

I Killed Morgan Freeman

(a fun, family comedy)

By

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INT. AIRPORT HALLWAY - MORNING

A piece of luggage rolls down the causeway, dragged behind a fast pair of moving legs. It races through crowds of people and their luggage of differing colors, differing materials.

It has a sticker on it that reads, "JOE'S STUFF."

As it goes from gate to gate, people wait for their flights, some in chairs, some on the carpet. It rolls over one of them -- a child -- she grabs her leg and screams in pain.

She hobbles around, limping and crying.

JOE KAPLAN (40's) and his luggage stop. He wears a business suit that's frazzled, wrinkled, and slept in. He kneels down.

JOE

You okay?

The little girl whimpers. Tears in her eyes.

Joe's forehead wrinkles with concern.

JOE (CONT'D)

Here. Would twenty bucks make you
feel better?

He offers cash, and the kid shuts up, stands up, and snatches the money away before running off smiling and laughing --

-- no limp.

LITTLE GIRL (O.S.)

Sucker!

JOE

(To himself)

Why, you little shit.

INT. AIRPLANE WALKWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Joe walks in a slow line towards the airplane door. He's talking on his phone while dragging his luggage.

JOE

(To phone)

Hey, Todd.

(Beat)

Yeah. Cake's ready to be picked up.
It's at that bakery off Court
Square.

INT. AIRPLANE - CONTINUOUS

Joe walks through the door, still on his phone.

JOE

(To phone)

Of course I got the scooter. It's
locked up in the shed behind my
house.

(Beat)

Why would I tell you where the
spare key is?

He moves slowly. Other passengers line up behind him, waiting for him to move. He bumps his luggage into arms and legs of passengers already seated.

TWO FLIGHT ATTENDANTS scoot by the passengers to see what's causing the stand-still and pause behind Joe as he stops in the aisle and talks, taking his time putting up his luggage.

JOE (CONT'D)

(To phone)

Well, Sarah has my extra bank card.
Just use that to pay for the cake.

MALE ATTENDANT

Excuse me, sir. I need you to stow
your things so others can sit down.

Joe looks up, smiles, and holds up a finger. Shushes.

JOE

(To attendants)

Just a second, I'm on the phone.

(To the phone)

No. I'll be back in Memphis
tomorrow.

The male flight attendant looks shocked. The female attendant purses her lips as if trying not to say something and stares at the ceiling.

MALE ATTENDANT

(To Female attendant)

He just shushed me. Did you see
that?

FEMALE ATTENDANT

(To Male attendant)

Yeah, I saw it.

MALE ATTENDANT

(To Joe)

Sir, put it up -- now.

JOE

(To attendants)

Yeah. Yeah. Just a sec.

He looks up at the attendants. Lots of passengers are standing behind them. He chuckles, points to the phone.

JOE (CONT'D)

(To phone)

Hey, Todd. Todd? I'm hanging up now. Yeah. Yeah. I have to hang up. Plane's about to take off. Call you when I touch down. Okay? Bye.

Joe hangs up and finishes putting his luggage up.

MALE ATTENDANT

(To Female attendant)

See. Just a matter of letting them know who's in charge.

She shakes her head.

The phone rings again. Joe holds up a finger and answers.

The steward looks back at the other attendant, astonished at the audacity. Passengers get audible in their frustrations.

PASSENGER 1

Oh my God, really?

PASSENGER 2

What the heck?

The two flight attendants look at each other and nod.

The male attendant pulls out a little black rod and pokes Joe with it. There's a loud clicking sound as Joe goes into seizures from being tased. His eyes flicker and roll up into his head. His phone drops to the floor.

The crowd of passengers cheer their approval.

INT. AIRPORT SECURITY OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe sits in a tiny metal chair, trying to get comfortable. He's disheveled. Hair's tussled. It stands up from currents that flowed through him when he was tased.

His luggage is at his feet.

He tries to make his blood-shot eyes focus by blinking them and rolling them, squinting at the glitchy fluorescent lights of the office.

There's a sigil on the window behind him: HOMELAND SECURITY. In front of him is a pasty, almost jaundiced looking MAN BEHIND A DESK with droopy, tired eyes.

The man has a sub sandwich in one hand and a pen in the other as he writes his report -- He never looks up at Joe.

SECURITY

You caused quite a commotion back on the plane. But since you technically didn't do anything wrong, we're letting you go.

Joe starts to stand as the man takes a bite of sandwich.

SECURITY (CONT'D)

Of course, you're now on the no-fly list for six months.

Joe sits back down hard and stares blankly at the floor.

JOE

But, my daughter's birthday is tomorrow. I promised I'd be there.

SECURITY

Memphis?

JOE

Yeah.

SECURITY

Just rent a car. It's only a six hour drive.

Joe blinks again.

SECURITY (CONT'D)

Or you could walk. Choice is yours. Heck, might do you good. Sitting behind a desk all day'll kill you.

The man takes a bite of sandwich, still doesn't look up as Joe stands and grabs his luggage, ready to walk out.

SECURITY (CONT'D)

Besides, you look kind of pale.

INT. RENTAL CAR OFFICE - LATER

Joe stands in line at the car rental queue. There's a long line of people in front of him.

Joe gets to the counter. He sets his luggage down. The CLERK behind the counter is a big, tall, muscled, Terry Crews looking man. He never looks up at Joe.

CLERK

(To phone)

Welcome to Cars-a-lot. Can I help you, little man?

JOE

Yeah, um, hi. I need a car ...

CLERK

... We got all kinds of cars.

JOE

Got it. Thanks. I need a ...

The Clerk looks up and leans aggressively towards him.

CLERK

Do you have a reservation?

JOE

Well, no. Do I need one?

The clerk slowly turns to his computer and starts typing.

Joe watches as other people joyfully get their keys from other clerks and walk out -- Joe looks envious.

JOE (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

The clerk keeps typing, ignoring Joe.

JOE (CONT'D)

I haven't given you any information yet. What are you even typing?

The clerk stops typing. He takes a deep breath, fans himself with his hand, and lets the breath out slowly.

He turns to Joe. There are tears in his eyes.

CLERK

It's my girl. Alright? She's breaking up with me on Facebook.

(Beat)

I mean, who does that?

(Beat)

Just because I slept with her best friend last year. Why she still holding that against me? I didn't say anything when she vanished for the whole weekend with Bruno Mars? I mean, we all deserve our freedom. You got to do you. Am I right?

Joe swallows hard. His voice barely squeaking out.

JOE

I'm sorry?

The clerk uses his sleeves to wipe his tears.

CLERK

It's okay, itsy-bitsy man-kini. Not your fault. Let me see what we got.

The clerk checks the inventory.

JOE

A mid-size would be great. Anything really. Just need to be back in Memphis as soon as possible.

CLERK

We got a sub-compact.

(Beat)

You thought about just catching a flight? I mean, you are in an airport.

Joe sighs loudly.

JOE

Yeah ...

(Beat)

... Maybe a mid-size?

Clerk pulls out a set of keys and slams them on the counter.

CLERK

You get what I give you!

Joe reaches for the keys. The clerk puts his hand on Joe's and smiles wide, almost crazed. The man becomes all smiles.

CLERK (CONT'D)
And don't forget to fill out our
survey telling us how satisfied you
were with our service.

EXT. RENTAL CAR PARKING LOT - LATER

In the middle of an empty parking lot sits a tiny Smart car.
Joe puts his luggage in the passenger side of the car and
shuts the door as it starts to rain.

He sighs heavily and looks up at the sky.

MOMENTS LATER

Joe pulls up to the exit kiosk and hands the KIOSK LADY the
rental paperwork. She's reading a magazine about **MOB-BOSS
SCALUCCI CAPTURED -- WIFE'S STILL MISSING.**

JOE
Hey, don't mean to bother you, but
I didn't seem to find the GPS I
asked for.

KIOSK LADY
You really think you need one?

JOE
It'd be nice. My phone's got crappy
service.

She huffs and picks up her walkie-talkie.

KIOSK LADY
(To walkie)
Hey, Junior?

JUNIOR (V.O.)
What's up?

KIOSK LADY
(To walkie)
We have a car that was suppose to
have a GPS.

JUNIOR (V.O.)
Is it the blue Smart Car?

KIOSK LADY
(To walkie)
That would be it.

JUNIOR (V.O.)
Got stolen.

KIOSK LADY
(To Joe)
Got stolen.

JOE
Do you have any others?

KIOSK LADY
(To walkie)
We got any others laying around?

JUNIOR (V.O.)
Got an old beat up one. Hasn't been
updated in years though.

The kiosk lady turns and looks at Joe.

KIOSK LADY
You could use that or go back
inside and get a refund.

JOE
I'll take it. At least it works.

She shrugs.

KIOSK LADY
I'd give it fifty-fifty.

INT. RENTAL CAR - AFTERNOON

Joe drives the car. He listens to music and sings along, trying to wake himself up. He blinks a lot. Rubs his eyes. Drinks an energy drink that he has in the cup-holder.

It's raining outside. The car's windshield wipers go full blast. Other cars keep steady. All of them going slow.

They stop; he stops. They go; he goes.

JOE
Oh, come on. Why are we slowing
down? It's an interstate, isn't it?

The traffic slows to a stop. There's heavy smoke ahead rising through the rain -- All the cars come to a stand-still.

A POLICE OFFICER walks by wearing a poncho, motioning for other cars to get off at the next exit.

Joe rolls down the window and yells out to the officer.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hey, what's going on?

OFFICER 1
A wild fire caused by lightning.
It's covering the interstate and
some side roads, including Highway
fifty-one.

JOE
In the rain? Really?

OFFICER 1
Yeah. Been dry, except for today.

JOE
How long is it going to take? I'm
trying to get to Memphis.

OFFICER 1
Don't know. There's a detour going
through Charleston and Clarksdale,
if you get off here and head west.

JOE
West? Which way's that?

The officer walks off without responding.

LATER

Joe drives down the road. He tries to get the GPS to work. He
smacks it. It works for a second or two, then glitches.

He rubs his eyes and yawns. The phone rings. He answers it on
speaker-phone.

JOE
(To phone)
Hey, Todd.

He wipes away condensation from inside the windshield.

TODD (V.O.)
Um, well, your daughter's been
asking for a piñata for her party.
(Beat)
Something new her school's doing --
cultural inclusivity -- or
something.

JOE
(To phone)
Yeah, I know. It's hidden with her
other present.

TODD (V.O.)
Yeah? Oh, cool. You already got it?

JOE
Well, yeah. She asked for a
watermelon piñata.

TODD (V.O.)
Oh. Well. She didn't mention that
to me. Really? A watermelon?

... Joe taps the GPS. It glitches again. He drops the phone.

JOE
(Yelling at the phone)
I'll be there in a few hours. Okay?

TODD (V.O.)
Great. See you when you get back.
I'll say hi to your wife for you.

The phone call ends.

JOE
(To himself)
Ex-wife. Todd. Ex-wife.

He reaches for the phone. As he does, a figure appears in the
road. Joe looks up just in time to see the man and swerves,
yanking on the steering wheel.

The car flips.

MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE ON:

... Joe as he comes to in the car. He hangs upside down,
stuck in his seat by the seat belt. He looks around and sees
a man lying in the road. He squints to see the man clearer.
Recognition crosses Joe's face.

JOE
Is that? Morgan Freeman?

As he says it, he passes out.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

Joe wakes in a blaringly-bright hospital room. A DOCTOR in full lab coat stands by the bedside, using a flashlight to examine Joe's eyes.

DOCTOR
Good. You're awake.

JOE
Kind of hard to sleep with a
flashlight in your face.

The doctor backs up. He's an older country doctor.

DOCTOR
How're you feeling?

Joe looks down at his own hands. Ink's on the fingertips.

Behind the doctor there is a television showing the news, with a man's face in a mugshot. Underneath the picture are the words: **MICHAEL SCALUCCI CAPTURED. WIFE STILL MISSING, PRESUMED DEAD.**

The doctor turns off the TV. The room gets quiet.

JOE
Bit of a headache and sore all
over.

DOCTOR
Great.

JOE
I think we have two different
meanings for the word 'Great'.

DOCTOR
Well, you don't seem to have
anything wrong with you that some
time off and aspirin won't cure.

JOE
Yesterday's kind of a blur. What
happened?

DOCTOR
You were in an accident.

Joe sits up.

JOE
What? How bad?

DOCTOR

Well, your car's totalled. Hope you had insurance.

Panic crosses Joe's face. He looks down at his inky fingers again.

JOE

Why is there ink on my fingers?

Beat.

The doctor looks pensive, thinking about something.

DOCTOR

The sheriff was in here a little bit ago to book you for the accident report.

The doctor starts to walk away. He turns and frowns.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Your clothes are in the hamper by the wall. There's some belongings they pulled from the wreck too. You're free to check out. You should probably get going.

The doctor starts walking away again.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Just remember that aspirin. You'll need it. And maybe some scotch.

JOE

What about the accident?

DOCTOR

I'll let the sheriff know you're up.

Then, Joe was alone in the room.

Joe gets up, wincing every time he moves. He walks to his luggage. The sticker, still firmly attached, appears mangled but still reads, "JOE'S STUFF".

He unzips it, looks inside. He lifts up a broken laptop.

JOE

Ah, man.

He picks up his phone, but it falls apart too. He gathers up the pieces and puts them into his luggage.

HOSPITAL LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Joe's dressed. His clothes look rough as he signs his paperwork and gets a copy.

He nods to the clerk who scowls at him -- her eyes never leaving him. He walks to the sliding doors of the exit, rolling his wobbly luggage behind him. People stare hatefully at him in silence as he walks by.

As he gets close to the front door, a tall leathery SHERIFF walks up beside him. He freezes. The sheriff doesn't look at him.

SHERIFF

Mr. Kaplan, I'm here to pick you up.

(Beat)

Now, when we get outside, there'll be some news-folk. Just keep your head down, and remember, you got the right to remain silent. I suggest you do just that.

EXT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - CONTINUOUS - SUNSET

Joe and the sheriff walk out. The sunset temporarily blinds Joe, but when he can see again, people rush at him with cameras and microphones. He's surrounded by the media.

REPORTER 1

Mister Kaplan, how do you feel after the accident?

JOE

I survived, so there's that.

(Beat)

Lucky I came out with only a few scratches. Still a bit in shock.

REPORTER 2

Shock from the accident or in shock about killing America's favorite celebrity?

JOE

Whoa. Wait. What celebrity?

REPORTER 2

You killed Morgan Freeman ...

Joe becomes the proverbial deer in the headlights. His jaw drops as the sheriff pushes him forward through the crowd.

REPORTER 1

... One of the nurses said they saw him being brought in after the accident and never brought back out.

REPORTER 2

What were his last words?

JOE

I don't know.

REPORTER 2

Are you saying that you didn't try to help him as he lay dying?

JOE

No. What? Where are you getting that? I was ...

The sheriff holds his hands up to silence everybody.

SHERIFF

... I think that's enough for now. Mister Kaplan's needing to come with me.

He opens the back-door, pushes Joe in, and grabs the luggage.

The crowd keep rolling as the sheriff gets in on the other side and shuts the door.

INT. SHERIFF'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The sheriff puts Joe's luggage in the passenger seat and starts up the car. Joe leans forward to talk through the grill separating the front and back.

JOE

Hey, wait. Wait! I have a birthday to get to. This isn't how today was supposed to go.

The sheriff looks back at Joe through the rearview mirror. He squints.

SHERIFF

Boy, don't you know? Things never go the way their suppose to. That's just life.

The sheriff drives off.

MOMENTS LATER

The car travels down the country highway. The sheriff concentrates on driving. Joe leans over in the backseat, keeping weight off his handcuffed hands.

JOE

Boy, I never knew these seats were so uncomfortable.

SHERIFF

Weren't really made for comfort.

Joe settles down and a serious look comes over his face.

JOE

So, is it true? Is Morgan Freeman dead?

SHERIFF

Listen up. Morgan's ...

... The sheriff swallows hard and takes a deep breath.

He pulls into a diner parking lot and stops the car. He looks hard at Joe through the rearview mirror, studying him.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

... Morgan is -- was a good man.

He gets out of the car, slams the door shut behind him.

Joe watches as the sheriff goes into the diner. The sheriff hangs his head and talks to a waitress and an old cook.

The cook takes off his little paper hat and looks at the floor. He leans into the waitress as she comforts him. She shakes a finger at the sheriff, visibly angry and yelling.

Joe hunches down in the seat, trying not to be seen.

INT. SHERIFF'S CAR - LATER

Joe watches from the back seat as the sheriff comes out with a bag of food and two cups of coffee in a drink carrier. He opens the back-door to the car and puts the food and coffee on the hood.

Joe keeps looking around, as if sizing the situation up on whether it's a trap or not. He looks paranoid.

The sheriff leans against the car and takes one of the coffees and starts drinking. He looks off down the road as he does.

SHERIFF

I think them reporters back at the hospital might be the start of something you ain't going to like.

(Beat)

People want to see you behind bars.
Or worse.

He looks over at Joe who is still in the back-seat.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Well, you getting out, boy?

Joe slowly gets out and walks over to the sheriff.

The sheriff points down the road to an old worn-out sign:
'NOW LEAVING TALLAHATCHIE COUNTY'

JOE

Are you letting me go? Why? I mean,
thank you, but why?

The sheriff pulls Joe's luggage from the passenger side and hands it to him, along with a large envelope.

SHERIFF

We booked you while you were asleep. No reason to hold you. It was an accident, and your paperwork's inside that there envelope.

JOE

So, that's it?

SHERIFF

Till the court date. Prosecutors'll decide on whether to bring charges.

JOE

How am I getting home?

SHERIFF

Not my problem. County line.
Memphis is 80 miles that way.

Joe grabs the food with one hand and grabs his luggage with the other before slowly backing away from the sheriff, and finally turning and slowly walking down the road, looking dejected and sad.

EXT. ROADSIDE - LATER

Joe looks even more dishevelled. He's covered in sweat and road-dust. He pulls his wobbly luggage by the handle and walks down the road. Watching as all the cars pass.

He sticks out his thumb awkwardly, as if this is the first time he's ever hitchhiked. Not knowing how to hold it.

A mini-van pulls up almost immediately. It's an older model, with wood panels and a cracked back windshield. There are bumper-stickers all over the hatch-back.

They say stuff like:

JESUS WAS MY FIFTH GRADE TEACHER, and JEREMIAH WAS A BULLFROG, BUT DON'T BE TEMPTED BY HIS WINE, and JESUS IS THE HERO WE NEED AND THE ONE WE DESERVE.

There are silhouette family stickers on the back windshield, with a man, woman, child, cat, and Jesus carrying a cross.

INT. MINI-VAN - MOMENTS LATER

Joe sits uncomfortably in the back seat of the mini-van. A LITTLE GIRL IN PIG-TAILS sits next to him, ignoring him and playing on her tablet. She looks well-dressed, as if she just stepped out of a 70s-themed thrift shop.

The other two are dressed similarly, the HUSBAND and WIFE. The husband sits behind the wheel. The wife's in the passenger seat staring at Joe. He jumps as the doors lock and the van tires squeal when the husband punches the gas.

Both are overly happy, with the brightest smiles ever. Joe can see the husband's face only in the rear-view mirror, beaming with his smile.

WIFE

Hi.

HUSBAND

Welcome to our church on wheels.
Good thing we picked you up. It
looks like it's going to rain.

Joe clutches his luggage tighter on his lap. His voice strains as he speaks.

JOE

Yeah, thanks. I'm really glad you
did. It's a long way to Memphis.

HUSBAND

Oh, that's where you're going?
Quite a walk. You live there?

JOE

Yeah, between travelling for work.

WIFE

Work a lot, do you?

JOE

Sometimes too much.

HUSBAND

Well, glad we can help you get
where you're supposed to be. That's
us -- making sure lost souls find
their way to Heaven ...

JOE

... Thanks. This is a big help ...

HUSBAND

(To himself)

... One way or another.

The wife smiles at her husband. Joe smiles too, but then a realization crosses his face, and he looks confused. Brows furrow.

JOE

Sorry, what was that?

The husband glances up at Joe from the rearview mirror. The wife keeps smiling at Joe as she pets her husband's arm with both hands.

JOE (CONT'D)

Sounded a little menacing, is all.

He looks at the little girl.

JOE (CONT'D)

Did it sound that way to you?

She ignores him. Plays on her tablet.

WIFE

It's on our way anyway.

JOE

Oh, so you're from Memphis too?

HUSBAND

No. We just drive the highways,
helping people get to Heaven.

Joe leans back and hugs his luggage as he watches the husband and wife look at each other. Their smiles seem to grow, if that were possible.

Joe tries to watch the world outside the window instead.

Out of his periphery, Joe keeps seeing the husband stare at him in the rear-view mirror, and the wife keeps turning to look at him, then smiling back at her husband.

LATER

Joe is startled awake from napping. He clutches the luggage tighter as if being attacked.

He looks around to see the wife staring at him with a big grin on her face. He goes wide-eyed.

The husband looks back in the mirror.

HUSBAND

Good. You're awake. Almost to
Memphis. We like people to be awake
when it's time to send them off.

JOE

Wouldn't everybody be awake when
you drop them off? See it's talk
like that: it's a little off-
putting.

Joe forces himself to chuckle.

WIFE

When we deliver them. Is that
better?

JOE

When you say that, you mean
delivering them to their house,
right?

She just shrugs and smiles.

WIFE

If that's where they're meant to
go.

The little girl watches something on her tablet -- a news report on Morgan Freeman. The report goes from showing a smiling picture of Morgan Freeman to a horrible screen-shot from a video of a handcuffed Joe being thrown in the back of the sheriff's car.

The little girl slowly turns to stare up at Joe. She looks puzzled.

Joe stares straight ahead and clutches his luggage. Shaking.

The little girl tugs on his jacket. He looks at her in periphery, never turning his head. Tries to ignore her.

LITTLE GIRL
Mister ..?

She tugs on his jacket again. He turns his head to see that the girl's face is covered in shadow. She looks like a demon child with large dark eyes from a horror movie.

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)
... Did you kill God?

Joe's eyes goes wide again.

JOE
(To the little girl)
Shhhh. What? No. TV's bad for you,
probably should just put that away
for now.

WIFE
What did you say?

JOE
Pfft. Children and their
imagination. I mean really. Where
do they come up with it?
(Beat)
You know, I blame it on today's
educational system.

LITTLE GIRL
He killed God, mama. Look ...

... She holds up her tablet, and Joe tries to push it back down, but the wife grabs the tablet and starts watching as it shows a news broadcast.

INSERT-VIDEO ON TABLET

NEWS BROADCASTER
... and with the grass-roots
movement pushing, everybody was
expecting America's favorite
celebrity to easily win the
presidential primary ...

The news caster chokes up, looks ready to cry. A picture of Morgan Freeman looking presidential shows behind them.

NEWS BROADCASTER (CONT'D)
... but we are sad to report to you
that the hopeful presidential
candidate and all-around American
hero, Morgan Freeman, was killed in
a car accident by this man ...

A video of Joe coming out of the hospital comes on beside the news-anchor. Joe's carrying his luggage, circled by reporters in the video.

REPORTER 2
Shock from the accident or in shock
about killing America's favorite
celebrity?

JOE
Whoa. Wait. What celebrity?

The video freezes on Joe as his face is stuck in a very unflattering pose.

BACK TO SCENE

The husband gets angry as he watches instead of driving. The car swerves all over the highway. Joe points at the road.

JOE
Road! Road!

The wife growls. Her face becomes almost animalistic.

Joe grabs the tablet from the wife and tries to throw it out the window, but the window's only open part way, and it just bounces off and onto the floor.

WIFE
(To the husband)
Billy, stop the car!

HUSBAND

(To wife)

But what about the sacrifice?

WIFE

(To husband)

Not this one. He's not worthy.

Joe reaches down and grabs the tablet and hands it to the crying girl.

JOE

(To wife)

Wait. What about a sacrifice?

(To little girl)

Sorry. Reflexes. Don't know what came over me.

The little girl bawls louder. Joe forces a half-hearted smile.

EXT. HIGHWAY ROADSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

The mini-van comes to a screeching halt. The husband gets out and drags Joe out of the mini-van as he clutches his luggage like a flotation device.

HUSBAND

How could you do that to someone who brought us such films as Hard Rain and Nurse Betty.

JOE

Wasn't Nurse Betty an unsympathetic character?

HUSBAND

She was whimsical! And endearing!

The wife yells from the open door.

WIFE

You're just a bad person. Hope you burn in Alabama.

Joe gathers himself and sits up on the road.

JOE

Wait. Don't you mean Hell?

The husband leans over, putting a finger in Joe's face.

HUSBAND

Hell's too good for the likes of
you, and Nurse Betty was an
underrated comedy masterpiece.

The husband gets back into the mini-van and shuts his door
loudly. The mini-van squeals off and down the highway.

Joe stands and looks up, sees a big highway sign saying it's
a few more miles to Memphis -- He starts walking.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - EVENING

The house is a small, modern ranch-style, but the windows are
smashed, the door torn off and thrown in the yard. Graffiti
all along the walls and broken-down garage door.

A crowd of people stand outside on the lawn with picket
signs, most signs tell Joe how horrible he is for killing
Morgan Freeman. Some are giant Morgan Freeman heads.

Joe's car is a smoldering pile of ruin in the driveway.
People stand around the burning car, cooking marshmallows and
singing, "Give Peace a Chance."

There's a news-crew standing in the front yard, getting ready
to broadcast. BRIAN O'BRIAN (30's-40's) stands in front of
the camera in his freshly pressed expensive suit. He's short
and stands on an apple-box.

His camera-person is STEVE (a woman in her 30's, all
business, hair tied back in a pony-tail with strands trying
to escape in every direction). Her style is distinct: jeans,
Ramones T-shirt, and an old olive-green Army jacket.

INSERT VIDEO OF ...

... Brian standing in front of the chaotic scene in his
expensive suit and perfect hair.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Brian O'Brian here, second hour of
a vigil outside the house of the
man who allegedly killed movie icon
Morgan Freeman.

Beat.

Brian pretends to listen to an earpiece he doesn't have.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)

Yes. That Morgan Freeman. The celebrity beloved by all America. All-around good-guy. The man who gave us great lines like: "A person must realize what's precious in their life, the things they own or the life they live," and lines like, "Onions are best served grilled."

Brian puts down the microphone and shakes out his arms and legs. He wiggles his head to loosen up his neck.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)

Okay, Steve. Let's get some more B-Roll and one more shot of me, so we don't have to come back to this dump.

Beat.

STEVE (O.S.)

Okay, back in three. Two ...

BRIAN O'BRIAN

... Eleventh hour of the vigil here at the house of the man who killed Morgan Freeman. Protesters are picketing. There's burning tire smell in the air, but so far, no sign of the man who did the horrible deed.

Behind the reporter, the crowd of protesters finally realize that Brian is reporting and they gather behind him, photo-bombing his report. Smiling to the camera. Holding their picket signs up for the world to see.

As everybody's attention is focused on the reporting, Joe walks behind them on camera, rolling his luggage, looking miserable.

-- No one notices --

Joe puts his luggage inside the doorway, slowly walks over to the broken door and picks it up. He carries it back to the door-frame and uses it to block the doorway, pretending like it's still a door.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

After putting up the broken door to block the protesters, Joe rolls his luggage through the disaster that used to be his home.

It's been looted and trashed. Graffiti's sprayed on the walls, and some windows are busted out.

There's an empty spot on the wall that's cleaner than the rest of the wall where a big TV use to hang.

He rolls the wobbly luggage through it, looking at the destruction. He sees his old answering machine still on the kitchen counter -- It blinks.

JOE

Well, at least you're still here.

He picks it up and brushes off the dust and debris. Pushes the button. MISTER RICHARDSON'S voice comes through on the message.

MISTER RICHARDSON (V.O.)

Joe, where the heck are you?
Seriously, why haven't you been
picking up? Where are those
contracts you were suppose to bring
me? You've better have not lost
them or you're fired.

The machine beeps as Joe unzips and digs through the luggage to find the contract papers all muddy, torn, and soggy.

JOE

No. I can still fix this.

MISTER RICHARDSON (V.O.)

Guess what I see on the five
o'clock news while I'm getting my
skinny-mocha-frapa with almond
milk. Go ahead: guess. It's you. On
television.

(Beat)

You killed Morgan Freeman, you
bastard. You better hope they have
more episodes of The Story of Us
recorded, or I swear ...

(Beat)

... you know what? Don't worry
about coming in. You're fired!

Joe pushes the button to skip to the next. A woman's voice --
JOE'S EX-WIFE, SARAH.

SARAH (V.O.)

Joe? Where are you? Your daughter has been crying because you promised you'd be here. Now Todd has to get the piñata. And for God's sake I hope you haven't forgotten to get that scooter you said you were getting. I swear, if you don't show up for your own daughter's birthday ...

... Joe pushes the button to cut her off.

The machine beeps. No more messages.

He looks down at the floor, depression comes across his face, but only for a moment, and then he goes wide-eye.

JOE

Oh crap, the presents.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Joe unlocks a shed in the backyard. He goes in and rolls out a tiny, hot-pink Vespa scooter. He also holds a watermelon piñata. He straps a hot-pink helmet on his head, but it's three sizes too small.

He pushes the scooter to a back gate and unlocks it, before grabbing his luggage and setting it on his lap. He starts the tiny engine and rides away with the piñata fluttering behind him.

JOE (O.S.)

I can fix this!

EXT. INNER-CITY ROAD - LATER

ANGLE ON:

... Joe's face as he rides the scooter. The engine is loud.

He nervously looks to the right and the left.

There, just barely behind him are a line of cars with angry occupants yelling at Joe as he slowly drives down the road.

He turns down a tight alley, too tight for the cars to follow. They stop at the entrance, and people get out to throw stuff in the direction Joe went.

INT. PARKING DECK - BOTTOM FLOOR - LATER

Joe hides in the shadows and looks out as a group of cars drive slowly by, obviously looking for someone.

When they leave, he starts up the scooter and drives to the exit, where there's a mechanical arm and parking pay-station blocking him from leaving, but there's room for him to go around it -- he just doesn't realize it.

He pulls his wallet out and puts in money. The arm lifts up, letting him leave.

He puts his wallet away and starts to leave, but the arm comes down before he can go.

He pulls out another dollar and puts away his wallet before giving the dollar to the pay-station. The arm lifts, and he starts to drive out, but the arm comes down as he's going by and slowly knocks him off the scooter, which continues to roll by itself into the road.

A truck zooms by the parking deck and smashes the scooter.

Joe sits there amazed as the scooter's front wheel comes rolling back to him.

EXT. EX-WIFE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Joe's ex-wife's house is on a quiet suburban street.

Joe walks up, carefully watching the road. He's dazed, like a zombie that doesn't feel like eating brains. He's still wearing the small helmet. He holds the loose scooter tire in one hand, and his luggage in the other, with a string falling down to a burnt and crushed watermelon piñata that drags behind him.

He staggers half-hearted up to the door and knocks. Soft at first then a little louder.

TODD answers (late 40's -- former surfer-boy, with awesome blond hair and a tan that's more orange than natural).

He wears Panama shorts, Hawaiian shirt, and flip-flops.

Todd sees Joe and quickly comes outside, closes the door behind him. Joe tries to look inside.

TODD

Hey, buddy. You made it.

Todd's smile seems fake. He's wide-eyed and paranoid.

JOE
Was that the picture of me and
Lou Ferrigno hanging on your wall?

TODD
No. No. No. No.

Todd tries to laugh, but it's half-hearted.

TODD (CONT'D)
Why would I have that? Don't be
silly.

Joe tries to go around Todd, but Todd puts himself between
Joe and the door.

TODD (CONT'D)
Listen, the girls are a little
miffed at you right now, so it's
probably not the best time.

JOE
But, it's Jasmine's birthday ...

TODD
... I know. Bad timing. Sucks. But
I will make sure she gets ...

Todd takes the helmet off Joe and looks down at the scooter
tire. He makes a face like he sucked a lemon, but he sighs
heavily when he reaches down and holds up the crushed piñata.

TODD (CONT'D)
... this and the scooter wheel, but
you gotta leave. At least for now,
till the heat dies down.

JOE
I don't have anywhere to go. My
house is wrecked. My car's burned.

Todd grabs Joe by the elbow and drags him away from the front
door and towards the garage.

TODD
Yeah, saw that. That's bad. Really.

Todd looks around to make sure nobody's seen Joe, pushes him
off to the shadows of the house.

TODD (CONT'D)
Whew, buddy, you smell pretty ripe,
could probably use a shower. And
clean clothes.

JOE
Todd? Loan me your car.

TODD
Why would I do that?

JOE
If not, I'll stand out here all night until people recognize me and start forming a mob on your lawn.

TODD
You wouldn't.

JOE
What else do I have to do?

Beat.

TODD
Damn it. Fine.

INT. JOE'S EX-WIFE'S GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

There's an old pick-up truck, a rusted 1979 F-150 in the garage and empty beer cans are everywhere. Todd pats the back fender of the truck like a proud papa.

TODD
She's not much to look at ...
(Beat)
... but she'll get you down the road.

Todd puts his hands on his hips and looks off into the distance wistfully, as if recalling some fond memory, but then he comes back to the present.

JOE
So, you're really loaning me your truck? And I'll get it back to you when I get back on my feet. Promise.

TODD
Insurance is paid till November. Tags expire next March, but after that it's up to you ...
(Beat)
... and I promise not to report it stolen for at least a month.

JOE

You're going to report it stolen?

TODD

But for now, I don't need it. Sarah just bought me a car, so ...

JOE

... Well, it'll do. I can use what's in my bank to get a motel room.

(Beat)

Wait. Where'd she get the money to buy you a car ...?

TODD

... about that. Remember you gave Sarah your spare bank card?

JOE

No ...

TODD

... Yeah. She wasn't sure how long it would be until she got more child-support, so she cleaned you out.

Joe leans his forehead against the truck. Todd pats him on the back.

TODD (CONT'D)

Stay the night tonight.

(Beat)

Out here, so Sarah doesn't get mad.

(Beat)

And here ...

... He hands Joe a large wad of cash.

TODD (CONT'D)

It's a small loan.

Joe perks up a little.

TODD (CONT'D)

Besides, it's just some of what I got for pawning your stuff. They didn't give me much ...

(Beat)

... but, I mean, resale's a bitch -- am I right?

(Beat)

I'll be right back.

Todd smiles as he vanishes into the house.

Joe loads up the luggage in the back of the truck.

JASMINE (12, going on 40, skinny with long brown hair)
appears barefoot in her nightgown at the door to the house.

JOE
Hey, Baby Girl. What're you doing
up so late?

JASMINE
I heard you talking with Todd.
Thought you were one of his late
night business buddies.

JOE
Still not calling him dad?

JASMINE
No. He can kiss my butt.

JOE
That's my girl.

He offers her a high-five, which she just stares at till he
lowers his hand again.

JASMINE
Mom rented a clown.

JOE
Was he any good?

JASMINE
No, dad. First, he was a clown, a
sad clown. Second, I'm twelve.

JOE
Hey, Baby Girl. I need to let you
know something.

JASMINE
I know. You're going away.

She leans her head on his shoulder.

JOE
You going to be okay?

JASMINE
It's not like I get to see you
anyway. Maybe we can hang out once
I leave home.

Beat.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
You should go find me that piñata
you said you were getting me.

JOE
Yeah, of course. I promise.
(Beat)
I'll be gone by the morning ...

JASMINE
... No. I mean you should go now.
Todd's calling reporters for the
bounty on you.

She hands him a flyer with Joe's face on it.

JOE
What?

JASMINE
Yeah, he's a douche.

Joe jumps up and starts stuffing his luggage in the back of
the truck.

JASMINE (CONT'D)
And, dad? Once you get your life
together, come find me. And
remember the piñata.

JOE
I wish I knew how to get my life
together. I really do.

JASMINE
You always know what to do.

JOE
Yeah, not really. I just fake it
most of the time. That's how it is
when you grow up. You have to
pretend to be someone you're not.

He stands there looking pathetic and sad, staring wistfully.

JASMINE
Dad?

JOE
Oh, yeah. Reporters. Got it.

GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Todd comes out of the house and into the garage with two beers. He has a big smile on his face that vanishes when he sees that the garage door is open, and the truck's gone.

Jasmine watches the empty road. She turns and walks by Todd, pausing long enough to hand him the flyer.

Todd looks down at it and sighs.

TODD

Ah, man.

JASMINE

You really suck, Todd.

She walks back into the house, leaving Todd all alone.

EXT. EX-WIFE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

A NEWS/22 MEMPHIS news van blaring Ramones.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

(To Steve)

Okay. Quick interview and we can go home. How's my hair?

STEVE

You look like a peacock.

Brian gives Steve a side-long look, but then shrugs it off.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Eh. Good enough.

He rushes to preen. He brushes his hair with his fingers and adjusts his suit before climbing out of the van.

Steve goes into the back to grab the camera as Brian walks up to introduce himself to Todd who's standing in the driveway -- waiting.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)

Is he still here?

TODD

You just missed him. I tried to hold him as long as I could.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Where's he going?

Todd coughs and holds out his hand. Brian rolls his eyes and digs money out of his pocket to hand to him.

TODD

Thanks.

He turns to walk away, but Brian grabs his shirt.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Hey, I just gave you a hundred dollars.

Todd stops and turns back to him.

TODD

Yeah, and I said thanks.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Where's he going?

TODD

Don't know. West, I think.

Steve steps up with Brian's apple-crate and has the camera ready to record. Brian holds up his hand, and Steve freezes.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Forget it. We aren't getting an interview here.

Brian starts to walk away from Todd. Steve takes the camera off her shoulder and begins to follow.

Todd's face lights up with an idea.

TODD

Wait. An interview? You want water-works with that?

Brian stops and turns back to Todd. He puts a hand on Steve's shoulder, stopping her from putting away the camera.

INT. JOE'S TRUCK ON THE HIGHWAY - EVENING

Joe listens to news about Morgan Freeman on the radio as he drives. There's a familiar voice on.

TODD (V.O.)

I told him I had to get ready for my step-daughter's birthday party. I just got her a new scooter, but now, this news about her father ...

BRIAN O'BRIAN (V.O.)
 ... And you said he took your car
 too ..?

Todd's voice becomes emotional, as if he's trying to cry.

TODD (V.O.)
 ... Yeah, that truck meant the
 world to me. He just took it. I
 tried to stop him, but he punched
 me and grabbed the keys.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (V.O.)
 A truly horrible person.

TODD (V.O.)
 He is.

Joe looks down at the radio as if it were a monster. He turns
 off the radio as he pulls into a gas station.

EXT. ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI: GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

The gas station is lit up in the evening hours. The highway
 sign next to it says 26 miles to St. Louis.

ANGLE ON:

Joe's luggage's in the back of the truck. The sticker that
 says, "JOE'S STUFF" peels slightly and flaps in the wind.

Joe pulls up to one of the pumps. There's another car on the
 other side of the pump. He gets out and goes inside to pay.
 He keeps his head down and looks around suspiciously.

INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

The CLERK's an older guy with grey long hair kept down with a
 bandana, and he has a wild salt-and-pepper beard. He looks a
 bit like an old hippy that never left the 60's. He's behind
 the counter and reading a newspaper with Joe's face on it.

A CUSTOMER stands in front of the counter in a plaid shirt,
 too-tight skinny jeans, and an ornate, handlebar mustache.

HIPSTER
 I'm telling you, Kopi Luwak coffee
 is way better than your average
 Arabica or Robusta.

GAS STATION GUY
 That's a bunch of malarkey, man.

HIPSTER

Then why would so many people pay
the outrageous price for it?.

Joe nods as he walks by and quickly moves off.

GAS STATION GUY

Because, man, you're trying to show
off to potential chicks that you
have something in common with them,
and you have enough disposable
income to accommodate their tastes.
It's just, like, basic signalling,
man. You don't actually like the
taste any better.

The two argue as Joe browses the shelves, trying to decide on
food. He sees some piñata hanging over the shelves and stares
at them for a moment, before the argument brings him out of
his daze.

HIPSTER

I think it tastes better?

GAS STATION GUY

It's all in your head. Like, all
psychosomatic. You convinced
yourself that it tastes better,
when in reality, it taste like
shit.

The hipster drinks his coffee and stares at the older man.

HIPSTER

What do you know? You just drink
instant!

GAS STATION GUY

Because, I don't have to hide who I
really am!

Joe starts towards them, but he sees cans of Vienna Sausages
on the shelf next to him.

JOE

(To himself)

Huh. I've never tried these.

He scoops up a few. As he does, he manages to sniff his
armpit and wrinkles his face in disgust.

He also grabs a travel-sized deodorant from another shelf as
he heads up towards the clerk, pausing only long enough to
see the same magazine the Kiosk Lady was reading.

He almost grabs one, but then stops himself when he sees other magazines with his face on them.

He walks up to the counter. The older man looks up and smiles at him. A black-and-white TV behind the clerk has a news report with Joe being confronted outside of the hospital.

GAS STATION GUY

(To Joe)

Oh, done already, man? That's cool, man.

He starts ringing up the Vienna Sausages.

GAS STATION GUY (CONT'D)

Sorry about being so loud, man.

JOE

It's fine. I also need twenty in gas. The truck out there.

The clerk leans back to look out the window.

GAS STATION GUY

Okay. That'll be thirty sixty three.

JOE

Hey, sorry to eaves-drop, but I couldn't help but hear the conversation. If it helps, I have worked in the coffee business before, and the Kopi Luwak coffee does have a unique taste because of the civet cat digesting them first, but it doesn't make it better. The scarcity makes us think it's better.

The guy in plaid looks over to Joe. He's smiling and about to say something when recognition crawls across his mustached face.

HIPSTER

Oh my God.

Joe remains calm as he pulls out his wallet. The hipster tries to get the clerk's attention, mouthing for the old man to look behind him. On the TV is Joe's face, plastered large on the screen.

HIPSTER (CONT'D)

Dude, it's him.

Joe takes the money out of his wallet. His hands shake.

HIPSTER (CONT'D)
Behind you. Look. It's the guy.

The older clerk looks surprised. He puts on a pair of glasses from his pocket and looks at the TV and then to Joe.

CLERK
Oh, wow, man. You're right. He's the dude.

JOE
Hey, listen, don't want any trouble. I didn't do anything.

HIPSTER
Freeman's Easy Reader taught me how to read.

The guy in the plaid punches Joe, who falls down and grabs his eye.

The clerk points his finger at Joe.

GAS STATION GUY
Yeah, me too.

Joe and the hipster stare at him in disbelief.

GAS STATION GUY (CONT'D)
What? I learned to read late in life, so sue me.

The hipster starts approaching Joe, but the clerk puts out a hand to hold him back.

GAS STATION GUY (CONT'D)
Hey, man, Wait.

Joe looks relieved.

GAS STATION GUY (CONT'D)
Don't fight him in here. Take him outside, and ...

The clerk grabs a wooden baseball bat from behind the counter.

GAS STATION GUY (CONT'D)
... here use my bat. You don't want to hurt your knuckles, man.

Joe goes wide-eyed at the bat and runs outside.

EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Joe runs out.

He's chased by the guy in the plaid and the clerk swinging a baseball bat. Joe jumps back into the truck and drives off while the gas station owner hits the back of the truck and yells.

INT. KANSAS CITY, KANSAS: WAL-MART

Joe looks rough. His clothes are dirty. His hair is a mess, and he has a couple of days worth of beard going on.

There's a slight bruise around his eye that's yellowing. He walks slowly, pushing a cart through deserted aisles.

He grabs a bottle of laundry soap off the shelf, looks closely at it. Puts it back and grabs another. Puts it back. Grabs another.

JOE
(Mumbles to himself)
How am I supposed to decide?

He looks up and down the aisle, not seeing anyone.

JOE (CONT'D)
(To the empty aisle)
Hey! Can anyone tell me which to
decide? I usually take my clothes
to a cleaner.
(Beat)
There's so many to choose from.
Which is best to get me clean? What
should I do? I've never done my own
laundry.

ANGLE ON:

... At the far end of the aisle, a woman sits in her mobility-scooter and peeks around with her one good eye. She's overweight with a T-shirt that says: 'MERIKUH, HECK YEAH! and has a glass eye that wanders while she scratches at her slight beard.

She watches as Joe throws his hands up in submission. He pauses ...

ANGLE ON:

... Joe turns, but there's nobody there.

A couple of cans at the end of the row fall off the shelf and onto the floor. He walks over, picks them up, and puts them back on the shelf.

JOE (CONT'D)
(To the empty aisle)
Hello?

He looks around suspiciously before going back to his cart.

ANOTHER AISLE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe finds himself in another aisle, grabbing gallons of water and putting them into his cart next to some cans of Vienna sausages.

The lady on the scooter watches him from the other end of the aisle. She now has two other people with her.

They're fine examples of the 'People of Wal-Mart'.

A man who wears a three-sizes-too-small shirt and short-shorts. A woman wears a tank-top and cartoon PJ pants.

The woman on the scooter lets out a soft HISSSSSS.

Joe turns to look at them, but they quickly look away and pretend to be reading boxes they pulled from the shelves.

Joe grabs more water and walks away, shortly followed by the Wal-Mart people who move slowly like zombies as they follow.

ANOTHER AISLE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe is being followed by a crowd of unusual and almost circus like people as he tries to make his way down another aisle, one filled with cans of vegetables.

They begin to yell at him.

He tries to ignore them, but another group show up in front of him, blocking his way to the cans.

He points to one can on a shelf just beyond his reach.

JOE
Excuse me, can you grab that for
me?

The woman in his way wears way-too-much-makeup and a bikini top with hot-pink shorts that have JUICY written across the bottom. She stops her yelling and grabs the can. She hands it to him.

JOE (CONT'D)

Thanks.

He puts it in the cart as she goes back to her protest. He turns to the crowd and raises his hands.

JOE (CONT'D)

Please! People!

The crowd quiets down. He looks them over.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'm one of you. A deplorable
haunting the aisles of grocery
stores. Just like you.

The a very audible GRRRRRR collectively from the crowd.

JOE (CONT'D)

Yes, I made a mistake, but haven't
we all done something wrong?

Something goes flying at his head, but he ducks just in time for it to miss him.

JOE (CONT'D)

Hey, that was uncalled for.

A store manager steps through the crowd. He's followed by several other store crew.

MANAGER

What the heck is going on here?

The manager looks out at the crowd.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Jean, you know you and Erma aren't
suppose to be in here, not since
that cold medicine ordeal.

(Beat)

And Billy, last time you got caught
shoplifting, we went and put you on
the banned for a month list. So
somebody tell me what you all are
doing harassing this poor man.

Beat.

The girl in the bikini top steps up.

JUICY LADY
He killed Morgan Freeman.

The manager looks close at Joe and squints -- thinking.

MANAGER
Sir. You're going to have to leave.

The manager points the way out, but Joe looks like a deer in the headlights -- frozen. His eyes look around at the crowd.

He throws crumpled cash at the manager and tries to reach for the cart. The people of Wal-mart and the workers gang up on him and lift him in the air as if crowd-surfing.

He grasps the cart to stay, but manages to only grab one can of Vienna sausages. He holds it up in the air triumphantly as they carry him out.

JOE
Victory! Victory!

EXT. BOULDER'S GATE LAUNDRETTE - SUNSET

Joe peeks out from an alleyway. He looks both ways before exiting the alley, pulling his luggage behind him.

He passes a telephone pole with a wanted poster showing Joe's face. The light illuminates the picture on the flyer.

He walks by the front of the laundry and pauses for a second to look at large number of wanted posters taped to the front window. He pulls one down and takes it with him inside.

INT. BOULDER'S GATE LAUNDRETTE - MOMENTS LATER

ANGLE ON:

An old washing machine, among many, with a front window rolling the laundry almost hypnotically.

Beyond them, Joe sits in the middle of the laundromat in just his boxer shorts and T-shirt. His eyes are red with lack of sleep. His face devoid of emotion. He doesn't flinch as the lights flicker and ...

... A kindly old lady beats him in the head with her purse as he stares at the wall in a daze.

BZZZZZZZ -- a buzzer says the wash is finished.

He slowly stands up and walks to the machine to take his clothes out and puts it in a cart.

The lady tires of being ignored and leaves.

He drags the laundry to the cashier who sits in a security cage and hands out soap and change through a small window. It's a big grizzly man who menacingly stares at Joe who pulls money out of his luggage and places it at the window.

JOE

Can I get some quarters for the dryer? Your change machine's broken.

The man lets out a disagreeing grunt, but takes the money and hands Joe a handful of quarters and a piece of paper.

JOE (CONT'D)

Um. Thanks?

The man growls.

Joe moves away and goes to a dryer, where he reads the paper the cashier gave him.

ANGLE ON:

The paper says: "I know what you did."

He stuffs his laundry into the only dryer that's open, the one at the very end of the line.

He takes his luggage and sits down again, pulls out the Vienna Sausages.

Joe eats the sausages and tries to ignore the cashier who is staring at him. He busies himself by looking around the walls.

Beside the dryer, there's a corkboard with a flyer of Morgan Freeman's face -- smiling -- and a wanted poster of Joe.

He puts down the can and goes back to the cashier window. Puts money down.

JOE (CONT'D)

Can I get a coke?

The cashier takes the money, hands him a soda and another piece of paper.

Joe looks down at the piece of paper in his hand. As he turns it over he finds a child-like drawing of a cabin and instructions. -- "If you need help, find Coop."

He looks up and hands the paper back to the big man behind the window.

JOE (CONT'D)
Sorry, but I don't know you.

Joe turns to leave ...

MITZI
Name's Mitzi.

The man speaks with a Russian accent.

Joe pauses walking back to his seat.

MITZI (CONT'D)
If you tired of running, Coop can help.
(Beat)
He helped me. Saved my life.

Joe grabs his luggage, takes it to the dryer and opens it. He dumps the clothes in the suitcase.

EXT. BOULDER'S GATE LAUNDRETTE - MOMENTS LATER

The Memphis news van pulls up outside the laundry. Brian and Steve get out with more posters.

They start taping the posters to a wall opposite the laundry. Steve tapes one to a light-pole.

INT. BOULDER'S GATE LAUNDRETTE

Joe gathers up his luggage and Vienna sausage can.

He looks back at the cashier as he opens the door to leave. Mitzi still holds the paper like an invitation.

The news van can be seen outside the door. Brian and Steve are busy working on taping up the posters.

Joe freezes in the doorway when he sees them. He stares for a second, but turns his head and looks over his shoulder at Mitzi.

JOE
This Coop guy saved your life?

MITZI

Da.

Joe looks out at the reporters again, before pivoting and walking back inside. Closing the door behind him.

JOE

You think he can help me?

MITZI

Da.

JOE

Cool. You happen to have a back door?

EXT. COLORADO HIGHWAY - EVENING

Joe drives down the road. There are mountains all around, and dense forests. The road is winding like a snake, and the last of the day sinks beyond the western mountains.

He pulls off on a side road.

EXT. OLD COOP'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's an old log cabin, surrounded by woods.

The lights in the windows flicker like candles or a hearth-fire. Smoke slips out a chimney made out of river-rocks.

Joe parks and gets out, straightens out his clothes as he walks up to the door. Takes a deep breath and knocks.

When the door opens, it opens just a crack, and a shotgun barrel comes sliding out.

OLD COOP (O.S.)

What do you want?

JOE

Mitzi sent me. Said I could find a place to hide. Big guy. No neck?

Joe holds up the flyer. OLD COOP (70's, grizzly man with bushy white beard) peeks over the gun to see it.

He drops the barrel and opens the door to let light fall on Joe.

OLD COOP
Mitzi talks too much.
(Beat)
You running from something?

JOE
As much as anyone, I guess.

INT. OLD COOP'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Coop opens up the door and waves him inside. The entire place seems to be made of wood. There are various animal heads hanging from the walls, and various shotguns and rifles mounted on the walls too.

He waves Joe inside.

OLD COOP
May have a couple of cabins empty.

He scans the dark outside before shutting the door.

JOE
I've got cash.

OLD COOP
Good. I don't do plastic.

Coop squints one eye at Joe.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)
Now, if I rent to you, you mind your own business, right?

JOE
Yes, sir.

OLD COOP
Plenty of us need a place to lie low for awhile.

Coop grabs a bottle of whiskey from a table, takes a drink. Offers it to Joe. He chuckles to himself as Joe gasps from the drink, acting like he's about to gag.

This makes Coop laugh even more.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)
I know you from somewhere, don't I?
You look awfully familiar.

JOE
So what's the rent on it?

OLD COOP
Three hundred a month ...

Coop takes the bottle back and drinks again.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)
Yeah, you supposedly killed that
fellow.

Joe looks depressed.

JOE
It was raining. I was on my phone
...

OLD COOP
... Four hundred dollars then. Keep
talking and I'll keep raising it.

Joe freezes, just stares at Coop.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)
Maybe you're not as dumb as you
look.

EXT. JOE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Coop holds a lantern as he unlocks the front door.

Joe watches the dark woods around them, clutching his
luggage. He sees another cabin in the darkness.

Lights flicker in the distant windows. A woman holds a
lantern on the front porch of the other cabin.

Coop opens the door and waits for Joe, but Joe is lost in
thought as he looks off at the other cabin. Coop hands him
the key and the lantern, and starts to walk off but pauses at
the bottom of the stairs to look at the other cabin as well.

The lights go out. The other cabin vanishes into darkness.

OLD COOP
Her name is Stella, by the way.

Coop walks into the night, vanishing, but Joe doesn't notice.

JOE
Stella? Huh.

OLD COOP (O.S.)
But like I said, mind your own damn
business.

Joe looks around at the dark, looking for Coop, but there's no one there.

INT. JOE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Joe uses the lantern to browse the cabin; there's barely anything in the room, but an empty blackened fireplace and a table on the other side of the room with four chairs, right next to an old dust covered couch.

A dusty bed with no bedding sits in a side room, with a nightstand beside it. He brings the lantern and luggage to the bed. He almost puts the luggage on it, but there are no sheets.

Instead, there's a giant multi-colored stain in the middle.

JOE

Do I get a discount for someone
dying out here?

He puts the luggage on the couch in the front room and opens a door off to one side of the bedroom, looks in with the lantern.

JOE (CONT'D)

At least there's a bathroom.

TINK. TINK -- the sound of metal is followed by Joe's heavy sigh. He comes out of the bathroom disappointed.

JOE (CONT'D)

And, no water. Of course.

He kicks off his shoes and lies on the couch, using the luggage as a pillow. He can't get comfortable on it, punches the luggage to fluff it.

He lays his head back down and lets his eyes close.

Beat.

Joe's eyes pop open. GRRR. SHUFFLE. SHUFFLE. GRR.

Something big and heavy walks by the cabin window. He shivers but stays still and listens to the noise outside.

JOE (CONT'D)

And now there's a bear. Yeah,
pretty sure I'm gonna die out here.

THE NEXT DAY

Joe's still awake. His eyes are red, and he looks to have not slept at all. He stares at the ceiling.

He has his dress jacket used as a blanket wrapped around his feet, and other dress clothes piled up on top of him like tiny, thin covers.

He slowly sits up. He looks tired. He gets up off the couch, puts his shoes on and shuffles out the front door shivering.

EXT. RIVER - LATER

Joe walks the woods, singing and gathering firewood.

JOE

Oh, Mama, I'm in fear for my life
from the long arm of the law.
Law man has put an end to my
running, and I'm so far from my
home.

He has a handful of small sticks when he notices the river.

He looks down at his filthy clothes and looks around the woods, then back at the river, seeing if anyone's watching.

Joe sets down the wood and kicks off his shoes and socks.

Joe starts by dipping his toe into the water, but brings it out fast and sucks in a deep breath.

JOE (CONT'D)

Cold! Cold! Oh my God, that's cold!

He tries to warm up his foot with his hand, but freezes as ... SNAP! SNAP! -- Something moves in the woods.

JOE (CONT'D)

And now I'm going become bear poop.

Joe grabs a tiny tree branch to use as a weapon and turns to see what it is.

STELLA BIRD (30s, wears a rather large and thick plaid shirt and muddied jeans) stands at the treeline watching him.

He gets scared and backs away, slipping on wet rocks and falling into the river. He flounders, panics in the water, but finds and holds onto a tree hanging over the river.

JOE (CONT'D)
Help! Help me! Anyone!

Stella runs to the river's edge and grabs the tree with one hand, offering her free hand to Joe. He grabs it and struggles onto the rocks. Collapsing on the shore, he lies there gasping and choking.

He looks up at her as she's trying to look elsewhere.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hi. Hey.
(Beat)
Name's ...

He freezes a moment.

JOE (CONT'D)
... Name's Roger Thornhill.

He chokes again. She still won't look at him, looks off in the distance.

STELLA
Your pants are gone.

He turns to see his pants stuck on a branch in the water.

JOE
Oh, for the love of Joseph. Really?

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Joe follows Stella as they walk through the woods. He has his pants back on and all his clothes are soaked and dripping.

STELLA
So, next time you should just use the shower instead of bathing in the river.

JOE
Oh, my God. You have a shower? I haven't had a shower in days.

STELLA
How have you been washing up?

JOE
Truck-stop restrooms sinks.

STELLA
That's disgusting ...

She grimaces.

JOE

... True story, but yeah. It is kind of gross now that I think about it.

STELLA

Well, today, you're taking a shower.

JOE

Asking me to your place? Wow. I mean, don't get me wrong: I'm all for women being open like that.

(Beat)

Tell you the truth, been awhile since I flirted with anyone. So, I might be rusty.

Stella stops and looks at him. She holds up a finger.

STELLA

It shows, and, no, you're showering at your cabin. Alone.

She points down the trail and walks off, leaving Joe looking confused. He calls after her.

JOE

What do you mean "my cabin"? I don't have any water.

She stops and stares at him like he's stupid.

INT. JOE'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Joe stands in his dark cabin dripping and shivering.

CRACK!

He jumps as the lights come on, and the sound of air comes from vents on the floor.

ANGLE ON:

Dust billows from the vents as they start blowing hot air. Joe stares at them like its the first time to see them.

Stella comes in from the back-door and wrinkles her nose.

STELLA

That smell's from the heater not running in a long time.

JOE

Heater? Really? But Coop ...

STELLA

... Probably never said anything about it. I turned on the water pump too. You should give it a few for the water to warm up.

Joe sits down hard on the couch.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Hey, if you haven't figured out how to turn the water on, where have you been going to the bathroom?

JOE

Well, see, there's a log on the side of the cabin. I would not go back there. It's a disaster area.

STELLA

Yeah. Yeah, I get it. Thanks.

JOE

I'm a complete idiot.

STELLA

Maybe not a complete one, but close.

She turns and heads to the front door. She opens it and looks back at Joe.

STELLA (CONT'D)

See you around, Roger.

She says his fake name slowly, sarcastically.

Joe snaps out of it as she shuts the door. He stares at the closed door.

JOE

(To himself)

Yeah, see you around.

He looks down at the floor and exhales loudly.

JOE (CONT'D)
(To himself)
Well, that was awkward.

EXT. STELLA'S CABIN - NIGHT

Stella stands on her front porch, freshly showered, wearing just a robe. She drinks a hot cup of coffee and watches the stars.

Joe comes out from the dark woods that surround her cabin. His clothes are a little cleaner. He still wears business slacks and a button up shirt. He's soaked -- shivers -- wrapped in his sports jacket.

STELLA
Enjoy your shower?

JOE
Nice to be clean.

He stares up at her for a moment.

JOE (CONT'D)
You wouldn't happen to have a towel
I could borrow, would you?

STELLA
Have a seat on the steps. I'll get
you one.

Joe takes a seat as she puts her cup down on the railing.

STELLA (CONT'D)
You want some coffee?

JOE
If it's plain black, sure. I've
sworn off poop coffee.

She looks confused.

STELLA
I'm sure there's a strange story
there, but I probably don't want to
know.

JOE
Yeah, long story, ending with me
getting a black eye.

She walks into the cabin, leaving Joe alone on the stairs.

Joe looks up at the stars.

JOE (CONT'D)
Huh. That's what they look like.

A towel flies down the steps and hits Joe in the back of the head.

STELLA (O.S.)
When was the last time you ate?

She comes out dressed in pajamas and sits next to Joe as he towels off his head.

She holds a cup of coffee for him. Steam drifts off the cup.

JOE
I had some Vienna sausages after
the shower ...
(Beat)
... which was great, by the way.

STELLA
The shower or the sausages?

JOE
You'd be surprised. Vienna Sausages
are actually pretty tasty.

Stella hands him the cup.

STELLA
I'll take your word on it.

JOE
Thanks.

STELLA
If you're going to last long out
here, you're going to have to learn
how to live.

JOE
Well, my suitcase is packed with a
lot of Vienna Sausages. So ...

STELLA
... Yeah, that's not really living.
(Beat)
When I first moved out here, Coop
showed me how to live off the land.
Apparently, he's been out here for
a long time.

He takes a drink to contemplate the answer. He coughs and chokes down the coffee. He looks into the cup.

JOE

Wow. Oh my God, that's strong. You put paint thinner in your coffee?

STELLA

Whiskey in coffee helps cut the edge off cold nights.

(Beat)

So, why are you out here? You aren't pulling a Walden Pond thing. Are you?

JOE

Made some stupid mistakes.

STELLA

That's why the majority of people come out to Coop's place.

JOE

What's your mistake?

He sips and winces.

STELLA

Trusted the wrong person. Got lied to. Had to run away. What's yours?

JOE

(Whispers)

Spy stuff.

Stella starts to laugh but cuts herself off.

STELLA

Spy stuff? Really? Aren't you suppose to keep that ...

(Whispers)

... a secret?

JOE

No. No. It's fine. I can trust you.

STELLA

Remember when I said I got lied to?

JOE

No. Honest Injun.

STELLA
That's not really P.C.. Kind of racist.

JOE
What? Being a spy?

STELLA
No. Honest Injun. It's racist.

JOE
Oh.

He stares into the coffee cup, pondering something.

STELLA
Fine, Mister Spy, but if I find out different -- and I'm sure I will -- I'll kick your butt. So, you've been warned.

Joe stands up and wraps the towel around his shoulders.

JOE
Welp. On that horribly awkward note: Mind if I return the towel tomorrow, after I've dried a bit?

STELLA
Sure.

As Joe starts heading into the darkness, he stops and slightly turns his head back towards her.

JOE
Good night, Stella.

STELLA
Good night.

Joe pauses as if wanting to say more.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Hey, Roger?

The name still sounds sarcastic in her mouth. Joe looks at her.

STELLA (CONT'D)
The guy who hurt me. He wasn't a very nice person.

She holds up her arm and points to a scar.

STELLA (CONT'D)
You seem like a nice person, so if
you want to come clean I'll be
here. I'm not going anywhere.

JOE
That's what they all say.

He tries to smile, but it falls as soon as he does it.

JOE (CONT'D)
Stella?

STELLA
Yeah?

He looks up at the sky.

JOE
I used to admire celebrities, you
know, when I was younger. Thought,
how cool it'd be to be one.

STELLA
I guess that depends on how they
get famous.

Joe scrubs at his face with the towel.

JOE
Like whether it was by accident? Or
if whether they would undo it, if
they could. Maybe go back to the
life they had before, even if they
weren't happy there either?

Stella stands up on her porch with her coffee, while Joe
stares off into the woods.

STELLA
But you can't take it back, so you
just have to forgive yourself and
move on with your life.

Joe tries to laugh, but it comes out more of a cough. He
forces a smile and looks back at her.

JOE
It was nice hanging out with you.
(Beat)
I needed it.

STELLA
Is that you coming clean?

JOE
Cleaner than I've been in a long
time.

STELLA
How's it feel? To be clean.

He walks off in the darkness.

JOE (O.S.)
Thanks. For the coffee.

She watches the darkness for a moment, smiles, and then goes
back to sky-watching.

EXT. JOE'S CABIN - THE NEXT DAY

Joe comes out stretching. There's a chill in the air. His
breath freezes as soon as he exhales. He shivers and looks
down at his rumpled and dirty clothes.

He picks at his shirt and crosses his arms in front of him,
rubbing his shoulders to keep off the cold.

INT. JOE'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Joe gets in and tries to start the engine.

WIZZZZ. CLUNK -- Smoke bellows from the engine.

He stares at it blankly before smacking his head into the
steering wheel.

He hits the horn with his head. It starts off sounding like a
dying goat and winds-down to nothing ...

... BLAHHHHHHhhhhheerrrrnnn ...

EXT. OLD COOP'S HOUSE - LATER

The front door is slightly ajar. Joe walks up the steps and
peaks inside before knocking.

TAP. TAP. TAP -- Softly, but it's answered by silence.

TAP. TAP. TAP -- He tries again, this time a little louder.
The door opens more. He leans into the room.

JOE
Hello? Coop? You here?

INT. OLD COOP'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He walks in ducking his head and startling at every sound the creaky wooden floor makes.

JOE
Coop? You okay?

He walks to a door at the side of the room and turns the knob. The door opens.

Inside, the room is covered in newspaper clippings, but they're too far away to see anything clearly.

Coop walks in from a different room. He's naked and groggy. His hair is everywhere, and there's food in his beard. He has a shotgun pointed at Joe.

OLD COOP
What the heck do you think you're
doing in here?

Joe about jumps out of his skin in fright as Coop lowers the shotgun and puts it on a chair.

JOE
Naked! Naked! Oh, God!

He looks at the ceiling to not have to look at Coop.

OLD COOP
You're as pale as a ghost, boy.
What's going on?

JOE
Sorry. Sorry. The door was open
when I knocked. I thought -- you
know -- something might have
happened to you.

He looks at Coop for a second and looks off again.

JOE (CONT'D)
Look. Is there anyway we can have a
conversation with you not naked?
Wow.

Coop grabs a robe as he walks over and closes the door.

OLD COOP
(Grumbles to himself)
Don't be naked. Don't pee on the
sidewalk. Damn city-folk and your
rules.

Joe keeps looking around the room, anywhere but at Coop.

JOE

Okay. Just gonna look at everything
but the hairy naked man. Hey,
what's in that room anyway?

Coop grabs Joe by the collar.

OLD COOP

What'd I say about minding your own
damn business?

Joe holds up his hands.

JOE

Yeah. Yeah. No problem.

Coop calms down and lets go of Joe and pats him on the
shoulders and smiles.

OLD COOP

Great. I mean, it's just a hobby
room. Just something to pass the
time while I'm out here.

JOE

Was that a picture of the Uni-
Bomber? There were a lot of
pictures of him in there.

OLD COOP

What? No -- God -- no! That guy's
too pretty to be the Uni-Bomber.
And way smarter.

(To himself)

Stupid Ted Kaczynski.

Coop sits down in an old leather recliner and starts eating
some jerky. His robe flips open. Joe stares up at the
ceiling.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)

So what was it you wanted?

JOE

It's cold, well not in here, I
mean, but outside ...

(Beat)

... and my truck crapped out on me
while I was trying to go into town,
and I don't really want to freeze
when the first snow gets here, so
would you mind giving me a ride?

Coop adjusts his robe.

JOE (CONT'D)
Into town, I mean.

OLD COOP
Yeah, guess I could. Would hate to
have clean up another corpse.

JOE
That's what that stain was in my
cabin, right? I knew it.

INT. OLD COOP'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

The truck drives down the bumpy dirt road. Coop's behind the wheel. Joe sits beside him.

Coop has on an old army jacket with 101st Airborne Screaming-Eagle patch on the sleeve and an olive green Army boonie-hat that's frizzled at the edges of the brim.

OLD COOP
You realize I don't go into town
too much, right? I'm not much of a
people person.

JOE
Really? I ...
(Beat)
... I couldn't tell.

Coop gives him the stink-eye.

OLD COOP
You making fun? I can drop you off
here and let you walk back.

JOE
No. No, sir. I wouldn't dare.

OLD COOP
We're coming into town. Keep your
head down. Talk to no one. Don't
need unnecessary attention. Got it?

JOE
Gotcha.

Coop leans over and opens the glove compartment while he drives. Grabs a pair of old Wayfarer sunglasses and hands them to Joe.

OLD COOP
Here. These'll help.
(Beat)
Don't lose them. They're my
favorite pair.

Beat.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)
Had them since the 70's. Loose
them, and I'll bury you.

Joe takes the sunglasses carefully. He's looks forward, wide-eyed.

EXT. SMALL TOWN - MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Joe gets out of the truck wearing the sunglasses. Coop gets out and leans on the truck-bed to talk to him.

OLD COOP
Remember: half an hour, and I'm
gone. If I even see one small half-
hearted mob, I'm gone.
(Beat)
Understand?

JOE
How about just a handful of guys in
polo shirts and tiki torches?

OLD COOP
Gah. That sounds even worse. What
kind of pansies would form a mob
like that? Sounds like a bunch of
bros having a pissing contest.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Joe walks up to the storefront of an old general store.

He sees a lot of posters and flyers taped to the windows. Several of them are flyers of him -- Same as the ones posted at the Boulder laundromat.

INT. GROCERY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Joe goes through different aisles while holding a basket. He tosses in random foods, until he comes to one shelf.

JOE

Oh, Vienna sausages, and they have
more than one flavor? What?
Barbecue? Oh, hot and spicy. Yes.

He grabs more than a few and puts them in his basket.

FRONT COUNTER - MOMENTS LATER

At the counter, there's a little old lady sitting on a stool,
doing knitting and smiling up at Joe as he walks up. His
basket is filled with food and clothes.

Behind her are some piñatas hanging on the wall. There's also
a little black-and-white TV set near her -- it's turned to
the news.

JOE

Morning, Ma'am.

LADY

Morning, stranger. Found everything
you need?

JOE

I certainly hope so.

(Beat)

Oh. Can I get that unicorn piñata
too?

She moves slowly as she stands up and takes down the unicorn
piñata hanging on the wall before she starts ringing up that
and the food and clothes from the basket. She wraps the
unicorn in plastic wrap before handing it to him.

Joe notices ...

INSERT VIDEO:

... his picture's on the news. It's still the old pictures
without his beard and with short, well-maintained hair.

It switches to a NEWS-ANCHOR.

NEWS BROADCASTER

Today, a break in the case of the
Holy-Roller serial killers. The
family that drove up and down the
Mississippi highways looking for
their next victim.

CUT TO:

The family from the mini-van back in Mississippi. The husband and wife are handcuffed, and the pig-tail daughter stands next to them playing on her tablet as they're all escorted by the police.

The wife struggles to get closer to the news camera. She look straight into it.

WIFE

We just couldn't do it anymore.
Just couldn't do the Lord's work,
not after we gave a ride to the man
who killed God.

BACK TO SCENE:

The little old lady notices Joe looking at the TV.

JOE

(To himself)

Well, that was a bullet dodged.

LADY

Shame what happened.

JOE

Yes, Ma'am. But it's good that
those serial killers are off the
streets now.

LADY

No. Don't care about them. I meant
about poor Morgan Freeman. Shame
what happened to him.

(Beat)

He visited this town before, you
know?

JOE

Oh, Morgan Freeman, right. Shame.

LADY

Yep, there's a bronze plaque out in
the town square celebrating the
first time he vacationed here.

He starts looking around as if someone might attack him, fidgeting and watching the windows, looking for trouble.

JOE

I'll have to go check that out. How
much is the total?

She looks at the register.

LADY
That'll be \$123.78.

He grimaces but hands her the money.

JOE
Talk about breaking the bank.
Didn't realize I'd collected so
much stuff.

LADY
You look familiar. Got kin up here?

JOE
No, Ma'am. Just passing through.

She scoops up the food and clothes in a paper bag and hands it to him. He nods his head to her before slowly grabbing his stuff and backing away from the old lady.

JOE (CONT'D)
Evening.

INT. OLD COOP'S TRUCK

Coop naps in the driver's seat and startles awake as Joe jumps into the passenger side with his bags.

OLD COOP
(To himself)
I ain't got the money anymore!

He looks around, groggy. Sees Joe and jumps.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)
Oh, it's you. You scared the
bejesus out of me, boy.
(Beat)
So, I take it you're ready to go?

JOE
Yup.
(Beat)
Didn't know general stores were
still around. Even had a piñata.

OLD COOP
Don't want to know why you want one
of those.

JOE
Anyways, it also had clothes. And,
look ...

... He pulls a plaid shirt from one of the bags.

JOE (CONT'D)
I found plaid. I'm a mountain man.

OLD COOP
Great. Remind me to take you snipe
hunting, when I get the chance.
(Beat)
So, did you get recognized?

JOE
Nope. The glasses did the trick.

Coop turns on the engine and holds out his hand.

OLD COOP
They always do.

Joe hands them over. Coop puts them on and smiles.

JOE
So, what's a snipe?

INT. GROCERY STORE

The old lady at the register stands near the window, watching Coop's truck drive off. She smiles and waves to people walking by her shop.

Once the truck's gone, she picks up a poster with Joe's face on it and makes a phone call on an old rotary phone.

RING -- RING. RING -- RING.

LADY
(To phone)
Hello? Is this the number to report
any news about the guy who killed
Morgan Freeman?

Beat.

LADY (CONT'D)
(To phone)
The poster says something about a
reward. How much money are we
talking about?

INT. OLD COOP'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Coop leans against the steering wheel and uses his arms to drive while he uses his hands to show the length of a snipe.

OLD COOP

It's, oh, about this big. Small bird, and it's got hair instead of feathers. They come out at night looking for berries.

JOE

But do they have enough meat to make it worthwhile hunting them?

OLD COOP

Yes, and they are delicious. I was taught to hunt snipe when I first came out here. It's kind of a tradition ...

JOE

And you catch them with a pillow-case?

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Coop leads with a flashlight as Joe follows him through the thick stand of pine and aspen trees. He stops and crouches down, hiding the flashlight.

OLD COOP

(Whispers)

Shhh. Did you hear that? I just heard one up in the thickets ahead.

JOE

(Whispers)

I didn't hear anything.

OLD COOP

(Whispers)

Hopefully, with any luck, we'll be having snipe for breakfast.

Coop digs out something from his pocket and unfolds it. It's a dingy yellow pillow-case.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)

(Whispers)

This here pillow-case belonged to the guy who taught me how to hunt snipe. It belonged to his father before him. I used it for every person I've taught.

He gently hands it to Joe, who takes it with great honor. He looks Coop in the eyes and nods to reassure him.

JOE

(Whispers)

I won't let you down. I got this.

Coop puts a hand on Joe's shoulder.

OLD COOP

I know you do, son.

(Beat)

Now, I need you to also do the sound of the snipe and try to lure them to you, while I go over to the other side and scare them your direction.

JOE

Got it.

(Beat)

What do they sound like?

WHOOOP! WHOOOP! WHOOOP! Coop calls out, and then he listens.

OLD COOP

I hear some in there. Wait here with the pillow-case and snatch them up when they come out.

Coop nods and vanishes, taking the flashlight with him, leaving Joe in the darkness with only a pillow-case.

WHOOOP! WHOOOP! WHOOOP! -- Joe shivers as he imitates the snipe call Coop told him to make -- WHOOOP! WHOOOP! WHOOOP!

EXT. JOE'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Coop laughs to himself as he sits down on the stairs to Joe's Cabin. Stella comes out of the dark, holding a flashlight, and walks up to Coop.

STELLA

Coop, what're you doing here?
Where's Joe?

Coop busts out laughing again, but tries to contain it.

STELLA (CONT'D)
What did you do?

Softly, in the air, there's a distant sound of -- WHOOP.
WHOOP. WHOOP.

Stella squints her eyes at Coop and purses her lips.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Really? Snipe hunting?

He bursts out laughing as she storms off into the woods.

OLD COOP
Oh, come on. I have to have some
fun out here.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Joe shivers as he tries to keep the pillow-case open. He
watches the dark woods around him and calls out -- WHOOP!
WHOOP! WHOOP!

He quiets down and listens.

There's rustling in the thicket. He prepares the pillow-case
to catch whatever comes out.

Stella steps out.

Joe makes to capture the creature but realizes it's just
Stella's feet. He looks up at her as she shines the
flashlight in his face.

JOE
Oh, hey. Shhh. Coop's in there
somewhere flushing out this bird
thing. I'm helping.

She looks down at him. A sad expression comes across her
face, but she tries to smile.

MOMENTS LATER

Stella and Joe sit on the ground, staring up at the stars.

JOE
So, no snipe?

STELLA

There are, just not around here,
and they're not hairy.

(Beat)

And they definitely don't whoop.
They look more like sandpipers and
sound like turkeys.

JOE

Do you think Coop hates me?

STELLA

It's his way of hazing you. Did the
same to me when I first came out
here. Left me out here all night
looking for the damn things.

Joe laughs and looks at her. She looks back and smiles.

STELLA (CONT'D)

We should probably be heading back.

JOE

Thank you for coming and getting
me.

She gets up and heads off into the trees.

STELLA

Come on. Don't know about you, but
I'm freezing.

As she walks -- GRRR. SHUFFLE. SHUFFLE. GRR. SNAP!

She stops. Joe frantically looks around. Stella shines her
flashlight at the trees.

A small brown bear slowly meanders through the trees.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(Whispers)

Joe, I want you to slowly stand up
and whatever you do, don't run.

Joe moves himself in front of Stella. She looks puzzled.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(Whispers)

What are you doing?

JOE

You saved me. I'm going to save you
now. This beast wants me.

The bear sits and stares at him.

JOE (CONT'D)

I knew it when it came to my cabin
the first night.

(To the bear)

Oh, Great Bear, take me and let her
go. I'm the one you want. I'm
covered in tasty-tasty fat from a
life of unhealthy fast-food. Take
me.

He throws his arms wide and shuts his eyes. The bear sniffs
the air and grunts at a few snow flurries that drift down in
front of its face, as if trying to catch them.

Stella picks up a stick and backs away, pulling on Joe's
shirt as she does. He opens his eyes and squints at the bear.

STELLA

Just shut up and back away, Joe. It
won't bother us, if we walk away.
Don't make any sudden moves that
could scare it.

They back off and leave the bear by itself. It digs into a
fallen tree and completely ignores them.

EXT. TRAIL - MOMENTS LATER

Stella leads Joe down a trail, using her flashlight. Joe
looks shocked and follows in silence.

STELLA

Take me? What the Hell was that
about, Joe? You realize that bears
don't normally eat people, right?

JOE

Wait. You called me Joe back there,
and again just now.

She stops and looks at him.

STELLA

Think I didn't know?

JOE

I was hoping. I mean ...

(Beat)

... I don't know what I mean.

STELLA

I just ask that you be honest. And it's a good thing you haven't gone into town yet. Everybody there knows what happened to Morgan Freeman.

JOE

I know. They even have a plaque of him in the town square.

He opens his mouth to say something else, but nothing comes out. He looks away and lets out a heavy sigh.

STELLA

You went into town, didn't you?

JOE

Where'd you think I got these clothes?

STELLA

Coop, maybe.

JOE

Do they smell like firewood and bourbon enough to be Coop's?

STELLA

Well, I didn't think you were stupid enough to go into town with all the world looking for you.

CLUNK. CLUNK -- Somewhere in the distance: car doors shut.

Stella gives Joe a frustrated look and runs off down the trail, leaving Joe alone in the dark.

STELLA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

They better not be here.

JOE

(Calling after Stella)

Who? Who had better not be here?

He runs after her.

JOE (CONT'D)

(To Stella)

Wait! I don't want to be out here all by myself. Coop's right, I'm not a mountain man.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Stella is followed by Joe as she sneaks through the thick trees. She turns off her flashlight and shushes Joe every time he breaks a loud branch by stepping on it.

She holds up a hand, and Joe freezes. She points to him and then to her eyes, and then she points down one of the many animal trails.

They can see the light of her house from there.

There's the Memphis news truck parked next to Stella's cabin, and barely seen in the dim cabin light are two people standing on her front porch. Steve, the camera-person, and Brian O'Brian, the reporter from Memphis.

Brian looks all dishevelled, as if he's been sleeping in his suit.

JOE
(Whispers)
How'd they find me?

Stella gives Joe a look to let him know he's stupid and motions with her head for Joe to follow.

She walks off, followed by Joe. They don't notice the snow that starts to fall.

INT. STELLA'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The cabin's empty. No decorations, except a few traps and animal skins. It looks like an abandoned hunting cabin.

A door in the back of the room slowly opens and in walks Stella and Joe. She puts a finger up to her mouth to motion for Joe to stay quiet.

She grabs a bag from under her bed and starts stuffing clothes into it.

JOE
(Whispers)
What are you doing? They're not
after you.

STELLA
(Whispers)
I can't be on TV, Joe. My husband
could be watching. If he finds me,
he's going to kill me. So, I'm
leaving.

JOE
(Whispers)
Wait. You're married?

She scowls at him.

STELLA
Ex-husband.

She goes back to packing. He puts a hand on her bag, stopping her.

JOE
Whoa. Whoa. Whoa ...
(Beat)
... I'll clear them off, then you
don't have to go. It's my fault
they're here anyway.

STELLA
How are you going to do that?

He looks at the ceiling, as if thinking.

JOE
I have no idea, besides I need to
go grab some stuff from my cabin.

STELLA
What could be worth getting
cornered by those reporters?

JOE
A piñata and my luggage.

Her face wrinkles up in confusion.

STELLA
A piñata? Why would you need that?

JOE
It's for my daughter. I promised
her I'd get one for her birthday.

EXT. STELLA'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Joe sneaks out the back-door of Stella's cabin. He closes it softly to not make noise.

He walks around the corner of the cabin: sees the reporter.

JOE
 (To himself)
 It was nice knowing you, Stella.

He takes a deep breath and walks out ...

INSERT VIDEO OF ...

... Brian O'Brian stands on the front porch, getting ready for a report.

STEVE (O.S.)
 We're recording in three. Two.

Brian coughs and looks into the camera.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
 Here we are, outside a cabin in the majestic Rocky Mountains. After weeks of searching, we have a lead on the whereabouts of Joe Kaplan, the man allegedly behind the vehicular death of Morgan Freeman, the star of movies both endearing and magical.

Brian puts down the microphone, and shakes out his arms and legs. He wiggles his head to loosen up his neck.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)
 (To Steve)
 I'm so tired of being on the road.
 (Beat)
 God, what I wouldn't give for a real hotel, one that doesn't have bedbugs, and maybe a spa.
 (Beat)
 I could go for a massage.

Behind the reporter, Joe walks by. He pauses and looks up at the camera, then waves.

STEVE(O.S.)
 (Whispers)
 Psst. Behind you.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
 You know, one of those deep tissue kinds, where they get into all your nooks and crannies?

STEVE
(Whispers)
Dude, really, behind you.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Maybe topped off with an old
fashioned basket-twirl. Haven't had
one of those since my stag-party in
Taiwan.

STEVE
Brian, he's. Right. Behind. You.

Brian turns and sees Joe, who runs off into the woods. He
runs after him. Steve follows with the camera.

STEVE (CONT'D)
(Calls after them)
Come on, guys! You know how hard it
is to run with a tripod?

CUT TO:

INT. STELLA'S CABIN

Stella watches through a window as the reporter and camera-
person run off after Joe. She notices little flakes of snow
start falling outside and starts packing again.

INT. STELLA'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Stella drives down a dirt road. The snow comes down thicker
than before, covering the road. The windshield wipers clunk
back and forth, wiping the snow away.

STELLA
(To herself)
Sorry, Joe. I can't get involved.

She slams on the brakes, causing the truck to skid on the
snowy road. She calms down and stares out the windshield to
see Old Coop standing in the road, smiling at her.

She waits while Coop climbs into her passenger side.

OLD COOP
Were you planning on leaving
without saying anything? And right
as a blizzard's creeping up on us?

EXT. JOE'S CABIN

The lights are off. It's quiet. Through the windows, Joe watches the blizzard come down hard outside as he packs, stuffing everything he can inside his rolly-luggage.

BAM. BAM. BAM - He freezes.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (O.S.)
Mister Kaplan, I just want an
interview. I promise to go away, if
you just give me an interview.

JOE
You have the wrong guy. Uh, No
Senior Kaplan aqui.

Joe starts packing again.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (O.S.)
Come on, Mister Kaplan, I can help
you set the record straight, maybe
you can get some of your life back.

Joe stops packing and walks to the door. He stares at it, hand out-reached. Visibly thinking about the offer.

JOE
You can do that?

Beat.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (O.S.)
Maybe.

STEVE (O.S.)
(Muffled)
Probably not.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOE'S CABIN

Brian starts smacking Steve's hand and pointing to the door. He looks angry -- Steve smacks him back till he cringes from her.

CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S CABIN

Joe marches back over to the couch and grabs the piñata that's still in the plastic and grabs the luggage. He slowly walks to the window in the back of the room, opposite from the door and opens it -- quietly -- slides the luggage and piñata out.

He turns back to the door.

JOE
So, no guarantees?

CUT TO:

EXT. JOE'S CABIN

Steve punches Brian in the shoulder. He recoils.

STEVE
(Whispers to Brian)
Don't be an asshole.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Sorry. No.

CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S CABIN

Joe looks out the window. The snow is coming down hard.

JOE
That's okay. I realize how much I
messed it up back there, long
before the whole Morgan Freeman
accident happened.
(Beat)
Let me think about it.

He crawls through the window, and half-way out -- he falls --
vanishing from sight.

EXT. JOE'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Brian and Steve stand on Joe's front porch. They're covered
in snow.

Steve pulls out a see-through poncho and puts it on, but
Brian doesn't have anything, and the snow melts into his
wrinkled, expensive suit.

Brian is poised to capture whoever opens the door. He has his microphone at the ready. Steve uses her poncho to help cover the camera too.

STEVE
(To the door)
Hey, Joe?
(To Brian)
Yeah, I don't think he's coming out.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
(To himself)
Ugh. Why can't I get a break.

Steve turns off the camera and flexes her neck to work out the stiffness of carrying it. Brian turns to her.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)
He's got to come out sometime.

STEVE
Yeah, but in the meantime, I'm freezing. The snow's just getting deeper.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Okay. Leave the camera and tripod and go grab the van. We camp in there till he comes out.

STEVE
You're insane, aren't you? Let's just go back into town and grab a BnB for the night. Come back in the morning.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
This is going to make or break us. You want to go back empty-handed?

STEVE
Fine.

EXT. WOODSHED BEHIND JOE'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

There are footprints going into the shed, but the snow slowly covers them. Erasing signs that Joe went this way.

INT. WOODSHED BEHIND JOE'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The shed is dark, and snow drifts in from cracks in the walls and ceiling.

A tiny sliver of orange fire-light jumps to life as Joe sits in the middle of the shed, surrounded by various tree branches he collected for firewood.

He rubs his hands over the tiny fire.

He grabs a branch and breaks it up to fit into the flames. The smoke hovers around his head unnoticed.

He keeps rubbing his hands.

LATER

Joe looks tired and light-headed as he sits almost drifting off by the fire. The piñata is on his lap.

He shakes his head to clear it.

JOE

Damn. I'm bored already.

He pulls his luggage over and unzips it.

The sticker that says, "JOE'S STUFF" is worn and barely hanging on. He reaches for the sticker and is about to pull it off, but then stops.

Beat.

He pulls out the broken laptop instead and pretends to type on it.

JOE (CONT'D)

Yes, sir, Mister Richardson. I'll get those reports right away.

He types some more.

JOE (CONT'D)

Why, yes, Mister Richardson, I'll send you that e-mail on the new client.

He takes his smashed phone out of the luggage and puts part of it up to his ear.

JOE (CONT'D)
You wanted to call and congratulate
me with a promotion?
(Beat)
And a raise?
(Beat)
And you want me to become a junior
partner? Oh, Mister Richardson.
You're too kind.

The phone lights up and starts ringing.

He freaks out and throws it on the ground, grabs a nearby
branch and smashes the phone repeatedly till it stops.

In the quiet, he looks down at the more-than-smashed phone
and scoops it up. He scowls at it.

JOE (CONT'D)
No, Mister Richardson, I don't
think I can come in today.

He puts it away and the broken laptop, both back into the
luggage. He zips it up and stares at it for a moment.

He sniffs the air as part of the wall behind him catches on
fire and flames spread around him. He slowly turns his head
to look.

EXT. WOODSHED BEHIND JOE'S CABIN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Joe stumbles out clinging to the piñata and drops his luggage
in the snow. He gags and coughs to get the smoke out of his
lungs. His clothes and face are covered in soot.

Behind him, the woodshed goes up in flames. Thick black smoke
pours out of the open door. He watches the flames.

JOE
Good thing there wasn't a deposit.

Joe picks up the luggage and piñata, and he leaves, wandering
into the snow-covered dark woods with a zombie-like daze
across his soot-covered face.

INT. NEWS VAN - EVENING

There's a small electric heater in the back of the van.

Brian and Steve sit around and bundle up with blankets used
originally for securing breakable equipment during driving.

Brian keeps looking out the back window. Joe's cabin is still within sight of the van, even with the snow coming down.

Steve has a hotplate and warms up a tin cup of something.

Brian glances over at the cup and then to Steve.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
You brought hot cocoa?

STEVE
Why? Didn't you?

BRIAN O'BRIAN
No. You have any more?

STEVE
Nope.
(Beat)
Listen. I wish you'd just call Sal and get him to put more money on the card, so we can stay somewhere decent for a change. This isn't like him to let us camp.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Well, that'll all change once we get this interview.

STEVE
I swear: if this Joe escapes again, I say we just go home.

Brian purses his lips and looks away from Steve's stare.

STEVE (CONT'D)
I know that look. What're you keeping from me?

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Sal might not know we're here.

STEVE
How could he not? He's paying for the motel rooms.

Brian scrunches his face and looks out the window.

STEVE (CONT'D)
He hasn't?

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Told him we were off doing a puff-piece about elections. He thinks we're in middle-of-nowhere Mississippi.

STEVE

Surely he's seen the receipts.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

No. My wife's charging for hotels in Mississippi, and I used my credit cards to pay for our trip.

STEVE

You're going to get me fired.

Brian looks out the window. He sees something.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Oh my God, fire.

STEVE

Yeah, that's right fired. And I haven't gotten around to paying off that life-sized Scarlett Johansson statue I bought yet. Can you believe it? She's dating that schmuck from Saturday Night Live? I mean -- yeah -- he's funny and a real nice guy, but come on.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

No. I mean there, behind the cabin. The woods are on fire.

EXT. WOODSHED BEHIND JOE'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The woodshed burns. Brian and Steve stand in the snow, watching. She has the camera on her shoulder but isn't filming. She sets the camera down.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

What are you doing? Get that camera going. You film it while I save him.

STEVE

It's one thing to lie to our boss, but it's another to let someone die.

She helps him pry the door slightly open, and Steve tries to shield her face from the heat as she looks inside.

STEVE (CONT'D)
There's nobody there.

STELLA (O.S.)
Mind telling me what you're doing
on private property?

Stella walks around the corner of the cabin.

Brian turns to see who it is. Steve does too, but her face is covered in soot like a raccoon.

STELLA (CONT'D)
I think you better explain what's
going on before I go get my shotgun
and have it escort you off the
property.

STEVE
We saw the shed on fire, thought it
might be Joe.

Stella starts for the shed, but Steve stops her.

STEVE (CONT'D)
It's empty.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Do you know Joe?

STELLA
You're trespassing. You should
leave now. You're lucky I don't
call the cops up here.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
(To Steve)
Come on, let's go.
(Pauses. To Stella)
Hey. Hey, I know you. Don't I?

STELLA
No. I don't think so ...

STEVE
... Yeah, right. Your name's ...

She snaps her fingers.

STEVE (CONT'D)
... Stella Scalucci. Everyone
thinks you're dead.

STELLA
It's Stella Bird. I'm divorced.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Wait. Scalucci? Like in the crime
family? What're you doing out here?
Shouldn't you be celebrating your
husband's -- sorry -- ex-husband's
capture?

STELLA
I think it's time you two leave.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Would, but a blizzard's blocking
our way out.

STELLA
You have a heater in that van,
don't you?

STEVE
An electric heater, yeah.

Brian scowls at her.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Fine. Come on, Steve.

They leave Stella alone at the back of the cabin. She looks
out in the woods.

STELLA
(To herself)
Where'd you go, Joe?

EXT. NEWSVAN - MOMENTS LATER

Steve opens the back door to the van and looks over at Brian
who is dragging his steps and looking at the cabin.

STEVE
So, we really leaving when the snow
lets up?

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Are you kidding? This place just
became a treasure trove of stories,
and I am not going home till I dig
them up.

Brian pauses as he looks back at the cabin and the reddish glow. Steve holds the door open for a second but then shrugs and shuts the door behind her.

Brian hears the door shut and tries to open it, but it's locked. Through the window, he sees her warming up to the electric heater and ignoring him.

He knocks on the window, but she looks up at him and slowly turns on a radio that blares the Ramones' *I WANT TO BE SEDATED*.

EXT. RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

The snow still comes down hard. Visibility's almost nothing.

Joe walks through the driving snow, carrying the piñata and pulling his rolly-luggage. It's all slowing him down.

Every now and then, he looks back the way he came and sees the red of the shed fire lighting up the falling snow.

As he walks, he comes across the river again.

After putting his luggage down on some river rocks, he reaches into the water and splashes it on his face. As he does, he slips and falls into the water.

His luggage falls into the river with him as he grabs it and the piñata while falling.

The piñata is still wrapped in plastic and floats. He uses it as a flotation device to keep above the water.

The luggage is being pulled on by the currents.

Joe calls out to the snowy night as the forest flies by him.

JOE

Help!

In the falling snow, his voice doesn't carry very far, and his breath is short from the cold river. There's no Stella this time. He chokes as he gulps water while trying to stay afloat.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hello? Anybody?

He tries to reach for the edge of the water with the hand holding the luggage, but can't. He looks down and realizes that his luggage is dragging him down with it.

He lets slip the luggage. It floats for a second.

ANGLE ON:

... the luggage.

The sticker that says 'Joe's Stuff' is just barely above the water, but slowly it's dragged down and vanishes as the luggage is swallowed by the river.

The sticker comes off and floats for a second before it disappears in the currents.

Still using the piñata as a flotation device, he reaches with his free hand to grab rocks that stick up out of the river. He grabs one and slowly pulls himself out and onto the shore.

EDGE OF RIVER - CONTINUOUS

He pulls himself out and lies on the rocky ground, panting and shivering. The snow sticks to him and his wet clothes.

He looks like a snowman as he walks away -- shivering and carrying the unicorn piñata. The plastic wrap has kept it in one piece.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Joe's frozen. Snow clings to his wet clothes. Ice hangs from his loose hair and his beard. His skin is blue and pale.

He pauses and looks around. He's surrounded by dark and snowy woods. He squints against the cold wind. There's a faint light of a house in the far distance.

Joe yells.

JOE
Hello?

He starts walking again as he keeps yelling.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hello? Can you hear me?

He starts to walk again, but stumbles. His yelling comes out as a loud whisper.

JOE (CONT'D)
Anyone there? Hello?

He tries to get up again, but falls. He can see the windows of a cabin in the distance. They're so close.

He falls on his face. Struggles to get up but can't. He lays there and looks at how close he was to the house. His yell a hoarse soft whisper.

JOE (CONT'D)
Anyone? Help?

He lays there, trying to catch his breath. His eyes close as he starts to drift off into a cold-induced sleep.

BEAT.

Beat.

CRUNCH. CRUNCH -- The dark silhouette of a person crunches through the snow with heavy footsteps coming up to where Joe sleeps.

Joe barely opens his eyes to see his rescuer, trying to make out what's going on. He looks confused.

He reaches out his hand toward the person, offering the unicorn piñata to them.

He squints his eyes and rubs them with his free hand. Looks relieved for a second and then laughs.

JOE (CONT'D)
Morgan Freeman.

His eyes roll up into his head as he passes out.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MORGAN FREEMAN'S CABIN - THE NEXT DAY

Joe sleeps in a bed, covered in quilts. His clothes are removed, and the ice has melted from his hair and beard.

The color's even come back to his face. His eyes flicker open, and he looks around the room. There's a large warm fire in the fireplace, and his clothes are drying next to it.

Daylight streams in columns through the windows. It's bright.

Lit by sunlight, a blurry someone sits in a large chair, reading by the fire.

Joe rubs his eyes to see better. He sits up, but only barely. He looks again.

It's MORGAN FREEMAN. He's wearing comfortable jeans and a large sweater. He has his glasses on and reads from an old hardback book.

MORGAN FREEMAN

I went to the woods because I
wished to live deliberately, to
front only the essential facts of
life, and see if I could not learn
what it had to teach, and not, when
I came to die, discover that I had
not lived.

He takes off his reading glasses, and turns fully to Joe, who seems confused by the whole scene in front of him.

JOE

Huh?

Closes the book.

MORGAN FREEMAN

Morning, sunshine.

Beat.

MORGAN FREEMAN (CONT'D)

You've been out for awhile now. A
little touch and go there, but I
think you'll be fine now.

JOE

What the Hell, man? I thought you
were ...

Morgan stands and walks to the fireplace.

MORGAN FREEMAN

... Dead? You know what Mark Twain
said about the reports of one's
death. Right?

JOE

Yeah, so, not dead?

(Beat)

Then where the heck have you been?
Everybody thinks I killed you.

MORGAN FREEMAN

Yes. Sorry about that. You did hit me. I was bruised like you wouldn't believe.

Morgan pours a glass of dark liquid from a bottle and hands it to the bed-ridden man.

MORGAN FREEMAN (CONT'D)

Here. It'll warm you up.

Joe takes a drink.

JOE

I'm mad as heck with you, mister. My life's in ruins because of that accident.

Joe waves the glass for more. Morgan pours another glass.

JOE (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to have any? What? Is this poisoned or something?

MORGAN FREEMAN

No. Don't touch the stuff anymore, just keep it around to remind me that I can always get better.

Morgan takes a seat in a chair near the bed.

JOE

But why all this charade then?

MORGAN FREEMAN

When I was at the hospital, they gurneyed me into the morgue to keep the paparazzi off me.

Beat.

MORGAN FREEMAN (CONT'D)

Apparently, some dumbass saw me being taken away and told everybody I was dead. I didn't know about this rumor till they released me, and my agent called me up the next day asking if I was dead.

JOE

And you just let this rumor go? Just let them ruin my life? For what? A vacation?

MORGAN FREEMAN

Look, Joe. I made a mistake. I'm only human, despite what some people think.

Morgan leans towards Joe.

MORGAN FREEMAN (CONT'D)

You know what it's like to be a celebrity? To be on -- all the time. To never be able to be yourself? Even to the point of having others try and force you into running for president? I didn't realize how bad it would get.

(Beat)

Look, Joe. I tried to find you, tried to set things right, but your house was ...

JOE

... trashed? Yeah, I know.

MORGAN FREEMAN

And your wife ...

JOE

... ex-wife. But that's not on you. That was all me.

Morgan has a can of Vienna Sausages on the table with him. He opens up the can and takes one out.

MORGAN FREEMAN

You want one? I found them in a suitcase down by the river.

JOE

You found my suitcase?

ANGLE ON:

... Joe's suitcase sits on a chair by the fire. There's no sticker on it anymore.

Joe looks frighten for a moment.

JOE (CONT'D)

What about the piñata?

MORGAN FREEMAN

The unicorn? It's safe.

Joe looks around and sees it on the mantle, next to his drying clothes.

MORGAN FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Look. I wanted to help. I've been looking for you. And here I find you up here with my old friend Dan.

JOE
You know Coop?

MORGAN FREEMAN
Of course. I vacation here from time to time.

Joe falls back onto the bed and stares at the ceiling.

JOE
Everyone knows you. I can't get away from you, dead or alive.

MORGAN FREEMAN
I was going to talk with you, see if I could alleviate your situation, but Dan told me to hang back, said you met somebody.
(Beat)
Stella, I believe her name is.

JOE
So, you and Coop were fixing us up?

Joe sits up and hangs his legs off the bed. He's just in underwear.

MORGAN FREEMAN
More like standing to the side and hoping for the best.

JOE
Good God, man. Were you ever going to say anything?

Joe stands up and walks over to his clothes, testing each one for dryness. He starts taking them down and dressing.

MORGAN FREEMAN
Eventually. Look. I have resources, connections. I can help you get back on your feet.
(Beat)
I'm sorry, Joe. I never meant to bestow the curse of celebrity on you.

JOE

Mister Freeman, Stella's gone. And I don't know enough to figure out where she went. She's just another part of my life that's missing now, thanks to this whole ...

(Beat)

... whole *you* thing.

(Beat)

I thought I found a place I could be myself and not have to pretend ...

Joe finishes dressing and pulls his socks on.

JOE (CONT'D)

... Whatever it was I was pretending to be.

(Beat)

Look. If you really want to help, tell the world you're alive. That would be great. Awesome, even.

He stomps into his shoes.

MORGAN FREEMAN

Is that what you really want, Joe? To go back to pretending that you're that guy? That job?

(Beat)

Was any of that really you, Joe?

JOE

Yes. No.

(Beat)

I don't know. My life was crap, but it was mine. I don't think there's anything you can do to fix it.

He looks up at the unicorn.

JOE (CONT'D)

There was one thing that was really me.

Joe takes a deep breath.

JOE (CONT'D)

But, even if you told everybody that you're alive. They'd still hate me for the accident. And everything about my life.

He almost takes a step towards the door, but stops.

JOE (CONT'D)

Wait.

(Beat)

There is one thing. At least take that unicorn back to my daughter and tell her that I didn't kill you. Can you do that for me?

He heads to the door and opens it. Cold snow drifts in.

MORGAN FREEMAN

Wouldn't it be better if she received it from you?

JOE

I can't bring that kind of attention on her.

Morgan stands up and closes the door.

JOE (CONT'D)

I never got to see her in the first place. Either her mom wouldn't let me see her, or I was too busy.

(Beat)

You know what? This whole thing finally gave me the vacation I kept promising myself. But I'll admit this vacation sucks balls.

MORGAN FREEMAN

So, you're leaving again? Running away? Even after finding two people who don't hate you because the news told them to?

JOE

Most likely. I hadn't decided where to go yet. Maybe Mexico. Or Canada.

MORGAN FREEMAN

I'd advise against Canada. Seems I'm popular there too. In Montreal there's a hotdog named after me. It's got jalapenos and pulled-pork.

JOE

Mexico it is then. I have to draw the attention away from Stella and my daughter. I owe them both that much. You're right; they don't hate me, but I owe them both more than I can give. So, this is the least I can do for them.

MORGAN FREEMAN
Don't forget your bag.

ANGLE ON:

... the roly-luggage. Joe looks at it. His hand clinches in a fist.

JOE
You know what? Keep it. I think I'm done dragging it around. Keep it or throw it away. I'm done with it.

Joe exits, shutting the door behind him.

Morgan walks to the table and eats another Vienna sausage while he contemplates the luggage Joe left behind.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

It's stopped snowing, but there's snow everywhere, all over the trees, the ground, the river. It's glaringly white.

Joe walks through the woods. He shivers, and his breath freezes in the air.

JOE
(To himself)
At least in Mexico it's warm.

INT. STELLA'S HOUSE - LATER

Someone knocks on the front door. Stella answers.

It's Morgan Freeman with Joe's luggage. He has his hat in his hand in an apologetic manner.

He notices Coop sitting at the table.

MORGAN FREEMAN
Morning, Stella. Dan.

STELLA
You alive, or you a ghost?

MORGAN FREEMAN
I'm very much alive.

STELLA
Well, that explains some things.

Turns to Old Coop.

STELLA (CONT'D)

I bet you knew about this, didn't you?

Turns back to Morgan.

OLD COOP

Stella, let him in. It's hard for a man to say his piece when he's freezing his balls off.

She scowls at Morgan but steps aside and gestures for him to come into the cabin.

STELLA

By all means, make yourself at home.

EXT. JOE'S CABIN - LATER

Steve's ready in front of the cabin. She's bundled against the cold and adjusting the controls on the camera.

Brian's also ready, in his wrinkled clothes and his heavy-five o'clock shadow. He looks tired. He stretches his neck out and holds the microphone in anticipation.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

We ready?

STEVE

Who's we? I should be heading home to explain to Sal what happened. You're going to get us both fired.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Not if we get the goods on this Joe guy or Stella. Emmy, here we come.

STEVE

Yeah, not like you're going to have my name on the Emmy. I'll have to pay for that myself.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

Come on. It's a team thing.

STEVE

Yeah, with your name on it.

She stops messing with the controls.

STEVE (CONT'D)
 Okay. We're on in three, two ...

INSERT VIDEO OF ...

... Brian stands with his back to the cabin.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
 Hi, Folks. Brian O'Brian here. Day
 two of the vigil outside the cabin
 of Joe Kaplan, the man who ...

He clears his throat.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)
 ... allegedly ran over the much
 beloved actor and hopeful
 presidential candidate, Morgan
 Freeman.

He clears his throat again.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)
 Much to my dismay, we seem to have
 lost him during the short-lived
 blizzard last night.

He loosens his tie a bit.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)
 With such harsh Winter storms --
 here in the Rockies -- we may never
 know where he went, or even if he
 survived out there alone in the
 dark wilderness, in freezing
 temperatures.

Behind him, the door opens and Joe steps out. He has cups of
 steaming coffee. He looks refreshed, washed, and relaxed.

STEVE
 (Whispers to Brian)
 Psst.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
 (To Steve)
 No. Don't. Don't. Don't you say it.
 Don't you dare say it.

Joe calls out to them.

JOE

Hey, folks. You look cold. You want to come in for a bit and warm up?

Brian hangs his head and sighs. Steve takes the camera off her shoulder and walks up the steps.

INT. STELLA'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Stella, Coop, and Morgan sit around Stella's table. Morgan puts Joe's luggage on the table between them.

OLD COOP

He said he was done with it? What is that supposed to mean?

MORGAN FREEMAN

Don't rightly know. I was going to give him a ride, but he marched out and into the woods before I could say anything.

OLD COOP

Yep, that sounds like him.

STELLA

So, are you going to let him continue to take the fall for your vacation from the public?

OLD COOP

I really don't need all these reporters coming around ...

MORGAN FREEMAN

... I offered, but some people like to throw themselves on their own swords.

OLD COOP

And you're going to let him do it? Sooner or later someone is going to discover that you're not dead. Getting out in front of it could save that idiot's sanity, whatever's left of it.

MORGAN FREEMAN

And how do you suppose I do that?

OLD COOP

Well, I think the reporters are still hanging around. Start there.

Coop stands up and points out the window.

OLD COOP (CONT'D)
So, I can get those two out of my hair.

STELLA
(To Coop)
I'm telling you, just call the sheriff on them.

OLD COOP
Yeah, I'd rather not involve the police. The Hobbs Act doesn't have a statute of limitations. So, no.

MORGAN FREEMAN
I think you're right. The best way to get this behind us is for me to get in front of it.

OLD COOP
Why is it everything sounds better when you say it?

INT. JOE'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Joe sets the steaming cups in front of Brian and Steve as they sit themselves in chairs around the table.

Steve greedily drinks and holds her hands to the cup for warmth, shivering. Brian ignores the cup to stare at Joe.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
(To Joe)
Does this mean I'm getting that interview?

Joe sits down on the couch and stares at the floor.

JOE
Would you do me a favor?

BRIAN O'BRIAN
And why would we do you a favor?

JOE
You owe me.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
How do we owe you?

JOE

You chased me. Made my life Hell.
You ran off my only friend by
coming here. I'll give you all the
interviews you want if you give me
a ride to Mexico. Deal?

STEVE

You mean that Stella lady? She's
still here.

JOE

What? You're shitting me.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

No. She was kind of rude. Wouldn't
let us interview her about her
husband.

JOE

Ex-husband. What about him?

Joe stares at him.

STEVE

Ex-husband, yeah. A mobster guy,
but him and most of his guys are
doing time in prison.

Joe jumps up and stares out the window.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

I mean, we're still going to do a
piece on her, but ...

JOE

... Hold on a sec. I'll be right
back.

ANGLE ON:

... out the window, he can see Stella standing on her porch.

Joe runs out the door, leaving the other two looking
confused.

Brian stands up.

BRIAN O'BRIAN

I think we should follow him.

STEVE

What? You think he'll run again?

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Wouldn't you?

Steve grabs the camera and runs outside following Brian.

EXT. STELLA'S CABIN

Three vehicles are parked outside: Coop's, Stella's, and a third -- an SUV that looks like it hasn't seen many backroads, freshly washed.

From the wood-line, Joe comes marching through the snow. Brian and Steve trudge slowly behind him.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Where are we going?

STEVE
I'd guess to his girlfriend's house.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
Whatever. He's not been out here that long.

The three stop at the bottom of the stairs leading up to Stella's porch. Brian almost runs into Joe's back, but Joe's too busy staring up at Stella standing on her porch to notice.

STELLA
So, you came back after burning Coop's woodshed? That's pretty ballsy.

JOE
Yeah. Can you tell him that I'm sorry? I'll send him some money when I can. Wherever I end up.

STELLA
Going somewhere?

BRIAN O'BRIAN
That's a good question. You said something about Mexico.

Stella sits on the steps and pats the wood to invite Joe.

STELLA
You don't have to run anymore, Joe.

Joe sits on the step sideways to keep an eye on both Stella and the reporter.

JOE
More people will show up after this, and I know how Coop is about his privacy.

STELLA
Shouldn't you ask Coop what he thinks about it?

The door opens again. Morgan Freeman steps out.

STEVE
Oh, shit.

Steve and Brian gape openly at him as he walks down the steps, patting Joe on the shoulder as he goes by.

MORGAN FREEMAN
I appreciate your discretion, Joe, but I think it's gone on long enough. Don't you?

Brian rushes to get his microphone out and hits Steve with it to get her attention. She's staring at Morgan blankly.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
(To Steve)
What're you doing? Get the camera rolling. This is big time.

MORGAN FREEMAN
Now, I know you two have some questions, but I think that we can settle this without Joe being involved. I think he's been through enough.

Brian looks stunned as Morgan walks up.

Morgan turns back to Joe.

MORGAN FREEMAN (CONT'D)
Joe, I wanted to apologize to you the most. Your life was interrupted because of what happened.

JOE
Think this will interrupt your political career?

MORGAN FREEMAN
 Political aspirations are for
 crusaders and crooks, and right now
 my inner crusader is a little
 tired.

Morgan smiles at Joe and starts to turn to the reporter but
 stops when Joe speaks up.

JOE
 One more thing.

MORGAN FREEMAN
 Yeah, Joe?

JOE
 Thank you.

Morgan turns to Brian and offers his hand to shake. Brian
 looks scared for a second.

MORGAN FREEMAN
 How about the interview of your
 career? And, we can just leave Joe
 out of this.

Brian shakes his hand enthusiastically.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
 Oh, Hell yeah. No problem.

STEVE
 Yay! I'm not going to be fired.

Morgan and the news-crew step off to the side to talk,
 leaving Joe and Stella alone on the steps, watching the
 interview from their seats.

JOE
 I thought you were gone.

STELLA
 Seems like I don't have to run
 anymore either.

Joe stretches out, looks a bit relaxed.

STELLA (CONT'D)
 You know, if you stay, I can teach
 you to hunt and trap.
 (Beat)
 Then you won't have to live off of
 Vienna sausages anymore.

JOE
Mrs. Bird, you're trying to seduce
me.

STELLA
No. Not really.

JOE
So, that's not flirting?
(Beat)
Not even a little? Because, I
thought ...

... Beat.

Joe and Stella both look uncomfortable in the silence. She
smiles first, and he follows. He looks off toward Morgan and
the reporters.

JOE (CONT'D)
So, what do you think he's telling
them?

Stella leans her head on Joe's shoulder.

STELLA
Probably something deep and
meaningful, something full of
gravitas.

JOE
Yeah, he does that, doesn't he?

EXT. NEWSVAN - CONTINUOUS

INSERT VIDEO OF ...

... Brian stands in front of one of the walls. Steve adjusts
the camera. Brian stands ready. His expensive clothes are
wrinkled but straightened up as much as he can get them.

STEVE (O.S.)
We're rolling in three ...

Brian adjusts his neck and readies the microphone.

STEVE(O.S.) (CONT'D)
... two ...

Brian gets serious and stares straight into the camera.

BRIAN O'BRIAN
 Good morning, Memphis. Brian
 O'Brian here. We have a late-
 breaking story about Joe Kaplan,
 who allegedly killed beloved actor,
 Morgan Freeman.

Brian walks to the right. The camera follows. Morgan Freeman
 stands to the side, waiting.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)
 But, instead of finding Mister
 Kaplan, we found Morgan Freeman,
 alive and well. Turns out this was
 just a misunderstanding.

He turns to Morgan.

BRIAN O'BRIAN (CONT'D)
 Good morning, Mister Freeman. How
 are you doing, sir?

Morgan puts on a wry smile as he nods to the camera.

MORGAN FREEMAN
 Thank you, Brian. A pleasure to be
 here. It's times like this that ...

CUT TO: BLACK

STEVE (V.O.)
 Oh, shit. My bad. Battery died.

END OF FILM

Not really ...

EXT. JOE'S EX-WIFE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Morgan Freeman, Joe, Stella, Coop, and Todd are sitting on
 plastic lawn chairs, drinking beers and watching Joe's
 daughter swing at the unicorn piñata that hangs from a tree.

There's a TV sitting in another lawn chair with news playing.

MORGAN FREEMAN
 Too bad your ex couldn't join us
 outside.

JOE
 Naw. Sarah's allergic to fun.

SARAH (O.S.)
I heard that.

Todd leans over to Stella.

TODD
(Whispers)
So, you and Joe serious or what?

STELLA
(Whispers)
Yeah, and you try anything, I'll
take off your testicles with a bear-
trap.

Todd leans back in his chair.

TODD
(To himself)
Fair enough.

Stella smiles at Joe, and he smiles back.

Piñata breaks, and Joe's daughter walks over to them.

OLD COOP
Not bad. Not bad.

JASMINE
Can you do better? Or are you just
bragging? Like that story you told
about jumping out of a plane with
all that money?

Everybody else perks up, looking curious. Coop looks panicky.

OLD COOP
What? She's kidding. Kidding. Kids
these days. They hear all sorts of
things on the television.

JOE
What is she talking about?

OLD COOP
Look. TV. Let's watch that. Oh,
hey: It's Steve.

He points to ...

INSERT VIDEO:

... Brian O'Brian and Steve stand in front of a building,
surrounded by reporters. Brian looks proud. Steve's nervous.

REPORTER 1

How does it feel to have the number
one scoop out there right now?

BRIAN O'BRIAN

I feel the same. Just part of my
job.

STEVE

Wait. We're rolling?

She goes wide-eyed and starts walking awkwardly to one side,
but finds reporters blocking her way.

REPORTER 1

What about the reports that your
wife misused company funds while
you were off on a trip with your
camera-woman?

Steve walks awkwardly the other direction, all while staring
into the camera wide-eyed and scared. She hides behind Brian,
peeking out to look at the camera.

Brian's face goes blank as the microphone is shoved in his
face, and he looks into the camera -- defeated.

STEVE

(Whispers)

I'm not supposed to be on this side
of the camera.

Steve walks slowly away from Brian and melds into the crowd,
vanishing, leaving Brian all by himself.

END OF FILM
(FOR REAL THIS TIME)