

UP IN THE AIR

screenplay by

Jason Reitman
Sheldon Turner

from the novel by

Walter Kirn

There is no "I" in team.

- Common Business Axiom

Secure your own mask before assisting others.

- Common **Pre-Flight Instruction**

A SPOTLIGHT reveals RYAN BINGHAM standing at a PODIUM.

He unzips a BACKPACK and sets it down beside him.

RYAN

How much does your life weigh?

Ryan pauses to let us consider this.

RYAN (CONT'D)

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

(gives us a beat)

Now, I want you to pack it with all the stuff you have in your life. Start with the little things. The stuff in drawers and on shelves. The collectables and knick-knacks. Feel the weight as it adds up. Now, start adding the larger stuff. Your clothes, table top appliances, lamps, linens, your TV. That backpack should be getting pretty heavy at this point - Go Bigger. Your couch, your bed, your kitchen table. Stuff it all in... Your car, get it in there... Your home, whether you have a studio apartment or a two story house, I want you to stuff it into that backpack.

Ryan takes a beat to let the weight sink in.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Now try to walk.

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

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - AFTERNOON

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

The few dozen people seem to be visualizing as told.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Kinda hard, isn't it? This is what we do to ourselves on a daily basis. We weigh ourselves down until we can't even move. And make no mistake - *Moving is living.*

We see nodding. People's gears turning.

RYAN (CONT'D)

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

(a beat of emphasis)

It's kind of exhilarating isn't it? That is how I approach every day.

A titter through the crowd.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

A FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT is looking directly at us.

FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Do you want the cancer?

Turn to see RYAN looking back.

Handsome. Anonymous. Right now - Confused.

RYAN

Excuse me?

FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(same delivery)

Do you want the cancer?

Ryan furrows - What the hell is going on here?

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

FEMALE FLIGHT ATTENDANT

The can, sir?

RYAN

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

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

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM, SUN CASUALTY - DAY

Two words - Subordinate chic.

Seated at a tiny table is RYAN. The Grim Reaper in a suit.

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

STEVE (AN ACTOR)

... who's on the verge of tears.

STEVE

Who the fuck are you?

FREEZE on Ryan.

RYAN (V.O.)

Excellent question. Who the fuck am I? Poor Steve has worked here for seven years.

FLASH IMAGES:

INT. STEVE'S CUBICLE - DAY

RYAN (V.O.)

He's never had a meeting with me before...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Steve in a small meeting.

RYAN (V.O.)

...or passed me in the hall...

INT. ELEVATOR BRIDGE - DAY

Steve passes a female coworker.

RYAN (V.O.)

... or told me a story in the break room....

INT. BREAK ROOM - DAY

Steve laughs at a coworker's story.

RYAN (V.O.)
And that's because I don't work
here. I work for another company
that lends me out to pussies like
Steve's boss...

INT. STEVE'S BOSS'S OFFICE - DAY

Steve's BOSS sits at his desk. Subtitle reads - "A Big Pussy"

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

FLASH IMAGES:

Steve wipes off his boss's desk.

Steve shreds sensitive documents.

Steve pours bleach into the communal coffee pot.

Steve loads an assault rifle. He stands up to get a view of
his coworkers on a coffee break.

BACK TO:

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Steve is trying to hold it together.

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

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

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

Steve scoffs at this.

Ryan slides Steve a PACKET.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Steve, I want you to review this packet. Take it seriously. I think you're going to find a lot of answers in there.

STEVE

(dismissive)

Oh, I'm sure it's going to be really helpful.

RYAN (CONT'D)

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

And just for a moment, Steve looks hopeful.

RYAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to need your key card.

STEVE

Right...

Steve begins removing it from his wallet.

RYAN

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

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

STEVE

Wait, how do I get in touch with you?

RYAN

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

Steve nods and exits the room.

RYAN (V.O.)

I'll never see Steve again.

INT. RYAN'S ROOM - PHOENIX HILTON - DAY

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

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

INT. LOBBY, PHOENIX HILTON - DAY

Ryan is at the check out desk.

CHECKOUT GIRL

Do you have your Hilton Honors Card
with you?

Ryan smiles... "*Do I?*"

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

CHECKOUT GIRL

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

Ryan nods in faux modesty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

RYAN (V.O.)

This is where I live.

Subtitles - "Airworld"

Ryan skips the long lines and steps directly into the AAdvantage Executive Platinum line.

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

Immediately, the AIRPORT CLERK registers and perks up.

AIRPORT CLERK

Pleasure to see you again, Mr. Bingham.

RYAN (V.O.)

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

We see it again...

AIRPORT CLERK

Pleasure to see you again, Mr. Bingham.

Ryan nods back to the clerk.

RYAN (V.O.)

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

Ryan continues to hit buttons, swiftly checking in.

RYAN (V.O.)

Loyalty is earned and rewarded with these small touches. It's these kinds of systemized friendly touches that keep my world in orbit.

A ticket begins printing. Ryan snaps it up.

INT. SECURITY - PHOENIX SKY HARBOR INTL AIRPORT - SAME

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

JUMP CUT TO:

RYAN MOVING THROUGH THE SECURITY SCREENING

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

INT. AMERICAN ADMIRALS CLUB - SAME

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

ADMIRALS CLUB HOSTESS

Welcome back, Mr. Bingham.

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

RYAN (V.O.)

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

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

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ASSISTANT'S DESK, CTC - DAY

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

KEVIN

Ryan Bingham's office.

RYAN

You have me in a Dodge Stratus in
Kansas City.

KEVIN

They are completely out of all full
sized sedans...

RYAN
(interrupts)
Did you?...

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

RYAN
Fair enough. Any other messages?

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

RYAN
Well done.

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

Ryan pauses.

RYAN
GoalQuest twenty?

FLASH IMAGE:

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

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

INT. SMALL CONFERENCE ROOM, HOTEL - NIGHT

Ryan delivers his speech with a smile.

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

INT. ADMIRALS CLUB - SAME

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

KEVIN

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

RYAN

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

KEVIN

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

RYAN

I... ah, fuck...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CRAIG GREGORY'S OFFICE, CTC - DAY

Four words - Store-bought sports memorabilia.

CRAIG GREGORY

How's the road warrior?

RYAN

Twenty minutes from boarding into a world of bliss.

CRAIG GREGORY

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

RYAN

No kidding?

CRAIG GREGORY

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

RYAN

I thought you needed me everywhere.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT'D)
We got something big - Game
changer.

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

Craig checks out a CUTE INTERN.

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

RYAN
What are we talking about here?

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

RYAN
That's me, hanging up on you.

CRAIG GREGORY
Good. I love that sound.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

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

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

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

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

BUSINESSMAN AND RYAN MAKING SUGGESTIONS

RYAN (V.O.)

You recommend a hotel in Tulsa. I
tip you off to a rib joint in Fort
Worth.

BUSINESSMAN TELLS A JOKE. HIS HANDS GESTURE.

RYAN (V.O.)

You tell me your best joke. I've
heard it before, but listen anyway.

Ryan laughs out loud.

TURBULENCE. THE BUSINESSMAN TIGHTENS HIS SEAT BELT.

RYAN (V.O.)

Nothing like turbulence to cement a
bond. Soon you're telling me about
family.

THE MAN SPEAKS ABOUT SOMETHING THAT OBVIOUSLY DISTURBS HIM.

RYAN (V.O.)

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

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

RYAN (V.O.)

And that if your windfall ever came
through, you'd quit and spend the
rest of your days restoring vintage
speedboats.

(saying it with him)

The water. That's where you belong.

EXT. TARMAC, DALLAS FORT WORTH AIRPORT - DAY

Their PLANE LANDS.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

As the plane begins to taxi to the gate, both Ryan and the
Businessman pull out their cards.

RYAN (V.O.)
 We exchange cards and slot them next
 to countless others.

The dull bell "*dings*" to let us know it's safe to stand. Ryan and the Businessman get up and open the overheads.

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

INT. CONCOURSE, DALLAS FORT WORTH AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan and the Businessman walk next to each, now completely ignoring each other as if they never shared a word.

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

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

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

INT. BROOKS BROTHERS, DALLAS FORT WORTH AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan is checking out TIES when his cell phone rings. He checks the I.D.- UNAVAILABLE. He weighs it for a second.

RYAN
 (picks up)
 Hello?

KARA (O.C.)
 Hi Ryan.

Ryan mouths a silent "*fuck*".

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. KARA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kara is Ryan's sister. Her home overflows with books, photos, family collectables, and kid's artwork.

RYAN (V.O.)

Every family has one person who is the glue. The one who keeps the genealogy in check. That's my sister Kara - The glue.

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

RYAN

Hey Kara.

KARA

How are you holding up?

RYAN

Just fine. You? The kids?

KARA

(lying)

Missy's outstanding. Matthew made varsity. How's the road?

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

INT. CONCOURSE, DALLAS FORT WORTH AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan hops onto a PEOPLE MOVER.

RYAN

Couldn't be better.

KARA

That's good. So, Ryan?

RYAN

(cautious)

Yeah?

KARA

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

Ryan rolls his eyes.

KARA (CONT'D)

But we're coming in on three weeks to go for Julie's wedding and there's something we could really use your help on.

RYAN

Yeah.

KARA

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

RYAN

Why?

KARA

(sighs)

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

RYAN

How is Julie?

KARA

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

RYAN

Isolated? I'm surrounded.

KARA

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

RYAN

Did he?

KARA

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

RYAN

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

KARA

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

RYAN

I'm going to try my best.

KARA

Well, thank you for trying your best.

INT. BAR LOUNGE - HOUSTON HILTON - EVENING

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

RYAN
You're satisfied with Maestro?

ALEX
Yeah, I am.

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

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

Ryan is intrigued.

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

ALEX
Hertz doesn't guarantee Navigation.

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

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

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

ALEX
Is that a joke?

After a beat.

RYAN
Yes.

ALEX
Their kiosk placement is a joke.

RYAN
Never have available upgrades.

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

RYAN
(*I love you*)
I'm Ryan.

ALEX
Alex.

RYAN
So are you going to join me?

She breaks into a smile.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BAR LOUNGE - HOUSTON HILTON - LATER THAT EVENING

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

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

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

RYAN
They got you with the cookies?

ALEX
I'm a sucker for simulated
hospitality.

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

Alex grabs Ryan's AMERICAN CONCIERGE KEY CARD.

ALEX

Oh my God. I've heard about these,
but never seen one in person. Is
this a...?

RYAN

Concierge Key. Yeah.

ALEX

I love the weight.

RYAN

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

ALEX

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

RYAN

(trying)
That's not bad.

ALEX

Don't patronize me. What's your total?

RYAN

That's a personal question.

ALEX

Oh please...

RYAN

(playful)
I hardly know you.

ALEX

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

RYAN

You have no idea.

ALEX

Come on...
(holds her hands eight
inches apart)
Is it this big?
(extends a few inches)
... this big?

RYAN

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

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

ALEX

This is pretty fucking sexy.

RYAN

I hope it doesn't cheapen our relationship.

ALEX

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

RYAN

There's nothing cheap about loyalty.

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

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

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

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

RYAN

I really have to start throwing these out.

He tries a couple.

ALEX

We can always use that room with the ice machine.

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

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

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

RYAN
Good call on the towel rack.

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

RYAN
I was improvising.

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

RYAN
We got to do this again.

JUMP CUT TO:

TWO LAPTOPS SIDE BY SIDE

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

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

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

ALEX
Miami?

RYAN
Ft. Lauderdale.

ALEX
That's nothing.

RYAN
Forty minutes.

They simultaneously type each other into their calendars.

ALEX
I should probably go back to my
room so I can wake up in my bed.

RYAN

I think that's the lady like thing
to do.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Ryan drops Alex off at her door. She flips the "do not disturb" on her door handle and kisses Ryan good night.

The door closes. Ryan smiles to himself.

EXT. HOUSTON HILTON - NEXT MORNING

Sprinklers doing their job. One's broken.

EXT. HOUSTON HILTON - MORNING

Looking through the first floor window, we see Ryan doing laps in the pool.

INT. LOBBY, HOUSTON HILTON - MORNING

Ryan gets a shoe shine.

INT. LOBBY, HOUSTON HILTON - DAY

The CLERK swipes Ryan card.

EXT. CAR DROP OFF - MAESTRO RENT-A-CAR - DAY

A CAR RETURN CLERK slides Ryan's card through a device.

INT. CHECK IN DESK, BUSH INTERCONTINENTAL AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan SWIPES his FREQUENT FLIER CARD through the automated machine.

A FEMALE DESK ASSISTANT notices the number, looks up at Ryan, and has a tiny orgasm right there.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

Ryan looks out the OVAL WINDOW to the landscape of Omaha.

RYAN (V.O.)
 Last year, I spent three hundred
 twenty two days on the road.

INT. KISS-N-FLY, EPPLEY AIRFIELD - DAY

Ryan wheels passed a couple that leaps into each other's arms.

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

EXT. RYAN'S APARTMENT BUILDING, OMAHA - DAY

Ryan steps up to an upscale building with little character,
 searching for his keys at the bottom of his bag. Finally
 finds them and opens the front door.

INT. ELEVATOR, RYAN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Ryan presses his floor, when a NOSEY NEIGHBOR slides in.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
 Ryan?

RYAN
 (doesn't know his name)
 Hi...

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

RYAN
 Yeah, sorry I couldn't be there.

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

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

NOSEY NEIGHBOR
 Sometimes I forget that you even
 live here. You could probably save
 money and move into a hotel.

RYAN

(dead serious)

I looked into it, but the IRS requires a permanent address for employment. Otherwise, they classify you as a vagrant.

Ding! - Ryan gets off at his floor.

NOSEY NEIGHBOR

Oh.

INT. RYAN'S APARTMENT, OMAHA - DAY

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

Ryan opens the fridge - Chinese take out. Pizza box. Bottle of Vodka. Takes a whiff of something - not good.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Hey neighbor.

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

RYAN

Hey yourself.

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

DIANNE

(hands over a package)

I signed for this while you were gone.

RYAN

Thanks. Hope it wasn't a bother.

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

DIANNE

(re: photo)

They seem happy.

RYAN

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

DIANNE

Lots of luck.

RYAN
I know, right?

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

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

RYAN
Hey, you want to come over tonight?

Dianne gets a little uncomfortable.

DIANNE
Actually, I kind of started seeing
somebody.

RYAN
Oh, that's... that's great.

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

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

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

EXT. CTC HEADQUARTERS, CTC - MORNING

A downtown midsize high rise.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

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

Craig addresses the group including his own superiors.

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

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

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

(MORE)

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

A strangely encouraged response from the group.

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

Natalie stands up.

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

Natalie clicks on her POWER POINT PRESENTATION.

POWER POINT SLIDE: "GLOCAL"

Everyone including Ryan attempts to pronounce it.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
 Glocal.

POWER POINT SLIDE: "GLOBAL ---> LOCAL"

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

POWER POINT SLIDE: A slide shows PEOPLE X 250.

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

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Well, today I stand before you with
jus that.

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

NATALIE (CONT'D)

You all know Ned in reception.

Various people say hello to Ned.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Today, I'm going to fire Ned.

(aside)

Sorry, Ned. I'm sure H.R. will hire
you back this afternoon.

Ned smiles. People chuckle in the conference room. One guy jokes "Don't count on it."

NATALIE (CONT'D)

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

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

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Mr. Laskin, the reason we're having
this conversation today is your
position is no longer available.

NED

(from a script)

I don't understand. I'm fired?

NATALIE

Hearing the words "You've been let
go" is never easy. Change is always
scary. But consider the following -

(using Ryan's line)

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

RYAN

(quietly)

That's my fucking line.

NED

Well, what happens now?

NATALIE

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

NED

Yeah, but, how does it work?

NATALIE

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

Ned picks up the packet.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

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

Ned starts to peruse the packet with fake interest.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

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

NED

I understand.

NATALIE

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

NED

Thank you.

Ned gets up and goes to leave.

NATALIE

Give it up for Ned.

People clap and tease him a little.

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

NATALIE (CONT'D)

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

Ryan is in a state of silent panic.

INT. CRAIG GREGORY'S OFFICE, CTC - MOMENTS LATER

Ryan enters and stops short.

RYAN

Tell me you're not taking this seriously.

CRAIG GREGORY

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

RYAN

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

CRAIG GREGORY

Who am I even talking to?

RYAN

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

CRAIG GREGORY

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

RYAN

Who are you taking off the road?

A beat.

CRAIG GREGORY

You don't get it. You're grounded, Ryan.
Everyone is. It's done.

RYAN

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

CRAIG GREGORY

Stabbing people in the chest
instead of the back?

Ryan rolls his eyes.

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

NATALIE

You wanted to see me?

Craig goes to wave her off.

RYAN

Yeah, why don't you come in.

Natalie is confused but takes the chair next to Ryan.

CRAIG GREGORY

Great job in there, Nat.

NATALIE

Thank you. How's everyone taking it?

Natalie and Ryan hold a look for a second.

RYAN

(to Natalie)

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

NATALIE

Actually, I minored in psychology.

CRAIG GREGORY

Nice.

RYAN

(to Natalie)

Okay kiddo, fire me.

CRAIG GREGORY
Ryan, stop it.

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

CRAIG GREGORY
She just fired Ned.

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

CRAIG GREGORY
Ryan.

NATALIE
It's okay, I got this.

Ryan and Natalie turn to face each other.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
Mr. Bingham, I regret to inform you that your position is no longer available.

RYAN
Who the hell are you?

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

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

NATALIE
Mr. Gregory hired me to handle this for him.

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

Ryan gets up. Natalie gets up too.

NATALIE
Mr. Bingham...

RYAN
You can't follow me... You're on a
computer screen. Remember?

NATALIE
(frustrated)
Ryan...

Ryan sits back down.

RYAN
Try again. Fire me.

NATALIE
I just did.

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

CRAIG GREGORY
Stop it, Ryan.

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

RYAN
I'm fired?

NATALIE
Yes, you're fired.

RYAN
(aside)
Never say fired.

NATALIE
You've been let go.

RYAN
Why?

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

RYAN
You never know why. Why doesn't
matter.

NATALIE

(back on track)

It's important not to focus on the "why" and rather to spend your energy thinking about your future.

RYAN

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

NATALIE

Mr. Bingham, the reason is not important.

RYAN

Oh, so you're firing me without grounds.

(to Craig)

Now, I *really* have a lawsuit.

CRAIG GREGORY

Ryan, I think we know what you're trying to say...

NATALIE

(still in character)

Don't take this personally, Mr. Bingham.

Ryan stops.

RYAN

Personally?

(quiet and calm)

This is the most personal situation you will ever enter. So before you try to revolutionize my business, I'd like to know that you actually know my business.

INT. RYAN'S OFFICE, CTC - DAY

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

Craig enters.

CRAIG GREGORY

Hell-of-a-way to welcome her to the team.

RYAN

Am I the only one who sees that by automating our own business, we're making ourselves irrelevant.

CRAIG GREGORY

(*frankly...*)

No... We're making you irrelevant.

Ryan shoots a look.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT'D)

Hey, don't blame me. Blame fuel costs. Blame insurance premiums. Blame technology.

(a beat)

Watch yourself, Ryan. You're too young to be a dinosaur...

RYAN

I'm not... I'm not a dinosaur.

CRAIG GREGORY

I want you to show her the ropes.

RYAN

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

CRAIG GREGORY

I'm not talking about here.

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

RYAN

No.

CRAIG GREGORY

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

RYAN

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

CRAIG GREGORY

Great. Well, here's your chance. Show her the magic. Take her through the paces.

RYAN

I'm not a fucking tour guide.

Craig cups one of his hands and places a FOLDED POST-IT between his fingers like a ship's sail.

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

Craig raises his other finger far away.

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

A beat of Ryan taking in this ridiculous illustration.

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

RYAN
Yes. Alone.

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

Ryan churns.

INT. RYAN'S APARTMENT - DAY

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

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

RYAN
Huh.

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

A moment of silent frustration.

CUT TO:

THE ROLL-AWAY

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

INT. EPPLEY AIRFIELD, OMAHA - MORNING

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

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

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

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

NATALIE

What?

CUT TO:

A ROW OF ROLL AWAY BAGS

INT. LUGGAGE STORE, EPPLEY AIRFIELD - MORNING

Ryan pulls one out and tests the action.

NATALIE

I really like my luggage.

RYAN

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

NATALIE

I don't know, maybe five minutes waiting for...

RYAN

Thirty five minutes per flight. I travel two hundred seventy days a year. That makes one hundred fifty seven hours... That's Seven Days.

(points to her luggage)

You ready to throw away a whole week on that?

INT. TERMINAL FLOOR, EPPLEY AIRFIELD - MORNING

Natalie is attempting to repack her new bag in the middle of the airport. Ryan helps by throwing a couple things out.

INT. SECURITY, EPPLEY AIRFIELD- MORNING

Ryan spots various "bad lines", then sees a group of Asians.

RYAN

Bingo. Asians.

Ryan starts walking.

NATALIE

You can't be serious.

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

RYAN

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

Second Line - AN ELDERLY COUPLE

RYAN (CONT'D)

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

Third Line - A COUPLE MIDDLE EASTERN GUYS.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Five words. Randomly selected for additional screening.

They enter the fourth line behind the Asians.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Asians. They're light packers,
treasure efficiency, and have a thing
for slip-on shoes. God love'em.

NATALIE

That's racist.

RYAN

I'm like my mother. I stereotype.
It's faster.

INT. SECURITY, EPPLEY AIRFIELD MOMENTS LATER

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

INT. BOEING 757 - MID FLIGHT

Ryan is sketching a theoretical book cover for "The Backback". Natalie is working on an Excel Document on her laptop - She's a loud tapper... Hitting the keys with violent strokes. It draws Ryan's attention and a raised eyebrow.

RYAN

Are you upset at your laptop?

NATALIE

No. Why?

RYAN

Fats Domino had a lighter touch.

NATALIE

I type with purpose.

RYAN

What are you working on so
furiously?

NATALIE

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

RYAN

Who is it for?

NATALIE

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

RYAN

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

NATALIE

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

RYAN

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

NATALIE

Okay, what are we doing?

RYAN

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

(frankly)

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

NATALIE

That was really impressive. You rehearse that?

Natalie smiles and goes back to her work. Ryan goes to say something, but holds back for now.

INT. MAIN TERMINAL, ST. LOUIS INT'L AIRPORT - DAY

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

RYAN

(to Natalie)

I got to grab this. I'll meet you at the rental lot.

Natalie nods and keeps moving. Ryan picks up.

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

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

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

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

Ryan turns into an elevator well to talk.

ALEX
You haven't called.

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

Alex stops. She moves to a quieter place.

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

RYAN
This sounds like a trick.

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

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

RYAN
When am I going to see you?

ALEX
I'm out of Hartsfield, into IAD,
then a connection at ORD into SDF.

RYAN
(compassionate)
Oh... sorry.

ALEX
Tell me about it.

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

ALEX
(smiles)
I can push.

Joy.

INT. ELEVATOR, BOTTLING COMPANY - DAY

Ryan and Natalie ride, briefcases in hand. Natalie is swaying back and forth. Ryan notices. Is she nervous? Excited?

Ding - The elevator door opens.

INT. RECEPTION, BOTTLING COMPANY - DAY

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

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

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

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

INT. CUBICLE CITY, BOTTLING COMPANY - DAY

Ryan and Natalie pass rows of cubicles. Heads begin to pop up to see their arrival. Natalie accidentally makes eye contact with one guy, then quickly shifts her gaze forward.

INT. WINDOWLESS CONFERENCE ROOM, BOTTLING COMPANY - DAY

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

RYAN

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

Ryan points to a stack of packets.

NATALIE

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

RYAN

Everything important in life comes with a packet.

MONTAGE OF MORE REAL PEOPLE REACTING TO BEING FIRED

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

RYAN

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

REAL PEOPLE tighten up as they begin to catch on.

RYAN

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

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

RYAN

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

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

RYAN

I understand why you are saying these things.

(MORE)

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

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

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

We SEE the "TREE OF ASPIRATIONS" sheet.

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

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

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

CUT TO:

BOB (AN ACTOR) PRESENTING A PHOTO OF HIS CHILDREN

BOB
 And what do you suggest I tell
 them?

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

Natalie can't hold back any longer.

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

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

BOB
 Positive effect?

NATALIE

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

BOB

Go fuck yourself. That's what my kids'll think.

Natalie shrinks. Ryan immediately covers.

RYAN

Your children's admiration is important to you?

BOB

Yeah. It was.

RYAN

(frankly)

Well, I doubt they ever admired you, Bob.

Bob looks up shocked and pissed.

BOB

Hey asshole, aren't you here to console me?

RYAN

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

BOB

Because they screw lingerie models.

RYAN

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

BOB

Yeah, well I can't dunk.

RYAN

But you can cook.

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

BOB

What are you talking about?

Ryan picks up Bob's resume.

RYAN

Your resume says you minored in French Culinary Arts. Most students work the fryer at KFC. You bussed tables at *Il Picatorre* to support yourself. Then you got out of college and started working here.

(looks up at Bob)

How much did they first pay you to give up on your dreams?

BOB

(flat)

Twenty seven thousand a year.

RYAN

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

Bob simply shrugs.

RYAN

Do you believe in fate, Bob?

BOB

Fate?

RYAN

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

BOB

(offering)

I met my wife at a gas station.

RYAN

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

Bob looks up and meets eyes with Ryan.

RYAN (CONT'D)

I see guys who work for the same company their entire lives. Clock in. Clock out. Never a moment of happiness.

(pauses for effect)

Not everyone gets this kind of opportunity.

(MORE)

RYAN (CONT'D)

The chance for rebirth. If not for
yourself... Do it for your kids.

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

Ryan shoots Natalie a look - *Hand over the packet.*

Natalie jumps to attention and hands Bob a packet.

INT. LOBBY, ST. LOUIS HILTON - NIGHT

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

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

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

BUSINESS WOMAN

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

DESK CLERK

We reserve priority assistance for
our Hilton Honors members.

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

RYAN

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

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

BUSINESS WOMAN

Fuck off.

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

Ryan's DIGITAL NUMBER bumps up another thousand points.

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM, ST. LOUIS HILTON - EVENING

Natalie is washing her hands, when she stops to look at herself in the mirror.

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

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

INT. RESTAURANT BAR, ST. LOUIS HILTON - EVENING

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

RYAN

You okay?

NATALIE

(covers quickly)

Yeah. Fine.

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

NATALIE

Hungry, much?

RYAN

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

NATALIE

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

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

RYAN

Your really want to know?

NATALIE

(mock serious)

I'm dying to know.

RYAN

I don't spend a nickel, if I can help it, unless it somehow profits my mileage account. I'm not talking hotel rooms and rental cars either, but internet services, cell phone, music downloads, teleflorists. The works. I shop them according to the miles they pay and I pit them against each other for the most value.

NATALIE

So, what are you saving up for?
Hawaii? South of France?

RYAN

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

NATALIE

That's it? You're saving to save?

RYAN

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

NATALIE

Wow. Seems a little abstract.
What's your target?

RYAN

I'd rather not.

NATALIE

(teasing)

It's a *secret* target?

RYAN

It's ten million miles.

NATALIE

Huh. Isn't ten million just a number?

RYAN

Pi is just a number.

NATALIE

I guess we all need a hobby.

Ryan looks back at Natalie - *Hobby?*

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Oh hey, I didn't mean to belittle your
collection. I get it. Sounds cool.

RYAN

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

NATALIE

Do they give you a parade or something?

RYAN

Lifetime Exec Platinum status. You get to meet the Chief Pilot, Maynard Finch. And... They put your name on the side of a plane.

NATALIE

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

RYAN

Now, who's stereotyping?

NANCY

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

RYAN

And why do you suppose that's singular to men?

NATALIE

Probably cause you can't have babies.

Ryan can't help but laugh a little.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

If I had that many miles, I'd just show up at the airport, look up at one of those big destination boards, pick a place and go.

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

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

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

Alex: "Can't fall asleep."

Ryan types back:

Ryan: "Me too. Just laying here."

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ALEX'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

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

Ryan's BLACKBERRY BUZZES again.

Alex: "You should rub one out."

RYAN
(chuckles)
Thanks for the advice.

Types back.

Ryan: "Only fair if you do too."

BLACKBERRY BUZZES again.

Alex: "Way ahead of you."

RYAN
Man alive.

Ryan: "Call me next time so I can listen."

Alex: ";) Have sweet dreams about me."

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

EXT. LAMBERT FIELD, ST. LOUIS - DAY

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

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

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

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

NATALIE
I don't get it.

RYAN
My sister is cooky. She thinks this is
charming... Like the gnome thing.

NATALIE

No, I mean... why would your sister want a fake photo in front of the St. Louis Airport?

RYAN

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

(points out the conical
main terminal)

The domed main terminal was the first of its kind. A precursor to everything from JFK to DeGualle.

NATALIE

(lame)

Wow. Pretty sweet.

Natalie takes the photo.

RYAN

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

NATALIE

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

RYAN

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

NATALIE

(quickly)

No.

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

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, WICHITA SECURITIES COMPANY - DAY

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

YOUNG ASIAN GUY

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

(MORE)

YOUNG ASIAN GUY (cont'd)
I am the one thing preventing this
place from being totally fucked in
the ass.

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

RYAN
Sometimes, they just need to vent.

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

Ryan gives it some thought.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, WICHITA SECURITIES COMPANY - LATER

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

Natalie sits up.

KAREN
I'm here to be fired, right?

NATALIE
We're here to talk about your future.

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

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

KAREN
Give me the bullet points.

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

KAREN
Placement services? How generous.

NATALIE

Commonly, it takes one month of searching for every ten thousand dollars you expect to earn in salary.

KAREN

So I could be looking for a while.

NATALIE

Not necessarily...

KAREN

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

NATALIE

(spirits lifted)

Oh yeah?

KAREN

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

NATALIE

I don't know. Why?

KAREN

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

Natalie begins to tremble.

EXT. WICHITA SECURITIES COMPANY COURTYARD - DAY

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

RYAN

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

NATALIE

They do?

RYAN

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

NATALIE

She was so calm.

RYAN
(not quite sure)
I think that's a good sign.

NATALIE
So they don't actually ever do it?

RYAN
No... it's just talk.

NATALIE
How do you know? Do you follow up?

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

Natalie is clearly still worried.

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

BEGIN MONTAGE

A PLANE PULLING BACK ITS GATE AND TAKING OFF

WHITE COLLAR PEOPLE ARE HANDED PACKETS

RYAN AND ALEX ENTERING A NEW HOTEL ROOM. THEY'RE BECOMING
MORE COMFORTABLE WITH EACH OTHER

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

Looking out the window at the passing landscape.

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

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

GARDENER DRIVES A RIDER MOWER ACROSS A TINY STRETCH OF GRASS

INT. HILTON HOTEL LOBBY - EARLY MORNING

Ryan turns a corner to find Natalie talking to her computer
screen with headphones on.

She's having an iChat with someone, but we only hear her side of the conversation. Ryan decides to listen in for a second.

NATALIE

I'll be back soon. Not really sure how long this whole exercise is supposed to last. He's fine... It's hard for these guys to accept change, you know.

(listens, rolls eyes)

I... I'm not even going to answer that... No, I can't even think of him that way... He's *old*.

Ryan frowns. Checks a mirror.

A NEW OFFICE - MORE EMPLOYEES REACT TO BEING LAID OFF

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

EXT. MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

A 757 touches down on the runway.

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

RYAN'S HEADSHOT - sitting on an EASLE.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, WICHITA HOTEL - AFTERNOON

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

RYAN

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

A titter through the crowd. For the first time, we see Natalie near the side, watching.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Don't worry. I'm not going to ask you to light it on fire.

Light laughter.

RYAN (CONT'D)

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

Ryan lets the weight sink in.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Now set that bag down.

You can feel the relief in the room.

RYAN (CONT'D)

You don't need to carry all that weight.

Noticeable agreement.

RYAN (CONT'D)

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

Ryan focuses towards his conclusion.

RYAN (CONT'D)

The slower we move, the faster we die. We are not swans. We're sharks.

INT. ANNEX, WICHITA HOTEL - AFTERNOON

Ryan has finished his session and is talking to eager stragglers. Ryan accepts a business card and elaborates on one of his theories.

Meanwhile, down the hall, Natalie is finishing a phone call. She looks shell shocked. She closes her phone and pockets it in silence.

EXT. TARMAC, MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

AN AMERICAN AIRLINES PLANE touches down.

EXT. MIAMI BOULEVARD - DAY

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

INT. HILTON AIRPORT SHUTTLE - AFTERNOON

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

NATALIE

Never...?

Ryan smiles to the few other riders as if apologizing.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

You never want to get married?
Never want kids?

RYAN

Is that so bizarre?

NATALIE

Yes. Yes it is.

RYAN

I don't see the value.

Natalie sighs.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Sell it to me.

NATALIE

What?

RYAN

Sell me marriage.

NATALIE

I... Uh... How how about love?

RYAN

Pff...

NATALIE
Okay. Stability?

RYAN
How many stable marriages do you know?

NATALIE
Someone to talk to, spend your life with?

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

The shuttle stops and everyone goes to grab their bags.

INT. LOBBY, MIAMI HILTON - DAY

Ryan and Natalie enter, still having the same conversation.

NATALIE
How about just not dying alone?

Ryan stops to address this.

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

Ryan turns, thinks of something, then turns back.

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

Natalie looks steamed.

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

Out of nowhere, Natalie starts crying.

RYAN
(almost silent)
Oh fuck.

Natalie is now balling in the middle of the lobby.

NATALIE
Brian left me.

RYAN
Oh, hey... I...

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

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

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

ALEX
I should give you both a moment.

Natalie attempts a recovery. It's not graceful.

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

Natalie gives Alex a firm handshake.

ALEX
Maybe a drink?

Ryan goes to challenge the idea, when...

NATALIE
Now we're talking.

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

CUT TO:

THE SCREEN OF NATALIE'S CELL PHONE

TEXT READS: **"I Think it's time we c other people"**

INT. BAR LOUNGE - MIAMI HILTON - MOMENTS LATER

The three share a booth. Natalie is sipping a drink. She seems to have settled a little.

ALEX

He broke up with you over text message?

RYAN

(soft dig)

That's kind of like firing people over the internet.

Both Natalie and Alex shoot Ryan a look.

ALEX

(re: the ex-boyfriend)

What a weasely prick.

NATALIE

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

ALEX

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

NATALIE

I followed him to Omaha.

RYAN

You did?

NATALIE

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

RYAN

To Nebraska.

NATALIE

I look in the mirror and I just see compromise... I'm supposed to *do* something.

ALEX

You'll do plenty.

NATALIE

I just can't... I thought I'd be engaged by now.

(catches herself)

No offense.

ALEX
It's alright.

RYAN
None taken.

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

ALEX
Life can underwhelm you that way.

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

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

ALEX
It doesn't work that way.

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

ALEX
They can be a little counterproductive.

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

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

RYAN
Well done.

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

ALEX
You really thought this guy was the one.

NATALIE

Yeah, I guess. I don't know. I could have made it work. He just really fit the bill.

RYAN

The bill?

NATALIE

My type. You know, white collar. College grad. Loves dogs. Likes funny movies. Six foot one. Brown hair. Kind eyes. Works in finance but is outdoorsy, you know, *on the weekends*.

(we think she's done)

I always imagined he'd have a single syllable name like Matt or John or... Dave. In a perfect world, he drives a Four Runner and the only thing he loves more than me is his golden lab. Oh... and a nice smile.

(back to Alex and Ryan)

How about you?

This catches both Alex and Ryan off guard.

RYAN

I'm not sure if...

NATALIE

I meant Alex...

RYAN

Right.

ALEX

Huh, let me think for a sec.

(mulls it over)

Well, by the time you're thirty four, all the physical requirements are pretty much out the window. I mean you secretly pray he'll be taller than you.

Ryan smiles.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Not an asshole would be nice? Just someone who enjoys my company. Comes from a good family - You don't think about that when you're younger.

(thinking)

Wants kids... Likes kids...

(MORE)

ALEX (CONT'D)

Wants kids. Healthy enough to play catch with his future son one day.

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

ALEX (CONT'D)

Please let him earn more than I do. That doesn't make sense now, but believe me, it will one day. Otherwise it's just a recipe for disaster.

(reaching)

Hopefully some hair on his head...? But it's not exactly a deal-breaker anymore. Nice smile... Yep, a nice smile just might do it.

Alex looks to Ryan. He has a nice smile.

NATALIE

Wow. That was depressing.

Alex and Ryan react - *It's not that bad.*

NATALIE (CONT'D)

I should just date lesbians.

ALEX

Tried it. We're no picnic ourselves.

Natalie looks worse than when the conversation started.

NATALIE

I don't mind being married to my career, and I don't expect it to hold me in bed as I fall asleep.

(looks up)

I just don't want to settle.

ALEX

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

NATALIE

It is. By definition.

ALEX

Don't worry, by the time someone is right for you, it won't feel like settling... And the only person left to judge you will be the twenty four year old girl with a target on your back.

Natalie cracks a smile.

Ryan looks to Alex. They've grown closer.

INT. LOBBY LOUNGE, MIAMI HILTON - DAY

Ryan, Alex, and Natalie wheel their ROLL-AWAYS towards the elevator.

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

Ryan and Alex share an uncomfortable silence.

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

RYAN
(quickly)
No...

ALEX
It's nothing like that.

NATALIE
We are in Miami.

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

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

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

ALEX
Well, I mean...

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

RYAN
I mean, I don't know if...
These guy put on a quite a party...

ALEX
More money than they know what to do with...

NATALIE
No, I get it. I'm in!

INT. CONFERENCE CORRIDOR, MIAMI HILTON - NIGHT

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

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

ALEX
Jennifer Chu?

NATALIE
Oh shit!

RYAN
It's going to be fine.

INT. SOFTWARE CONVENTION PARTY, MIAMI HILTON - NIGHT

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

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

RYAN
(to Natalie)
You okay there?

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

ALEX
Thank you, Natalie.

A CONFERENCE LEADER steps up to an on stage MIC.

CONFERENCE LEADER
How's everyone doing out there?!

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

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

The opening beats of the 90's jam "Bust-A-Move" blast over the speakers and sure enough, now-40-year-old rapper, Young MC steps out and starts rapping.

YOUNG MC
 THIS HERE'S A TALE FOR ALL THE
 FELLAS... TRY TO DO WHAT THOSE
 LADIES TELL US... GET SHOT DOWN
 CAUSE YOU'RE OVERZEALOUS... PLAY
 HARD TO GET, FEMALES GET JEALOUS...

Everyone goes crazy and starts dancing.

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

RYAN
 Think she'll be okay?

ALEX
 Look...

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

EXT. BOAT - NIGHT

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

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

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

RYAN
 That's why I don't have a "back home".

ALEX
 I know. You're so cool. "Mr. Empty
 Back Pack".

Ryan emotionally stumbles.

RYAN
 You know about the back pack?

ALEX
 I googled you.

RYAN
 You did?

ALEX

It's what us modern girls do when we have a crush.

RYAN

Did it bother you?

ALEX

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

RYAN

I don't hate people. I'm not exactly a hermit.

ALEX

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

RYAN

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

ALEX

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

RYAN

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

ALEX

Jesus...

RYAN

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

ALEX

Oh my God.

RYAN

Right?

(relives it for a second)

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

(A beat)

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

The idea settles in. Ryan returns to the point.

RYAN

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

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

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

SOFTWARE DUDE

Hey... I think we're out of gas.

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

EXT. PONTOON BOAT - NIGHT

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

Cold, soaked, and smiling.

Natalie and David are there too... still kissing.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

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

INT. LOBBY, MIAMI HILTON - NIGHT

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

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

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

RYAN
Hey, you're up...

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

RYAN
(disappointed)
Oh... Okay.

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

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

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

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

RYAN
I can't remember the last time I enjoyed spending time with someone as much as you.

ALEX
Neither can I.

They kiss again and he lets go. Alex leaves and the door closes. Ryan just lays in bed for a moment.

INT. CAFE - MIAMI HILTON - MORNING

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

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

Meanwhile, after a little silent eating...

NATALIE

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

RYAN

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

NATALIE

What?

RYAN

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

NATALIE

(not proud)
I... just left.

RYAN

Protocol is always tricky.

NATALIE

I didn't know what was right.

RYAN

Sometimes there really is no right thing to do.

This doesn't comfort her.

EXT. OCEAN BOARDWALK, MIAMI - DAY

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

NATALIE

What happened to Alex?

RYAN

Had to skip town early to make a meeting.

NATALIE

That's too bad. Where does she live?

RYAN

Chicago.

NATALIE

You thinking of going to see her?

RYAN

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

NATALIE

What kind of relationship do you have?

RYAN

It's, you know. Casual.

NATALIE

Sounds pretty special.

RYAN

It works for us.

NATALIE

Think there's any future there?

RYAN

Never thought about it. What's going on here?

NATALIE

Really never thought about it?

RYAN

(a good lie)
No.

NATALIE

How can you not think about these things? How does it not even cross your mind that you might want to have a future with somebody?

RYAN

It's simple, you know that moment when you look into someone's eyes and you feel them looking right into your soul, and the whole world goes quiet for a second.

NATALIE

(finally, a break through)
Yes.

RYAN

Right. Well, I don't.

NATALIE

You're an asshole.

Natalie knocks over the CUT OUT and stands up.

RYAN

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

NATALIE

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

RYAN

A chance to what?

NATALIE

A chance at something real?

RYAN

Natalie, your definition of "real" is going to evolve as you get older...

NATALIE

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

RYAN

Bullshit philosophy?

NATALIE

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

RYAN

No, it's simply a life choice.

NATALIE

It's a cocoon of self-banishment.

RYAN

Wow. Big words.

NATALIE

Screw you.

RYAN

Well, screw you too.

NATALIE

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

Natalie begins walking away.

RYAN

I don't have a gauntlet of...

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

RYAN

... Fuck!

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

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

INT. BATHROOM, MIAMI HILTON - DAY

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

INT. CONCOURSE, MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

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

EXT. TARMAC, MIAMI INTERNATIONAL - DAY

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

EXT. TARMAC, DETROIT INTERATIONAL - DAY

The plane lands amidst snow.

INT. RENTAL CAR, DETROIT HIGHWAY - DAY

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

RYAN

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

EXT. DETROIT CAR PART COMPANY - DAY

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

INT. DETROIT COMPANY - DAY

Ryan and Natalie check in at the front desk.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, DETROIT COMPANY - DAY

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

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

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

CRAIG GREGORY

Welcome to Detroit.

Natalie and Ryan exchange a look.

RYAN

What's going on here?

CRAIG GREGORY

I've been getting those great numbers over the last few days. Thought we should nut up and give this a try.

RYAN

We could use a little more time.

CRAIG GREGORY

Gotta leave the nest at some point.

RYAN

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

CRAIG GREGORY

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

Ryan sighs.

RYAN

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

CRAIG GREGORY

I was thinking Natalie takes this one.

Natalie, once confident, now takes pause.

RYAN

She's hardly ready for this.

CRAIG GREGORY

I've been watching her. She's great.

RYAN

(re: the webcam)

This is a whole other animal...

CRAIG GREGORY

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

NATALIE

I'm... I'm game.

CRAIG GREGORY

Atta girl.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, DETROIT COMPANY - MOMENTS LATER

Ryan and Natalie have a moment aside.

RYAN

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

NATALIE

Got it.

RYAN

Just keep it professional. You're
going to do fine.

INT. CRAIG GREGORY'S OFFICE, CTC - LATER

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

INT. ALTERNATE CONFERENCE ROOM, DETROIT COMPANY - DAY

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

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

NATALIE

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

SAMUELS

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

NATALIE

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

SAMUELS

What are you talking about?

NATALIE

You've been let go.

SAMUELS

What, just like that? I can't believe... Who are you?

NATALIE

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

SAMUELS

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

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

NATALIE

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

SAMUELS

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

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

NATALIE

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

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

NATALIE (CONT'D)

There's a packet in front of you.

Samuels picks up the packet and opens it.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

I want you to take some time and review it.

Samuels begins to leaf through.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

All the answers you're looking for are inside those pages.

(MORE)

NATALIE (CONT'D)

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

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

NATALIE (CONT'D)

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

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

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Thank you for your time, Mr. Samuels.

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

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Mr. Samuels? There's nothing else
we can discuss now.

(and again)

Thank you for your time.

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

Craig leans into his computer, watching intently.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

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

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

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

RYAN

You did good.

Natalie nods.

RYAN (CONT'D)

You okay? Want me to take over.

NATALIE

No, I'm alright.

Natalie pulls out a LIST OF FORTY NAMES. The amount of people
is daunting. She crosses off the first name.

EXT. PARKING LOT, DETROIT CAR PART COMPANY - AFTERNOON

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

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

RYAN (CONT'D)

... We just got out here. That was one place. I think we need to try a few more...

(listens)

Maybe there isn't a difference, but it's comforting to know we're in the next room.

(listening)

I know you don't give a shit about my comfort.

(listens)

We could just use a little more time. That's all I'm saying.

(listens)

Right... Right.

(shakes his head)

Yeah... Alright... Uh huh. Bye.

Ryan hangs up.

RYAN (CONT'D)

He thought you did a great job. You did - I was real proud of you.

NATALIE

Thanks.

RYAN

We're being pulled off the road.

(clarifying)

We're going home.

NATALIE

For good?

RYAN

That's what it looks like.

A moment of mixed emotions.

INT. RYAN'S ROOM, DETROIT HILTON - NIGHT

Ryan is holding the LARGE EMBOSSED ENVELOPE of his sister's WEDDING INVITATION.

He pulls out the RESPONSE CARD, looks at the line for extra guests, then sets it down. He pulls out the actual INVITATION. It looks inexpensive. Sighs.

INT. NORTH TERMINAL, DETROIT AIRPORT - MORNING

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

NATALIE

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

RYAN

It's alright. I understand.

NATALIE

I mean, who am I to be dolling out relationship advice?

RYAN

It's fine.

NATALIE

You going to be okay?

RYAN

What do you mean?

NATALIE

In Omaha?

RYAN

Oh, I don't know.

NATALIE

It's better than you'd think.

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

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

NATALIE

Ryan, where are you going?

RYAN

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

Ryan disappears in the crowd.

EXT. PARKING LOT, LAS VEGAS - DAY

We're looking at the LUXOR PYRAMID.

RYAN (O.C.)

Okay, start walking it in from the left.

ALEX enters frame, carrying the engagement CUT OUT.

ALEX

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

RYAN

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

Alex obliges. She checks out the engagement photo.

ALEX

How do you feel about the wedding?

RYAN

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

Ryan takes the photo.

Alex picks up the engagement photo.

ALEX

They're a cute couple.

RYAN

Think so?

ALEX

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

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

RYAN

How do you like Wisconsin in February?

ALEX

Who doesn't?
(sweetly)
(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)
I like it if you're there. Besides, I
know a killer burger in Milwaukee.

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

This quickly registers... *He's inviting me to the wedding.*

ALEX (CONT'D)
No...

RYAN
What? I haven't even...

ALEX
I can't.

RYAN
Why not?

ALEX
I couldn't.

RYAN
I'm being serious.

ALEX
You want me to be your date?

RYAN
Well... Yeah.

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

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

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

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

A long thoughtful beat. Alex sighs.

ALEX

Okay.

RYAN

Really?

ALEX

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

RYAN

I feel like we should kiss or something.

ALEX

Then kiss me.

They do.

INT. BAGGAGE CAROUSEL, MILWAUKEE AIRPORT - DAY

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

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

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

EXT. DRIVEWAY, CHALET SUITES - DAY

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

INT. LOBBY, CHALET SUITES HOTEL - DAY

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

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

RYAN

(to the CHECK-IN LADY)
Are you available?

CHECK-IN LADY
Sorry, this line is for members of
our Matterhorn program.

Ryan steams.

INT. CORRIDOR, CHALET SUITES - DAY

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

KARA
Ryan?

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

RYAN
Kara...

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

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

KARA
Well, *hello*.

ALEX
Hi.

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

RYAN
Kara, what are you doing at a hotel?

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

RYAN
You're not staying at the house?

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

RYAN
Oh, okay.

KARA
Yup. So, you guys are dating?

Ryan and Alex fumble over each other.

RYAN
Um...

ALEX
It's not exactly...

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

An awkward beat in the corridor of the Chalet Suites.

RYAN
So, the rehearsal dinner?

KARA
Yeah, I'll see you two there.

Kara humps the laundry basket down the hall.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, CHALET SUITES - DAY

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

RYAN
There's a packet.

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

RYAN
Um, I love you?

Ryan is kidding, but not really. They play it off as a joke, but can't help feel the weight of this "moment".

INT. CLUB ROOM FIRESIDE LOUNGE, CHALET SUITES - EVENING

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

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

JULIE
Oh my God, Ryan!

She hops up and gives him a hug.

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

ALEX
The basket was very lovely.

JULIE
Tammy wrapped all of them.

Tammy waves.

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

RYAN
Me? You're the one getting married.

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

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

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

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

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

RYAN
I brought those photos you were asking for...

JULIE
(lights up)
Oh great! They go over there.

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

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

Ryan returns to the conversation with his sister and Alex.

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

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

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

ALEX
(helps)
... Substantial?

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

The idea of this lands on Ryan pretty hard.

ALEX
It was a great idea.

JULIE
Thanks.

CUT TO:

AN HOUR LATER

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

JIM

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

RYAN

Sounds nice.

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

JIM

Homes will go in the high fours.

RYAN

Must be a nice development.

JIM

(correcting)

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

RYAN

Nice.

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

JIM

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

RYAN

That's a nice touch.

JIM

What?

RYAN

That bit at the end about promise... I like it.

JIM
 (a little embarrassed)
 Thanks.
 (leading)
 So, you still renting that one-
 bedroom?

RYAN
 I gave it up.

JIM
 (surprised)
 You own now?

RYAN
 No.

JIM
 But you're looking?

RYAN
 Not really. No.

The conversation stalls out.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, CHALET SUITES - NIGHT

Everyone is leaving. Tammy grabs Julie's hands.

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

JULIE
 I don't know!

TAMMY
 You want some Xanax?

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

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

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

JIM
 One more box...

ALEX
I'll get it.

RYAN
You sure?

ALEX
Yeah, yeah...

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

RYAN
Jim seems like a good guy.

JULIE
Yeah, I know... Isn't he great?

KARA
He's going to make a great husband.

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

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

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

KARA
(uncomfortable)
He's been really supportive.

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

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

Alex comes out with the second box. Ryan notices and grabs the flowers from her and sets them in Jim's luxury pick-up truck.

INT. CORRIDOR, CHALET SUITES - NIGHT

Ryan, Alex, and Kara arrive at their adjacent rooms. Key cards slide in simultaneously. Alex heads in. Ryan stops.

RYAN
Hey Kara?

KARA
Yeah.

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

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

RYAN
Oh.

KARA
Yup. Sleep tight.

FADE TO:

EXT. RYAN'S OLD HIGH SCHOOL - NEXT MORNING

The rental car pulls up into the empty lot. Snow on the ground. It's cold.

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

ALEX
That's all you got?

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

RYAN
Are we really doing this?

ALEX
Give me a boost.

INT. CLASSROOM, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

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

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

ALEX
You ever fool around with one of
your teachers?

RYAN
No. You?

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

They head for the door.

A TEAM PHOTO OF A HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL TEAM

A finger reaches and points to a teenage face.

RYAN (O.C.)
That's me.

INT. HALLWAY, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - NEXT MORNING

Ryan and Alex are huddled at the trophy case.

ALEX
You played basketball?

RYAN
Point guard. Don't act so surprised.

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

EXT. LOADING DOCK, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Ryan and Alex walk passed a concrete ledge.

RYAN
My first fight.

ALEX
How'd it go?

RYAN
Got my ass kicked.

INT. STAIRWELL, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Ryan shows an area behind the stairwell.

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

ALEX
Very romantic.

CUT TO:

RYAN AND ALEX KISSING UNDER THE STAIRWELL

EXT. SOCCER FIELD, WAUPACA HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Alex and Ryan sit tight like teenagers on the team bench.

ALEX
I'm really happy I came here.

The school soccer team takes the field for practice.

RYAN
(to the team)
Go Cougars!

Players look back at him strangely.

Ryan's phone rings.

RYAN
(checks caller ID)
It's Kara.

The first thing we hear is crying in the background.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Kara is on her cell phone. Behind her in the deep background, we see bridesmaids consoling Julie.

KARA

Ryan, where are you? We're having a meltdown here.

RYAN

What's wrong? What happened?

KARA

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

RYAN

Yeah, of course...

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Ryan's rental car pulls up in front. He hops out and Alex takes the driver's seat.

ALEX

I'll grab your suit.
(adding)
Good luck.

INT. ENTRY, CHURCH - DAY

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

RYAN

What happened?

KARA

Jim's got cold feet.

RYAN

Today?

KARA

That's how cold feet work.

RYAN

What do you want me to do?

KARA

Talk to him.

RYAN

You want me to talk to him?

KARA

Hey, it's either you or me. You know my record. I've already struck out once.

RYAN

I haven't been to bat. I haven't been in the dugout.

KARA

Don't you talk for a living? Motivational type stuff?

RYAN

I tell people how to avoid commitment.

A beat.

KARA

What kind of fucked up message is that?

RYAN

It's a philosophy.

KARA

It's stupid.

RYAN

Hey, it might have helped you.

A beat of stalemate.

KARA

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

Ryan takes a breath.

INT. SUNDAY SCHOOL ROOM, CHURCH - DAY

Ryan quietly steps in to find Jim, half dressed in a tux reading the children's book "The Velveteen Rabbit". Jim snuffles. Ryan goes to leave, when...

JIM

Ryan?

RYAN

Oh, hey Jim.

JIM
You ever read this?

RYAN
Yeah, it's pretty powerful stuff.

JIM
I'll say.

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

Jim puts down the book.

JIM
I don't think I can do this.

RYAN
Okay. What makes you say that today?

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

Ryan gulps. Fuck.

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

RYAN
The point?

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

RYAN
(dancing)
It's marriage... it's the most
beautiful thing on Earth... you
know, what everyone aspires to...

JIM
You never got married.

RYAN
That's true...

JIM
You never even tried.

RYAN
Well, it's hard to define "try".

JIM
You seem happier than most of my
married friends.

Ryan takes a beat.

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

CUT TO:

KARA EAVESDROPPING AT THE DOOR WITH A LOOK OF COLD FEAR

BACK TO:

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

Jim sinks a little.

RYAN (CONT'D)
I'm not the guy you'd normally want
to talk to about all this stuff...
But think about it - your favorite
memories. The greatest moments of
your life? Were you alone?

JIM
(thinks about it)
No... I guess not.

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

Jim nods.

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

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

Jim chuckles to himself.

RYAN
Kind of lonely?

JIM
Yeah.

RYAN
Hey. Everybody needs a copilot.

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

JIM
That's a nice touch.

RYAN
Thanks.

JIM
What's the mood like out there?

RYAN
It's not good... Emotional.

JIM
What should I do?

RYAN
(twinkle in his eye)
Go get her.

INT. ENTRY, CHURCH

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

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

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

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

KARA
Welcome home.

MONTAGE BEGINS AS A SERIES OF IMAGES:

- Ryan and Alex getting dressed in a little kitchen in the church. They're in a hurry and a little sloppy, but there's a crooked joy in their faces.
- Jim standing at the alter with the priest getting a pat on the back from his best man.
- Julie getting walked to the alter by Jim's uncle. They pass Ryan, who looks on proudly.
- The priest gives his blessings.
- Jim raises Julie's veil. They kiss.
- Wedding attendees file into the Chalet Suites Banquet Hall.
- Ryan and Alex mingle with their table.

RYAN
Hi, I'm Ryan.

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

RYAN
Oh, hey!

- Ryan and Alex dance like teenagers.
- The band does a cheesy choreographed dance step.
- Jim makes a speech. He is not good at public speaking, but the guests are generous with laughter.
- Tammy has her tongue down a groomsman's throat.

- Ryan pulls Kara onto the dance floor. She rests her head on his shoulder and they slow dance.
- Jim and Julie make their farewell and run off.
- Ryan and Alex help pick the center pieces off the tables.
- Ryan and Alex get into the elevator together. She's wearing his jacket. We're about to see them kiss, when the elevator door closes.

INT. CONCOURSE, MILWAUKEE AIRPORT - MORNING

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

ALEX

When am I going to see you?

RYAN

You're just going to have to come and visit.

ALEX

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

RYAN

Same guy. Just one address.

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

ALEX

Call me if you get lonely.

A beat. And then...

RYAN

... I'm lonely.

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

CUT TO:

INT. RYAN'S APARTMENT, OMAHA - EARLY EVENING

The door opens and Ryan wheels in his Roll-Away. He walks over to the window, parts the blinds and checks out his awful view.

We see Ryan opening some mail. We see Ryan laying in bed.
It's quiet. It's alone.

INT. CTC HEADQUARTERS, CTC - DAY

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

NATALIE

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

RYAN

You don't actually call them that.

NATALIE

I prefer "terminators", but it bumped with legal.

RYAN

Really? I can't imagine why.

NATALIE

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

RYAN

Are they actually on line, right now?

NATALIE

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

(catches one of the guys making a mistake)

Kyle, you're running through the events too quickly. You have to give them time to acknowledge each statement. Okay? It's a legal thing.

Ryan can only watch.

INT. RYAN'S OFFICE, CTC - DAY

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

RYAN

This is ridiculous.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM, CTC - ANOTHER DAY

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

EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP - DAY

One of the GIANT DIGITAL MARQUEES reads: "GOALQUEST XX"

INT. GREEN ROOM, GOALQUEST - DAY

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

GOALQUEST HOST
You ready to rock?

Ryan nods and gets up.

INT. CONVENTION HALL, LAS VEGAS - DAY

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

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

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

A breath.

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

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

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

Ryan isn't feeling them. He is not inspired. He isn't believable. He's barely even there.

RYAN

Now, I want you to pack it with all
the stuff you have in your life.
Start with the little things.

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

RYAN

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

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

RYAN

Excuse me.

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

GOALQUEST HOST

(to Ryan)

What the fuck are you doing?

(to crowd)

Okay, everyone just relax. We'll
have your next guest out in a sec.

EXT. CONCOURSE, MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan hustles past SLOT MACHINES until he is actually jogging.

INT. BOARDING GATE, MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

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

INT. BOEING 757 - NIGHT

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

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

Ryan on the PEOPLE MOVER under the ceiling of NEON LIGHTS.
Peaceful music emits from hidden speakers. Ryan walks briskly
past idle riders.

EXT. RENTAL CAR SATELLITE KIOSK, CHICAGO - NIGHT

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

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

EXT. TOWNHOUSE, CHICAGO SUBURBS - NIGHT

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

Ryan stops, knocks, and puts on a smile.

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

RYAN
Surprise.

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

A man's voice calls from inside.

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

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

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

Ryan just stands there. Emotionally bleeding to death.

ALEX
(almost inaudible)
What are you doing here?

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

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

ALEX'S HUSBAND
Who was that?

ALEX

... just some guy who was lost.

Ryan gets in his rental car and drives off.

EXT. CHICAGO HILTON - NIGHT

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

INT. RYAN'S SUITE, CHICAGO HILTON - MORNING

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

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

Ryan is on the phone with Alex.

RYAN

How could you lie to me?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ALEX'S CAR, DOWNTOWN GARAGE - SAME

Alex sits in the car with the engine running.

ALEX

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

RYAN

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

ALEX

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

RYAN

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

ALEX

I thought our relationship was perfectly clear. You're...

(MORE)

ALEX (cont'd)
 (a long beat)
 ... an escape.

RYAN
 I'm an escape?

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

RYAN
 I'm a parenthesis?

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

Ryan stumbles on this. *What does he want?*

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

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

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

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

EXT. ESCALATOR, CHICAGO O'HARE AIRPORT - MORNING

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

INT. TICKET DESK - CHICAGO O'HAIRE - DAY

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

PLUCKY TICKET AGENT
 Welcome back, Mr. Bingham.

RYAN

Yeah, right, you got me in 2C?

PLUCKY TICKET AGENT

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

RYAN

What's got you so fucking happy?

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

PLUCKY TICKET AGENT

Your boarding card, Mr. Bingham.

Ryan takes the ticket and exits.

INT. BOEING 757 - DAY

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

PURSER

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

Passengers look up.

PURSER (CONT'D)

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

RYAN

Oh no...

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

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

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

MAYNARD FINCH

(to Ryan)

That seat taken?

Maynard gives a little salute to his flight attendants, then slides by Ryan to the window seat.

MAYNARD FINCH

You're the youngest yet to hit
twenty mil. Don't know where you
found the time...

(remembers)

Oh right, here you go.

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

MAYNARD FINCH (CONT'D)

Seventh card we've made. Small club.
We really appreciate your loyalty.

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

RYAN

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

MAYNARD FINCH

Really? What did you want to say?

A long beat.

RYAN

You know, I... I can't remember.

MAYNARD FINCH

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

Ryan looks at him straight in the face.

RYAN

I'm from here.

INT. RYAN'S OFFICE, CTC - NEXT DAY

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

AIRLINE OPERATOR

Hello, Mr. Bingham.

RYAN

Oh, how did you know it was me?

AIRLINE OPERATOR

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

RYAN

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

AIRLINE OPERATOR

Certainly. How many miles would you like to transfer?

RYAN

How many miles would it take to circle the globe?

AIRPORT OPERATOR

We have our "around-the-world" tickets. They're five hundred thousand miles each.

RYAN

Sounds perfect.

Craig enters Ryan's doorway.

CRAIG GREGORY

Got a second?

RYAN

(to the airline operator)

I'm going to have to call you right back.

Craig takes a seat across from Ryan.

CRAIG GREGORY

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

RYAN

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

An uncomfortable beat.

CRAIG GREGORY

Do you remember Karen Barnes?

Ryan doesn't.

CRAIG GREGORY (CONT'D)
She was part of a thirty person
reduction a few weeks back in
Wichita. Natalie fired her.

RYAN
No, I fire dozens of people a day.

CRAIG GREGORY
She killed herself. Jumped off a bridge.

RYAN
Fuck.

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

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

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

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

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

Ryan remembers her.

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

CRAIG GREGORY
Natalie quit.

Ryan isn't surprised.

RYAN
Just like that?

CRAIG GREGORY
Text message.

Ryan stifles a laugh.

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

RYAN
She say where she was going?

CRAIG GREGORY
Nah. She was pretty upset.

RYAN
I should give her a call.

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

Ryan doesn't react.

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

RYAN
I'm fine. What about video conferencing?

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

RYAN
How long are you sending me out?

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

Ryan absorbs this. Nods.

INT. OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

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

MANAGER
So, what happened?

We turn to reveal Natalie.

NATALIE

How exactly do you mean?

MANAGER

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

NATALIE

(obvious cover)

It's challenging work.

MANAGER

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

NATALIE

(after a beat)

... I followed a boy.

The manager smiles to himself.

MANAGER

Everybody does at one point or another.

The manager raises a letter - It's Ryan's letter.

MANAGER

This guy says I'd be lucky to have you.

INT. RYAN'S OFFICE, CTC - DAY

Ryan writing the letter. We hear what he's writing...

RYAN (V.O.)

To whom it may concern, I can't even count the number of people I've fired in my lifetime. So many, that I've forgotten what it's like to actually hire somebody. We've never met, but I know you'd be lucky to have Natalie Keener. My advice? Take her and don't look back. She'll be the best decision you've made in a long time.

INT. OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

The manager puts down the letter and reaches out a hand.

MANAGER

Hope he's right.

Natalie breaks into a smile, then jumps back to professional.

INT. CORRIDOR, RYAN'S LOFT - DAY

Ryan steps out his front door, ROLL-AWAY in tow.

INT. OMAHA AIRPORT - DAY

Ryan walks through the automated door. He looks like he did in the opening of the film. Maybe even wearing the same clothes. Something is different though.

RYAN (V.O.)

Tonight, most people will be welcomed home by jumping dogs and squealing kids. Their spouses will ask about their day and tonight they'll sleep.

Ryan stops and looks up at a GIANT BOARD OF DESTINATIONS. An endless list of cities around the world. A menu of new lives departing every five minutes.

RYAN (V.O.)

The stars will wheel forth from their daytime hiding places.

We look back at Ryan. His eyes lock on one of the cities. We don't see which one. He makes a mental decision and turns in the direction of the gate. He lets go of his ROLL-AWAY.

RYAN (V.O.)

And one of those lights, slightly brighter than the rest, will be my wingtip, passing over, blessing them.

Ryan takes a step, but before his foot can land we...

CUT TO CLOUDS