

Coming and Going

by

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(1-hour drama pilot)

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TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. NEW YORK CITY - CENTRAL PARK -- DAY

1

TITLE: "APRIL"

WHEELS - small, rubber-coated ones - roll happily along the sidewalk near a patch of neatly-mowed grass, moving from left to right.

ANOTHER SET OF WHEELS roll by in the opposite direction, followed by a MOM'S FEET strolling along, which makes sense because these wheels are attached to--

--BABY STROLLERS. And as we rise and back away we see there are lots of them, cruising along on this beautiful Spring day.

Some of the moms stop to chat, or to fuss a moment with the baby's blanket. The moms are happy and the kids are healthy.

Damn, life is sweet, ain't it?

2 EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

2

MORE WHEELS. Bigger ones, turning slower than the first kind, and these are also followed by someone's feet, because these wheels are attached to--

--WHEELCHAIRS. Lots of them, rolling along the sidewalk outside a nursing home JUST ACROSS THE STREET from the park.

The attendants pushing them smile pleasantly and most of the old folks in the wheelchairs smile, too; a few drool or scowl.

Some of the attendants stop to chat with each other, or to fuss a moment with a blanket.

Damn, life is short, ain't it?

3 INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- DAY

3

STILL MORE WHEELS. Smaller like the ones on the strollers, but these are MOVING LIKE HELL down a tiled hallway and it's all we can do to keep up.

The white-sneakered feet of TWO NURSES propel the gurney, for that's what these wheels are attached to.

Their voices are quick, tight.

NURSE #1  
Who's on duty?

NURSE #2  
Foster. Just got here.

And now we rise and get a glimpse of the PATIENT, a young girl, fifteen, her face a tearful mess of pain and fear.

Her breathing is quick and shallow, but she still manages to let out a primal SCREAM --

--just as the gurney bangs through a pair of SWINGING DOORS.

We stop, and the doors come back on us like a slap.

A sign on the door: LABOR AND DELIVERY.

FADE TO BLACK:

And in the darkness - the sound of a DIESEL ENGINE REVING.

FADE IN:

4 EXT. HIGHWAY REST AREA -- DAY

4

TITLE: "AUGUST"

MORE WHEELS, but these are the big, sturdy mothers that carry eighteen-wheelers. A half-dozen trucks idle in a row.

We hear an engine rev again as one of the trucks pulls away, revealing a STATION WAGON parked beside it. It's a high-end make and model.

The luggage rack and rear area are packed with suitcases, boxes, duffle bags, you name it.

Standing next to the station wagon is MELVIN FOSTER (39), a man who might be attractive if he allowed himself time to smile, but who the hell has time for that?

His clothes and hair suggest money and class in a subtle, non-flashy way, but the circles under his eyes tell a different story -- one that fits well with the words he's spitting into his cell phone at the moment.

MELVIN

(trying to get a word in)

I don't believe--this is just--am I  
just supposed to--

(yells)

I'm on my way already! Don't you get  
that?

(listens again)

No. Phil, that's bullshit. You never  
said anything about student enrollment  
levels. "Four courses and some  
academic advising." Does that sound  
fam--

(he's interrupted)

--no, you didn't. We agreed--

(again)

--no, I don't have it in writing. What  
I do have is my life packed into a car  
on the side of the New York State  
Thruway on a Sunday afternoon.

5 INT. STATION WAGON -- CONTINUOUS

5

In the passenger seat is Melvin's daughter, GRACIE (14).

Somewhere beneath the over-sized headphones, heavy black  
mascara and purple-streaked hair is a young girl who -- well,  
shit, she's fourteen. Who can say what's going on in there?

One eye opens. A hand with black-painted nails lifts one of  
the earphones clamped to her head. We can hear blasting  
music.

And now Gracie can hear her dad:

MELVIN (O.S.)

Next semester? And what the hell am I  
supposed to--?

6 EXT. STATION WAGON -- CONTINUOUS

6

Melvin listens, trying to take in air. He's getting shakier  
by the moment.

MELVIN

Fine. Yes, fine. Fine. Are we done?  
Good.

He hangs up. Squints into the morning sun. Swallows the  
moment like so much broken glass and gets back behind the  
wheel.

CUT TO:

7 INT. STATION WAGON -- CONTINUOUS 7

Melvin turns the key and grinds the starter of the already-running car. Grunts at his own stupidity. Starts to back out.

A SPORTS CAR barrels past behind them in the parking lot, horn blasting.

He slams on the brakes.

Notices Gracie is watching him.

GRACIE

You might want to check those mirrors,  
Melvin.

MELVIN

Gracie, don't.

He checks his mirrors, backs out slowly and gets back on the highway.

GRACIE

(feigning innocence)  
Don't what?

MELVIN

Don't talk to me like that. I'm your  
father. Not some jerk in your math  
class.

GRACIE

Well, let's take a look at that. Oh,  
that's right, I don't have a math  
class! I don't even have a school. I  
just found out two days ago that my  
dad decided to quit being a doctor,  
sell our home, so he can--

MELVIN

I told you at the beginning of the  
summer we needed a change and I was  
gonna look at some--

GRACIE

"We?" *We needed?* I liked my life! I'm  
not the one walking around numbed out,  
popping those little pills like--

MELVIN

Look, I don't expect you to understand this, but sometimes the prudent thing is to step back--

GRACIE

Step back? Prudent??? You're dragging me to Vermont for a job that no longer exists! Yeah, Melvin, I heard you on the call! This is not "prudent!"

SOUND FX: They're interrupted by a strange hollow THWOKKA-WOKKA-WOKKA coming from the engine.

MELVIN

What the hell...

8 EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

8

The tailpipe BACKFIRES--

9 INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

9

--and they both JUMP, and turn to look out the back. White smoke is pouring out of the tailpipe.

MELVIN

Okay. All right...

He eases the car onto the shoulder but continues to drive at a reduced speed.

GRACIE

Aren't you going to stop?

MELVIN

I'm pretty sure there's an exit just over this next rise. And the smoke's white. That can't be that bad, right?

GRACIE

I don't think you should keep driving a car like this Melvin. It's not prudent.

MELVIN

Gracie! I swear...what kind of girl--

GRACIE

(aggressive)

What? 'What kind of girl' ...what?

He shakes his head. This is hard enough. They ride in silence a moment, except for the increasing noise from the engine - which now begins to pump out white smoke of its own.

MELVIN

Dammit.

GRACIE

Since you've abandoned your question,  
maybe we can explore one I've been  
kicking around: What kind of a man...

He looks at her. She looks back, the beginnings of a sneer on her lip.

GRACIE

...runs?

He swallows that hunk of glass too and turns his eyes back toward the road.

WIDE SHOT:

He was right - there is an exit. The car, still pouring smoke, takes the ramp past a sign: "HAPVILLE - EXIT 57."

END TEASER

ACT I

10 EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOT -- HAPVILLE, NY -- DAY 10

A quaint little upstate New York town nestled into the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains.

The stillness is broken by the approaching *braaaaaattttttt* of a troubled engine.

11 EXT. MAIN STREET -- CONTINUOUS 11

The "business district" is a short row of squat, brick buildings. Chet's Barbershop. Ronnie's Diner. Vera's Fashions.

Faded store awnings flap in the morning breeze like droopy eyelids on this sleepy little town.

The station wagon comes around the corner, the cloud of white smoke bigger than before.

12 INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS 12

Melvin sees a stooped-over old man rooting through a TRASHCAN in front of a building sporting a sign that says "Augustus Mathers, M.D."

He pulls over and rolls down his window. Gracie is blasting music through her headphones again.

MELVIN

(to Trashcan Man)

Excuse me?

The Trashcan Man pops his head out, and waves away the exhaust that is accumulating.

TRASHCAN MAN

Looking for poke. A right and a left.

MELVIN

Excuse me?

TRASHCAN MAN

You said that already.

MELVIN

Right, but...this time I meant ...I'm sorry, I don't know what 'poke' is, but I hope you find it in there. But

(MORE)



MELVIN (CONT'D)  
maybe you can help me first? I'm  
looking for--

TRASHCAN MAN  
Poke. Right, then left.

MELVIN  
No, I'm looking for a garage. A  
mechanic.

TRASHCAN MAN  
Yep. That'd be Poke McHugh. A bit  
slower than some, but Poke knows his  
way under any hood. Don't imagine a  
differential diagnosis'll take him  
more'n a minute, with the white smoke  
and all.

MELVIN  
I'm sorry - "differential...?"

TRASHCAN MAN  
'Differential diagnosis.' Sorry. It's  
a methodology for ruling out various  
diagnoses that manifest common  
symptoms until you arrive at--

MELVIN  
Yes, I'm familiar. I'm a doctor. I'm  
just surprised that--

TRASHCAN MAN  
--that what? That another doctor'd use  
the phrase regarding automotive  
problems?

MELVIN  
'Another doctor...'  
(does a double-take at the sign)  
Wait - you're Augustus Mathers?

DOC MATHERS  
Haven't been 'Augustus' since fifty-  
one, when ma died. Now I'm just Gus.  
'Doc' to most folks around here, but  
Gus'll do when I'm talking to another  
sawbones.

He reaches his hand out for a handshake, sees Melvin's  
disbelief, and realizes he's been half submerged in a

trashcan for most of the encounter.

DOC MATHERS

Oh, my apologies. Some kids threw  
popsicle sticks in here when there was  
no bag. Ants are having a party.

He wipes the hand on his filthy pants. Melvin hesitates, then  
shakes.

GRACIE

Aww...isn't that nice? You made a  
friend!

The two men turn to see Gracie has gotten out of her side of  
the car and is standing a few feet away.

GRACIE

(to Gus)

Any chance I can get a decent lunch in  
this backward-ass town?

MELVIN

Gracie...

DOC MATHERS

(unphased)

Ronnie's diner, middle of next block,  
makes a mean turkey club sandwich.

GRACIE

That'll do. I hope they take American  
money.

She heads up the street.

Melvin is embarrassed, but Doc Mathers waves it away with the  
exhaust smoke.

DOC MATHERS

Next right, then a left. Poke'll be  
there by now. You can leave it and  
walk back to meet your lovely child.  
(checks his watch)  
I'm meeting my bride there in a few  
minutes myself.

He resumes his rummaging in the trashcan.

13 INT. RONNIE'S DINER -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

13

Gracie stands just inside the door.

The DINERS, mostly local farmers and merchants and a couple of truck drivers, gawk at the weird-looking city kid.

GRACIE  
(to herself)  
Oh boy...

She looks around the place, then takes a seat at the counter and grabs a menu.

CUT TO:

Two BEAUTIFULLY MANICURED HANDS. They dump old coffee grinds into a garbage can, then plop a new filter and fresh coffee into the basket and slide it into an industrial-sized coffee maker.

These hands belong to VERONICA "RONNIE" STAID (36), owner and operator of the place.

Over a decade of trading the hot food for cold cash has honed both her appearance and her attitude.

She notices GRACIE at the counter.

RONNIE  
You lost, honey?

GRACIE  
(annoyed, fiddling with her cell  
phone)  
No. Do you have wi-fi here?

RONNIE  
Huh-uh. Running away?

GRACIE  
Yeah, right. All the way to here.  
Piss-poor planning on my part, huh?

They parry eyeballs for a moment, while Ronnie drums her fabulous nails on the counter top.

Gracie notices them and self-consciously curls her own black-enameled nails into fists. She moves her eyes back to the menu on the counter and pretends to be engrossed in it.

Ronnie smiles. Instead of responding to Gracie's taunt, she goes into a little 'spiel,' her beautiful hands dancing as she speaks.

During Ronnie's performance, various diners PERK UP, listening to what they've obviously heard before.

RONNIE

(a la TV commercial announcer)  
Green Mountain fresh ground coffee. No  
one else has the robust taste--  
(hand flourish)  
--the deep, rich flavor--  
(another hand flourish)  
--or the sweetly satisfying scent of  
Green Mountain coffee.  
(a beat)  
Available at all fine stores.

A TRUCKER a few stools away smiles at Ronnie.

TRUCKER

You still got it, Ronnie.

GRACIE

(to Trucker)  
Wow. She memorized a commercial. Does  
that make you tip better?

TRUCKER

Little girl, Ronnie was in that  
commercial.

GRACIE

You're an actress?

RONNIE

(showing her hands, proudly)  
Was, once upon a time. But only from  
the wrists to the nails.  
(she gives Gracie a quick once-  
over)  
You're the pancake type, right? And  
none of that blueberry or chocolate  
chip crap. Straight up.

Gracie nods.

RONNIE

Gotcha covered. Just et me warm up a  
few of these regulars first.

Gracie watches as Ronnie goes off to pour coffee for other customers. A few who try to sing her praises for the performance get a stern "Knock it off" along with a genuinely grateful smile.

One of them, a much older woman (ESTHER, 70s), sits alone in a booth. She is staring at Gracie.

Gracie stares back, even going so far to glare a bit, but it only makes Esther's eyes twinkle.

ESTHER

C'mere, you. Plenty of room, and  
you're gonna need it for the pancakes.

GRACIE

No thanks.

ESTHER

I didn't ask a question, sweetie. Now  
get your ass over here.

Annoyed but intrigued - an old broad who threatens and curses? - Gracie slides into the booth across from her.

ESTHER

Ronnie, we're gonna need another tea  
cup.

GRACIE

I don't drink tea.

ESTHER

(pleasantly)  
I don't care.

Ronnie slides a cup onto the table.

RONNIE

Pancakes in five.

GRACIE

(re: cup, to Ronnie)  
No wait, I don't--

But Ronnie's gone. She turns back to Esther, and tries the glare again.

Esther is placing a fresh tea bag in Gracie's cup and humming. She looks up, sees the glare. Chuckles.

ESTHER

Now that little look of yours might be the scariest thing on whatever city block you came from, but to me it's about as worrisome as a cloudy day.

Gracie cranks the glare up all the way. Esther doesn't even acknowledge, just slowly pours hot water into Gracie's cup.

ESTHER

You know, Native Americans always served hot beverages during the first visit with leaders from other tribes. The time and patience it took to drink hot liquids was thought to be symbolic of the time and patience needed to grow new friendships.

GRACIE

(drops the glare, tries sarcasm)  
Wow. I mean, like, wow. Really? Native Americans did that? Sooooo cool.

ESTHER

Nah. I just made that up.

GRACIE

You just...I'm sorry, *what?*

Doc Mathers slides into the booth next to Esther, pecks her on the cheek and nods at Gracie.

DOC MATHERS

I see you two've met.

(to Gracie)

I'm guessing no one told you yet that my lovely wife, Esther here, is a pathological liar.

ESTHER

Not 'pathological' - recreational!  
There's a huge difference.

DOC MATHERS

Lying is lying.

ESTHER

No, it's not. *Pathological* liars have no control, and often even delude themselves into believing the tales they tell.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

(to Gracie, re: her husband)  
He's not a shrink, but he's got a few  
shrinky books on this big shelf at  
home so he should know this.

DOC MATHERS

Now Esther, just because--

ESTHER

(to Doc Mathers)  
*Recreational* liars, on the other hand,  
invent falsehoods for the sole purpose  
of entertainment. For *fun*, you old  
fart. Remember fun?  
(to Gracie)  
Don't you enjoy a good lie?

GRACIE

I'm fourteen. Lying is my life.

MELVIN (O.S.)

Hey.

They look up. Melvin has a phony "cheerful" face on.

Gracie recognizes the look and groans.

GRACIE

(to Esther)  
Our car is dead. We're stuck in a town  
with no wi-fi.

Melvin slides into the booth next to her.

MELVIN

No no no, it's just gonna need a  
little work.

GRACIE

(to Esther)  
It's dead.

ESTHER

(sympathetic)  
Don't be harsh. Not everyone lies  
well. It's a talent, a gift.

DOC MATHERS

What'd Poke say?

MELVIN

Probably the head gasket, which wouldn't have been a big deal if I'd gotten it towed immediately, but I drove it another ten miles and I may have, I don't know, bent a valve or something.

GRACIE

Dead dead dead.

MELVIN

Resting. Recuperating. Which is what we're going to do for at least a day or so. Just need to find a decent motel.

ESTHER

How about a bed and breakfast?

DOC MATHERS

Now hold on--

MELVIN

Sure, that'd be fine.

ESTHER

There's a nice one right here in town.

DOC MATHERS

(to Esther)

No, there's not.

(to Melvin)

There's an Easy Rest Inn the next exit up. I'd be happy--

ESTHER

(to Melvin)

And the local B&B rates are way lower than that nasty Easy Rest.

DOC MATHERS

(to Esther)

Honey...sweetie...love of my life...call it recreational or whatever you want, but *that's a lie*.

ESTHER

(to Doc Mathers)

No, it's not! It's...a wish!

(to Melvin)

(MORE)



ESTHER (CONT'D)

Or a dream!

14 INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

14

A DUSTCOVER is pulled off an old GRANDFATHER CLOCK. Another is pulled from a beautiful SIDEBORD.

Esther stands with the dust covers draped over both arms. Dust motes whirl around her in the late afternoon sun like so much faerie pixie dust.

Doc Mathers, still standing by the open front door with Melvin, is not enchanted. He tries a wall switch.

DOC MATHERS

(to Melvin)

I'm not even sure the electric is still on. And we haven't serviced the furnace yet this year.

ESTHER

A phone call takes care of the electric. And Digger's right next door, so we can get the furnace checked out before nightfall.

DOC MATHERS

No sure what kind of shape the mattresses are in, either.

ESTHER

(to her husband)

They're fine.

(to Melvin)

So...what do you think?

MELVIN

I think it's way more than we need. You own this place?

ESTHER

Every board and beam. I was born in this house.

MELVIN

But you don't live here.

ESTHER

We've been using the apartment over Doc's office for years.

MELVIN

So...there's not really a bed and breakfast here in town.

DOC MATHERS

That's what I've been trying--

ESTHER

I swear, men have no imagination. There are four bedrooms upstairs. Another one down here. A kitchen that can cook any kind of breakfast. Or you can have Ronnie deliver an omelet, since it's only two blocks.

Melvin looks at Doc, who shrugs. He turns to look behind him, frowns--

MELVIN

Hold on a sec.

--and ducks back out the front door.

15 EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

15

Melvin finds Gracie leaning over the side of the porch railing, looking up the driveway that separates the Mathers' house from the one next door.

MELVIN

Hey.

She doesn't turn, and he joins her at the railing.

GRACIE

What the hell's he doing?

Melvin follows her gaze and sees someone - short hair, a slender frame swimming in oversized overalls and a t-shirt - in the yard behind the house next door, bent over a makeshift table on a pair of saw horses.

16 EXT. NEXT DOOR YARD - CONTINUOUS

16

The person's HANDS are working on something so close to us that it's out of focus.

In the background we can see GRACIE as she LEANS over the railing to get a better view.

We RACK FOCUS to the person's hands. They're doing something

to a dead cat, whose front legs are sticking up stiffly into the air.

17 EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

17

Gracie recoils and turns away. Melvin is more intrigued than shocked, and glances up the driveway a few more times.

MELVIN

So, listen. We're gonna crash here for a day or so.

GRACIE

Next door to the cat mangler.

MELVIN

I'm not sure that's a cat.

GRACIE

But you're not disputing the mangling part.

MELVIN

Look, just...come inside, let's take a look. It's just a few days--

18 INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

18

Gracie enters, frowning at the dust covers piled on top of a dining room table. Esther and Doc Mathers are nowhere to be seen.

Melvin comes in right behind her.

MELVIN

I'm thinking we might be able to get a cell signal on the second floor--

A long, high-pitched SCREAM cuts him off. They look at each other, then down the hallway toward the back of the house where it sounds like the scream came from, just as a SECOND SCREAM begins.

Melvin sprints in that direction. Gracie follows.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

19 EXT. BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

19

Esther SCREAMS AGAIN just as Melvin and Gracie come bursting through the back screen door--

--but from the SMILE on Esther's face we can see now that these have been screams of surprise and delight, not terror or pain.

Melvin and Gracie shift their gaze from Esther to a STUFFED AND MOUNTED CAT on the patio table.

The neighbor in the oversized overalls is standing beside it. Thanks to a baseball cap pulled down tight, we can't see their face.

ESTHER

(to the neighbor)

It's amazing! Harriet is going to be so pleased.

(to her husband)

You know how devastated she was to lose both Felix and Oscar just days apart--

(see Melvin and Gracie)

Oh! I'm so sorry. Digger, this is Melvin and Gracie...um...

(to Melvin)

What was your last name?

MELVIN

Foster.

ESTHER

Melvin and Gracie Foster, this is Digger Peterson.

The person in overalls turns and extends a hand.

Melvin reaches automatically, hesitates, then LOOKS UP--

--at the expressionless face of a plain-looking but not unattractive woman (CARLA "DIGGER" PETERSON, mid 40s).

Melvin's aborts the handshake; it turns into a weak wave.

MELVIN

Hey.

Digger gives a small, almost imperceptible nod.

DOC MATHERS

Digger here runs the funeral home next door. She's a licensed mortician. But since a small town like this doesn't have people 'checking out' often enough, she does taxidermy too, and a bunch of odd jobs like maintaining the little league fields, plowing the school parking lot...

ESTHER

(to Digger)

Melvin here's a doctor.

Another nod.

MELVIN

(trying to recover, clumsily folksy)

Yep. I guess guys like me and Doc are your competition, huh? If we do our jobs, you don't get to do yours.

Digger looks down at the stuffed cat. She pets it and mumbles something.

MELVIN

Pardon?

Digger looks up - dead into Melvin's eyes.

DIGGER

(soft)

I get 'em all eventually.

Melvin flinches a bit; Esther and Doc Mathers exchange a look. Even Gracie raises an eyebrow.

Digger just continues to lock eyeballs with Melvin. Not aggressive - just very matter-of-fact.

The awkward silence is broken by the metallic SQUEAL of brakes in the driveway, followed by a loud, insistent horn.

20 EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

20

A thick necked man with grease-stained hands (POKE, 40s) clambers out of a pickup truck. He's red-faced and out of breath. He starts toward the back of the house--

--just as Doc Mathers and the others come out to see who's here.

POKE

Doc! Chet Taylor's been trying to reach ya. Maggie's took a bad fall.

MELVIN

Did someone call 911?

DOC MATHERS

(to Melvin)

I am 911. And I shoulda been at my office by now. Dammit.

He turns to Poke.

DOC MATHERS

(re: Melvin)

Take this man back to your garage to fetch his bag from his car, and meet me at Chet's.

(to Melvin)

You do have a bag in your car, right? Mine's in my office - Poke's garage is more on the way.

MELVIN

Yes sir. But what-

DOC MATHERS

We'll talk there. Just get the bag.

He jumps in the car and leave.

Melvin turns to Gracie, but Esther speaks before he can say anything.

ESTHER

She'll be fine. Meet us back at Ronnie's where we'll be finishing our tea.

21 INT. POKE'S PICKUP - SHORT WHILE LATER

21

Through the windshield we see Doc's sedan and an older pickup as we pull up behind them in the driveway that runs between the house and the barn.

22 EXT. CHET'S FARM - DAY

22

Poke's vehicle is barely stopped when Melvin is out the door, black bag in hand. He heads up the porch, through the front screen door--

23 INT. CHET'S HOUSE

23

--into the front end of a dogtrot that runs alongside a set of stairs--

--he looks left into a dining room, right into a parlor, both empty--

MELVIN  
(yells upstairs)  
Hey? Doc?

He spins around, realizes Poke didn't follow him inside--  
--then moves down the dogtrot toward the rear of the house, as we start to hear VOICES--

DOC MATHERS (O.S.)  
Lift her head. There. A bit more.

CHET (O.S.)  
She's not breathing!

DOC MATHERS (O.S.)  
I know! Now lift!

--but Melvin reaches the back rooms - a kitchen on one side, bathroom on the other - and there's still no sign of them.

MELVIN  
Doc?

DOC MATHERS (O.S.)  
(strained)  
Out here!

Melvin rushes through the rear screen door--

24 EXT. BARNYARD - CONTINUOUS

24

--where he finds Doc with his ARM SHOVED ELBOW DEEP into the mouth of a cow laying just outside the entrance to the barn.

CHET, a white haired, sunburned farmer, is on the ground too, rubbing the Heifer's neck.

CHET

Easy, Maggie. Just take her easy.

Melvin freezes, exchanging an incredulous look with Poke and another farmhand (PETE, 20s).

DOC MATHERS

(to Melvin)

Don't just stand there. Help me!

MELVIN

I...what...

Doc strains a bit more, then pulls his arm back out, covered with cow saliva and some of his own blood.

DOC MATHERS

(to Melvin re: the cow)

She's got a goiter in there. I can just feel it with my fingertips, 'bout the size of a golf ball in her windpipe. Must have been growing for months.

Chet shakes his head, rubs the cows neck some more.

CHET

(to cow)

I'm sorry, girl, I heard you wheezin' and I shoulda had you checked but I...I just...

DOC MATHERS

(to Chet)

Stuff your 'buts,' they're a waste of breath.

(to Melvin)

You got forceps in your bag? Damn thing's too slippery, I can't get hold of it.

Melvin rummages, comes out with a TINY PAIR OF FORCEPS that might serve if the patient were an infant.

Doc shakes his head, looks around, desperate. Points--

DOC MATHERS

(to Melvin)

Grab that potato sack!

(to Poke)

Poke, I'm gonna need you to hold her

(MORE)



DOC MATHERS (CONT'D)  
mouth open. Damn near bit my arm off  
last time, and this is really gonna  
piss her off.

The POTATOES are dumped on the ground-- --and Melvin TOSSES  
the empty sack to Doc--

--who SHOVES HIS ARM into it, turning it into a crude burlap  
sleeve.

Poke kneels beside the cow's massive head and looks at Gus,  
terrified.

POKE  
I ain't never done this before.

DOC MATHERS  
Me neither. Now shut your mouth and  
open hers.

Melvin has taken position next to Chet, and he puts his hand  
on the cow's REAR FLANK.

MELVIN  
Wait. This cow...

The creature's entire muscular system is undulating in  
regular SPASMS.

MELVIN  
(to Chet)  
...she's pregnant?

CHET  
(nods)  
Yeah, but she wasn't supposed to calf  
for another three weeks.

MELVIN  
Well...I think our Maggie here may  
have misplaced her calendar.

He moves to where he can see better--

--and sure enough, a SMALL PAIR OF HOOVES is protruding from  
the birth canal.

MELVIN  
Yep, it's time!

DOC MATHERS

Okay. You boys handle that end, we've got this one!

Melvin grimaces but knows he's got no choice. He looks around for something, and when he doesn't find it he yanks off his dress shirt and ties a sleeve around each hoof. He gestures for Pete to grab the main part of the shirt.

MELVIN

Just pull steady - don't yank. I'll do my best to guide the little guy out.

CHET

What do I do?

MELVIN

You...uh...try to keep her calm...

And so it goes. From an angle near Maggie's udder we watch the FACES of these two teams of men as they pry--

--their faces as they REACH--

--their faces as they GRAB HOLD--

--their faces as they STRUGGLE to maintain a grip--

--their faces as they LEAN BACK...and PULLLLLLLLLLLL...

...and then a long silence...followed by a low, exhausted MOOOOOOOOOOOO...

The men have all collapsed on the ground. Melvin has a SLIMY NEWBORN CALF in his arms.

Pete tenderly UNTIES the shirt sleeves from the calf's front legs.

Chet HUGS Maggie's neck.

Poke strokes her muzzle. Everyone's looking at the calf and smiling.

Everyone except Doc Mathers.

He's flat on his back in the dirt, looking up at the sky--

--having a heart attack.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

25 EXT. BARNYARD

25

The LITTLE BLACK BAG sitting in the barnyard dirt fills the frame.

We hear rhythmic breathing, along with Melvin's voice.

MELVIN (O.S.)  
(softly)  
C'mon. Come on...  
(commanding)  
My bag. Get it - bring it over here.

Poke's grease-stained hand grabs the black bag a second later.

Our view no longer obstructed, we now see Melvin is performing CPR on Doc Mathers.

The other men are kneeling nearby. Watching. Melvin finishes the series of chest compressions. He leans his ear down near Doc's face, as he looks, listens and feels for a breath.

MELVIN  
Okay. He's breathing.

He wipes his filthy hands on his t-shirt, then grabs a pill bottle from the bag.

EXTREME CLOSEUP: The label says "Nitroglycerin"

CHET  
So he's gonna be alright?

MELVIN  
Too soon to say.

He pops the lid, wipes his hands on his shirt once more, then extracts a capsule and puts it under Doc's tongue.

He looks at the others.

MELVIN  
How far to the nearest hospital.

CHET  
'Bout an hour.

MELVIN  
 (Oh shit)  
 Help me get him in the truck.

26 EXT. DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

26

We keep pace with the LONG, THIN SHADOW cast on the ground by a man running up the driveway.

The shadow reaches and climbs the tailgate of the pickup, and a second later the man catches up and we see that it's Chet, with several COUCH CUSHIONS hugged to his chest.

He places them quickly in the bed of the pickup truck. The four men lift Doc up into the pickup bed. Poke gets behind the wheel.

Melvin and Chet climb into the truck bed on either side of Doc.

Pete closes the tailgate.

PETE  
 I'll call Esther.

CHET  
 (nodding)  
 She's at Ronnie's.

Melvin raps the side of the truck with his hand, and Poke puts it in gear.

[Begin MUSICAL INTERLUDE - e.g. Patty Griffin's "When It Don't Come Easy" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODG2dCwnr00>]

27 INT. RONNIE'S DINER - SUNSET

27

The booths are full of happy people with either full plates or full bellies - and everyone has a full heart.

We don't hear their voices or their laughter - we just see their expressions as the gentle guitar strumming carries us from one booth to the next--

--as we move toward the RINGING PHONE. It's an old wall unit. We get there just as Ronnie arrives, still smiling from whatever flirty thing the truck driver at the counter just said. She picks it up.

In the booth, Esther is sipping her tea and being her kooky self and chatting away to Gracie who still hasn't smiled, but

maybe the armor has been pierced a tiny bit?

Esther's mouth is moving and we can tell from her expression that she just cranked up her kookiness ALL the way--

--and Gracie LOOKS AWAY, trying and failing to suppress the grin that insists on emerging--

--and she sees RONNIE'S FACE.

Gracie's grin dies. Esther notices. She turns to follow Gracie's gaze--

--and sees Ronnie's face too.

28 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - SUNSET

28

The trees are a mixture of gold and crimson that only happens when the end of a gorgeous day dances with the end of yet another summer.

Poke's pickup comes over a rise, moving as fast as is prudent.

29 INT. POKE'S PICKUP - SUNSET

29

Poke HANDS are white-knuckled tight on the wheel. He SQUINTS into the last golden rays of the day, and takes a moment to look into the--

REAR VIEW MIRROR: Melvin is doing CPR again. Chet's kneels nearby, helpless, clutching his ball cap against his chest.

30 EXT. DIFFERENT COUNTRY ROAD - SUNSET

30

A SEDAN moves quickly along the blacktop.

31 INT. RONNIE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

31

A single TEAR steals down Ronnie's left cheek. She wipes it away hurriedly and looks over at--

--Esther, who is looking stoically out the passenger window at the gorgeous foliage ablaze with color and light. Ronnie shifts her gaze slightly to the--

REAR VIEW MIRROR: Gracie is looking down at her hands.

She looks up and meets Ronnie's eyes, then shifts her gaze slightly to something on the road UP AHEAD--

--and Ronnie looks away from the mirror to focus on the approaching intersection, where she sees POKE'S PICKUP on the shoulder, the driver's door open. She pulls in behind it.

32 EXT. RURAL INTERSECTION - DUSK 32

Ronnie kills her cars headlights; the only illumination left beneath the indigo sky is the intermittent light from the traffic signal: amber...crimson...amber...crimson... Poke and Chet watch the women emerging from the car.

These men have been raised to be providers and protectors, but they know there's no way to protect the women from this. Melvin sits on the open tailgate, looking into the woods.

33 INT. TRUCKBED - CONTINUOUS 33

Doc rests peacefully, eyes looking up glassily into the crimson sky.

Esther's face appears over the side of the truck bed, her expression a mixture of love and loss. She doesn't cry.

Beside her, Ronnie tries and fails to keep her face from crumpling.

34 EXT. ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS 34

Melvin still hasn't acknowledged the women's arrival. He's peering into the woods, his face steeled against something older and deeper than these recent events - something trying to surface.

Behind him, Gracie approaches. She looks into the truck first.

Then at her dad.

He looks back at her. And suddenly, for all the crap we've seen them sling at each other, it's abundantly clear that these two - this wifeless, motherless, father-daughter pair - have endured such storms before. They're not exactly pros at handling them, but they're not rookies either.

And the night really is arriving, because now the intervals between the flashes of the traffic light seem longer and darker, and during one of the intervals of darkness we--

CUT TO:

35 INT. KITCHEN #1 - NIGHT

35

A WOMAN'S HANDS wash a POTATO under running water. We get a glimpse of her flowery print apron as she adds it to a large bowl of already washed potatoes--

--and then reaches for another and puts it under the water was we--

CUT TO:

36 INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

36

A different set of hands plunged into the running water, liberally soaped and scrubbed for several seconds before we--

CUT TO:

Digger as she turns from the sink, drying her hands. She is wearing an industrial strength rubber apron and a surgical mask.

We follow her to a stainless steel table where Doc Mathers' naked body lays.

CUT TO:

37 INT. KITCHEN #2 - NIGHT

37

From INSIDE an old refrigerator we watch as the door is opened and a SECOND WOMAN, this one in a red plaid apron, removes JARS of pickles, mayonnaise and peppers from the door shelf, hugging them to her chest as she closes the fridge with her hip and we--

CUT TO:

38 INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

38

Digger, concentrating, as she pours a COLORFUL, MILKY FLUID into a contraption with a motor and several long tubes and hoses, and if we don't know that the contraption is an embalming vacuum that's okay since before we can really get a good look at it, we--

CUT TO:

39 INT. KITCHEN #3 - NIGHT

39

A THIRD WOMAN'S HANDS use a CHOPPING KNIFE to scrape remnants of onion cores and skins from a cutting board into a sink

disposal.

She RINSES the knife blade a moment, then raises a hand to RUB her red, tear-filled eyes with the back of her wrist, and we--

CUT TO:

40 INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

40

TABLE LEVEL POV: A large SCALPEL is selected from a surgical tray.

We TILT UP slowly, following Digger's arm to the surgical mask covering Digger's mouth and nose, and up to her bone-dry eyes.

She LEANS FORWARD over us, concentrating on making an incision.

On the wall shelves above and around her we can see a crazy collection of DEAD ANIMALS, stuffed and mounted like the cat we saw earlier, looking down like they're WATCHING--

CUT TO:

41 EXT. DIGGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

41

A CASSEROLE in a Pyrex pan is carried up the front steps by an elderly woman, to the front porch where small groups of men are smoking pipes and talking softly. The casserole makes its way inside--

42 INT. DIGGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

42

--where it joins dozens of other plates and bowls on a huge dining room TABLE, the spread being orchestrated and arranged by Ronnie.

Because this what we do when we lose something important, when a hole appears in our lives so suddenly and so big we couldn't even plug it with Maggie the cow: we try to fill it anyway --

--with children that don't know to keep it down and have to be hushed--

--and half-eaten plates of food left on the coffee table--

--and hushed conversations in the parlor about being sorry for the loss--



--and in the hallway, about how sudden it was--

--and in the kitchen, about how he lived a good, full life--

--and as we move through this brightly lit home and watch these good people do what they can when there is really nothing to be done, and even though the occasion is sad, and the song we're hearing is sad, it's clear that this house is being filled with love and memories and shared sorrow and all the things we have to keep the darkness back.

And the light and warmth of this place is even more apparent when we suddenly leave it to--

CUT TO:

43 INT. KITCHEN OF THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

43

A lonely light over the stove in an otherwise dark kitchen. It casts a bluish tint over everything in the kitchen--  
--including Gracie.

She sits in a wooden chair by the window, watching the lines of cars and people arriving and joining the throbbing knot of warmth next door.

She lifts her feet and puts them on the seat of her chair so she can hug her knees to her chest, rocking slowly.

[END MUSICAL INTERLUDE]

44 INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

44

Melvin is near a window, looking down at the same scene - and he's talking loudly on his cell phone.

MELVIN

Yeah, I understand. Two classes as an adjunct, and 3 shifts in the health center. Thanks Phil. We should get there by...Phil? Can you hear me?

(Looks at his phone. The call was dropped.)

Dammit.

45 INT. KITCHEN OF THE MATHERS' HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

45

Gracie is still huddled by the window as Melvin comes in with his cheery face.

MELVIN

Hey. I've got good news and better news.

She raises an eyebrow, far from hopeful.

MELVIN

The good news: I got a cell signal in the room at the end of the hall upstairs.

That gets a non-committal shrug.

MELVIN

And the better news--

A KNOCK at the front door interrupts--

46 INT. FRONT HALLWAY - MOMENT LATER

46

He opens the door to find ESTHER on the porch.

ESTHER

I need your help with something.

MELVIN

Of course. Anything.

END ACT III

ACT IV

47 INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - A FEW MINUTES LATER

47

Melvin is up on a ladder with his upper torso sticking through a ceiling entrance to an attic.

ESTHER

It should be right there.

MELVIN

(muffled, strained)

It is, I just need to...move...this other box so I can...there!

He starts to come down the ladder, a big box in his hands.

48 EXT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

48

Melvin and Esther come down the stairs.

ESTHER

(calling)

Gracie?

Gracie appears in the kitchen doorway.

ESTHER

You're coming with me. There's an awful lot of food piling up next door. We'll need your help getting rid of it.

GRACIE

Thanks, but I'm fine.

ESTHER

(to Melvin)

Isn't that cute? She answers like I asked a question.

(to Gracie)

I said we need your help, young lady. I'm sure you're not so busy staring out a window that you can't be helpful.

49 EXT. DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

49

Melvin hesitates, looking up the long driveway toward the garage. The warm light from the house doesn't quite reach it. The light escaping the garage along the edges of the doors

and windows is colder, almost bluish.

MELVIN

Just...bring this to her?

ESTHER

I know, it's pretty complicated.

MELVIN

No, I mean...should I knock?

ESTHER

(exasperated)

I don't know, Melvin. I never brought clothes for a dead man before. You'll figure it out.

She takes Gracie's arm and heads for the front of the house next door.

Melvin lingers another moment, then goes up the driveway into the shadows.

50 EXT. DIGGER'S FRONT PORCH - SAME AS BEFORE

50

At the bottom of the porch steps to Digger's house, Gracie stops.

It's obvious she doesn't want to join the crowd inside, but she can't bring herself to abandon Esther.

As if to reinforce this, Esther readjusts her grip on Gracie's arm, but doesn't try to hurry her up the stairs.

ESTHER

Back in that big old city you two left  
- what kind of doctoring did your  
daddy do?

GRACIE

Obstetrics mostly. He was chief of  
staff in the neo-natal unit.

ESTHER

Now isn't that funny. Your daddy's an  
expert in helping people come into  
this world. And our Digger is an  
expert at helping people leave. Big  
doings, huh?

GRACIE

I guess.

ESTHER

You 'guess.' Well, listen. One liar to another, I'm going to tell you the biggest truth I know: coming and going is the easiest stuff we do. The real trick is filling the space in between.

Gracie chews on that as they start up the stairs.

GRACIE

Has Digger always been so...weird?

ESTHER

Nope.

GRACIE

What happened to her?

Esther stops at the top stair and fixes her eyes on Gracie's.

ESTHER

Where's your mama?

GRACIE

What? I...uh...she...

Gracie's anger boils over and she shakes Esther's hands from her arm.

GRACIE

That's none of your business.

ESTHER

(smiling)

Atta girl. You answered your own question about Digger. Let's get some potato salad.

And she firmly takes Gracie's arm again and leads her in.

51 INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

51

Digger is wheeling Doc's body into a walk-in freezer. Behind her, Melvin comes in quietly with the box in his arms.

MELVIN

(re: the box)

Esther sent this over. His clothes, I  
(MORE)

MELVIN (CONT'D)  
guess. For tomorrow.

Digger nods once as she closes the freezer door, then crosses back to the table and begins putting away tools and equipment.

Melvin looks around for a place to put the box, but can't find a flat surface that doesn't have a stuffed animal on it. A badger. Various birds. A bobcat.

Finally, Digger approaches, moves aside a few animals, then puts her hands on the end of the box closest to her.

She doesn't take it yet, however. Instead, she whispers over it, a whisper like you'd use in a cathedral. And he whispers back, so their conversation is like a prayer.

DIGGER  
Aren't you going to say it?

MELVIN  
Excuse me?

DIGGER  
He was a friend. We were neighbors.  
Aren't you going to say you're sorry  
for my loss?

Melvin looks around. The animals are watching. Waiting. He looks back at Digger.

MELVIN  
I'm sorry for your loss.

Digger bows her head.

DIGGER  
Now ask.

MELVIN  
Ask?

DIGGER  
(still bowed)  
Ask. If there is anything you can do.

Melvin frowns. He's not a stupid man and he doesn't like to feel stupid. Still, he can't think of a reason to refuse.

MELVIN

Is there anything I can do?

She looks up, an odd look on her face. Pity? Bemusement?

DIGGER

No.

(a long beat)

Did it help you? The saying? Or the asking?

MELVIN

No.

DIGGER

Me neither.

(a beat)

But we always say and ask.

And now, finally, she takes the box and turns, and moves a few of the animals to create a space for it on a nearby shelf.

Then she walks away, removing the rubber apron as she gets to the sink. She hangs it on a hook and starts washing her hands.

Melvin realizes their interaction is done. He takes one last look around and leaves.

52 INT. DIGGER'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

52

Melvin comes in the back door and makes his way through the throngs of people still visiting and eating. The kitchen is largely women and some of the smaller children.

More than one of the women greets him with "Evening, Doc" or "Hi, Doc." He nods back, smiles, keeps making his way through the room--

--down a hallway full of lanky mechanics and farmers and town folk, the greetings varying slightly, but always carrying the title.

He gets to the end of the hallway and sees Chet holding court in the middle of the living room, delivering an animated story to a knot of people huddled on and around a couch, including Gracie and a CHUBBY KID.

CHET

-figured she'd swallowed something  
(MORE)

CHET (CONT'D)

bad, maybe some twine like that dumb dog Jake I useta have did one time. But Doc takes one look at 'er layin' there, listens to her neck with his stethoscope for a second, and next thing I know he's shoving his arm down Maggie's throat. But he can't get hold of the, uh, the...what'd he call it again?

MELVIN

A goiter.

Chet wheels around and smiles to see Melvin there.

CHET

Yeah! Thanks Doc!

(returns to the tale)

So this goiter, it's too slippery, so Doc--not this Doc here, but Doc Mathers--he gets this burlap sack and shoves his arm in it, and then this Doc--

(jabs a thumb toward Melvin)

--notices that Maggie's starting to calf! So Doc Mathers tells him and Pete to take care of the back end, while he has Poke pry open Maggie's mouth again--

He continues with his story, but Melvin's attention is diverted by Esther who has come up along side him. She hands him a plate of food.

ESTHER

Beef stroganoff. Fill ya right up. After the day you've had you must be running on empty. Gracie's knocking back a plate too.

He takes it, shovels in a mouthful, and tunes back into Chet's tale--

CHET

--at the same moment that the calf comes out! It was like the weirdest tug-o-war I've ever seen.

CHUBBY KID

So, if Doc Mathers and Poke were at  
(MORE)



CHUBBY KID (CONT'D)

Maggie's head, and this other Doc and Pete were taking care of the other end - what the heck were you doing?

CHET

(grins)

Well, Maggie's my cow, boy. I was supervising!

Everyone cracks up. And then Chet sees Esther.

CHET

Aw, damn. Esther, I don't know what's wrong with me. Telling this like it's a big joke. You know I-

ESTHER

We'll have plenty of time to miss Gus. Tonight isn't about him. It's about us - about love and comfort and community. He'd be mad if you didn't tell a story like that, especially since he was one of the main players.

GRACIE

Player? Hell, he was the hero! I mean, he saved Maggie -- right?

ESTHER

Mmm. Not quite.  
(nods toward the plate of  
stroganoff)  
You're eating her.

Gracie and Melvin both blanch, and a second later everyone cracks up.

CHET

Oh, she got you good!

Melvin and Gracie look at each other. What kind of folks are these people?

53 EXT. DIGGER'S HOUSE - LATER

53

Goodnights and tail lights; handshakes and hugs. Esther waves off the last of them, then turns to Gracie.

ESTHER

Get lost. Big people need to talk.

GRACIE  
(feigning hurt)  
Sheesh. I like you better when you  
lie.

She gives Esther a sudden, shy hug, then heads across the  
driveway, leaving Esther and Melvin alone.

ESTHER  
Just need to make sure you're okay.

MELVIN  
With...

ESTHER  
All this. My husband ate fried eggs  
every morning for more'n sixty years  
and was twenty pounds overweight.  
Preferred sitting on the couch to  
taking a walk, and never could put  
down the tobacco completely. This was  
not a lightning bolt out of a blue  
sky.

MELVIN  
(shaking his head)  
If I'd noticed a few seconds earlier--

ESTHER  
--it wouldn't have changed anything.

MELVIN  
No. No, I suppose not.

ESTHER  
So you're okay.

MELVIN  
As okay as I get.

ESTHER  
Good. So you'll be able to make up  
your mind about what I'm gonna ask you  
without getting tangled up in some  
misplaced guilt or stupid sense of  
debt.  
(a beat)  
I think you should stay. You and  
Gracie.

MELVIN

Stay?

ESTHER

That hospital is still an hour away.  
We need a doctor here.

MELVIN

You more than anyone should know I  
could never take Gus' place. How can  
you ask me to try?

ESTHER

I'm asking no such thing. Don't take  
his place. Take yours. Here with us.  
You need a job. And that girl of yours  
- well, let's just say she needs more  
than what you're haulin' in that  
station wagon. Think about it hard.  
Now if you don't mind, I'll excuse  
myself. Can't trust another woman to  
put the final touches on dressing my  
man.

She walks off toward the garage where Digger is standing in  
the doorway, silhouetted against the light within.

54 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

54

Melvin lies awake, staring at the ceiling. After a moment he  
gets up.

55 INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

55

Melvin comes toward another bedroom door. He looks in.

MELVIN'S POV:

Gracie sleeps.

Melvin watches her. Thinks.

56 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAWN

56

Sunlight tickles its way through trees on a distant hill.

57 INT. GRACIE'S BEDROOM

57

Gracie stands at the window, looking down.

GRACIE'S POV:

A group of pallbearers guide a gurney bearing Doc Mathers' coffin along a series of planks between the garage and the back door of Digger's house.

A CREAKY FLOORBOARD lets her know her dad has come into the doorway behind her. She looks at his reflection in the window.

GRACIE

What was the better news?

MELVIN

Huh?

GRACIE

Last night. You got off the phone and told me you had good news and better news, but then Esther showed up and you never told me the second thing. What was it?

He comes up behind her, looks down at the people below.

MELVIN

That I'm done running.

Their eyes meet in the reflective glass.

58 INT. FUNERAL HOME VIEWING ROOM - MORNING

58

Esther looks up from her place at the front of the room next to the casket and sees Melvin and Gracie in line to pay their last respects to Gus.

People stop to say words of comfort to her, so her view of them is intermittent. But every few seconds she gets another glimpse. She watches them kneel.

And then they rise and move on - to take seats in the middle of the town folk filling the rows of chairs in the center of the room.

Melvin sees her looking. He nods.

She nods back.

FADE OUT.