

    MANAGER
    Hope he’s right.

Natalie breaks into a smile, then jumps back to professional.

INT. CORRIDOR, RYAN’S LOFT - DAY

Ryan steps out his front door, ROLL-AWAY in tow.

INT. OMAHA AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan walks through the automated door. He looks like he did in the opening of the film. Maybe even wearing the same clothes. Something is different though.

    RYAN (V.O.)
    Tonight, most people will be welcomed home by jumping dogs and squealing kids. Their spouses will ask about their day and tonight they’ll sleep.

Ryan stops and looks up at a GIANT BOARD OF DESTINATIONS. An endless list of cities around the world. A menu of new lives departing every five minutes.

    RYAN (V.O.)
    The stars will wheel forth from their daytime hiding places.

We look back at Ryan. His eyes lock on one of the cities. We don’t see which one. He makes a mental decision and turns in the direction of the gate. He lets go of his ROLL-AWAY.

    RYAN (V.O.)
    And one of those lights, slightly brighter than the rest, will be my wingtip, passing over, blessing them.

Ryan takes a step, but before his foot can land we...

    CUT TO CLOUDS