

"BREACH OF CONFIDENCE"
an original screenplay
by Ron Sasso

Contact: Ron Sasso
Cell #: (605) 593-3759
Email: ron.sasso@yahoo.com

"BREACH OF CONFIDENCE"

FADE IN:

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The HUM of an air conditioner fills the quiet room as THREE MEN and TWO WOMEN who are professionally dressed, sit behind a conference table looking stone faced. STAN, a balding man in his 40's who looks like someone just ran over his dog, sits in the center of the group.

Standing in front of them on the other side of the table is MILES FLETCHER, a forty-something year old with a worn, but caring face and slim build.

Stan reads from a sheet of paper.

STAN

This board, by a majority vote, hereby finds you in violation of the Pennsylvania Counselor's Code of Ethics for breach of confidentiality. We hereby suspend your license and right to counsel in the state of Pennsylvania for one full year.

He pauses, then looks up at Miles.

STAN (CONT'D)

Miles, do you have anything you would like to add?

MILES

Yeah...I'm sorry I acted impulsively...I thought what I did was right---but I won't make the same mistake again...

Miles lowers his head in shame.

STAN

Good luck to you, Miles.

INSERT: "3 YEARS LATER"

INT. COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Miles attempts to teach a class of TWENTY STUDENTS. Half are interested, the other half are bored.

MILES

Ethics is the cornerstone of all good counseling.

(pauses)

Does anyone know why confidentiality is important?

MEAGAN, an attractive and intelligent looking female student with red hair raises her hand.

MILES (CONT'D)

Meagan, yes?

MEAGAN

TO build trust. If the client thinks you're gonna tell other people about them, they won't open up.

MILES

Very good.

A male student wearing a football jacket raises his hand.

MILES (CONT'D)

Yes, BOB?

BOB

Didn't you get in trouble a couple of years ago for talkin' to the cops about a client?

Miles appears caught off guard by this question but gains composure to answer it.

MILES

(hesitantly)

Yes...that happened a few years ago. The state counseling board didn't look too favorably upon that. I was young and made a stupid mistake---as a result they suspended my license to counsel for a year.

MEAGAN

Why'd you break confidentiality?

MILES

The client I was working with confessed to a murder.

This gets the attention of his students.

MILES (CONT'D)

I contacted the police but they never found any evidence. My client sued me for breach of confidence and won.

MEAGAN

(confused)

But aren't you obligated to break confidentiality when someone's in danger? He said he killed someone.

MILES

A dead person can't be in immanent danger when they're already dead. There's no urgency. You must protect the information they shared in confidence.

MEAGAN

You mean a person can tell you they killed someone and you can't do anything about it?

MILES

That's correct. As long as they have no plans to do it again.

JEN, an extroverted 20 year old student sitting near Meagan, blurts out with a midwest accent...

JEN

Doesn't that suck!

There's some laughter from the classroom.

A BUZZER signals the end of class. All the students get up to leave.

MILES

(loudly)

Don't forget we have an exam after break!

Several students groan.

MILES (CONT'D)

Remember it was your choice to have it *after* the break.

We see Jen and Meagan walk past Miles.

MILES (CONT'D)

Jen, you were in rare form today.

JEN
(smiling broadly)
I'm totally gone about spring break!

MILES
Where're you going?

JEN
Fort Lauderdale...I'm gonna find
some sun, fun and a man with hot
buns!

EXT. BATTERED WOMEN'S SHELTER - DAY

The shelter is in a poverty stricken area. ERIC ANDERSON, a confident and suave looking 28 year-old, exits the shelter.

A gray haired black woman, KATHY, approaches the building.

KATHY
Hey Eric, how's it goin'?

ERIC
Okay, though Ellie's back again.

KATHY
Damn, what do we gotta do to get
through that thick head of hers?

ERIC
I visited with her for a while---Joe
beat her up pretty bad this time.
Half her face was swollen.

KATHY
She gonna press charges?

ERIC
No. But she said she's got some
family in Ohio she's gonna go to.

KATHY
Good! When's she leavin'?

ERIC
(smiling)
I booked her on Greyhound to leave
tomorrow afternoon.

KATHY
(excited)
Yes!!!

She gives Eric a high five. Then she tempers her excitement and looks somber.

KATHY (CONT'D)

We're gonna miss havin' you 'round here.

ERIC

I'm gonna miss it too. It's been rewarding work.

KATHY

Well, I better git inside---make sure she don't change her mind---you know how Ellie is....If I don't see ya before you go, have a good trip.

ERIC

Thanks, I will.

Kathy goes inside and Eric walks away.

INT. COLLEGE APARTMENT - DAY

A door opens and Meagan walks in. Meatloaf's "All Revved Up" is CRANKED on the stereo. The apartment is small and has an assortment of rock and roll posters on the walls and inexpensive furniture. There are a couple of old pizza boxes on the kitchen table.

MEAGAN

(shouting over music)

Hi JAZZ! I'm home!

Jazz is a fairly attractive twenty-something year-old woman with an attitude and a slight southern accent. She's dressed in all black. She dances while washing a sink full of dishes.

JAZZ (O.S.)

(shouting back)

I wuz wonderin' when you'd get here.

Meagan turns down the stereo to a normal level.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

Hey, I wuz listenin' to that!

MEAGAN

You still can. I'm trying to save your hearing.

JAZZ

Kill-joy.

MEAGAN

(taking off her coat)
I stopped by the library and lost
track of time.

JAZZ

Good thing I didn't expect you home
when you said. Dinner woulda been
colder than ice cubes.

MEAGAN

What're you making?

Jazz grabs a phone and dials.

JAZZ

A phone call. You want sausage and
pepperoni or sausage and meatball?

MEAGAN

Peppers and onions.

JAZZ

(into phone)
Hello. Hold on for a moment. Thanks.

Jazz looks up at Meagan.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

(to Meagan)
I don't believe that wuz a choice...I
gave you a choice of A or B an' you
choose C: None of the above. How
'bout you choose D: Sausage an'
peppers?

Meagan thinks briefly.

MEAGAN

I can live with that.

JAZZ

(into phone)
We'll take a medium pizza with sausage
and peppers. To be delivered. The
address is 324 Witherspoon, apartment
2B. And make it quick. Last time it
took so long to deliver our pizza
had mold growin' on it. Thanks!

Jazz hangs up the phone. Meagan dramatically collapses on
the sofa.

MEAGAN

Less than a week till spring break
but I don't think I can survive that
long.

JAZZ

At least you're not stuck in this
shit-hole for break.

MEAGAN

I told you, you can come with me.
I've got room in the truck.

Jazz looks forlorn. She wants to go but...

JAZZ

I wish I could but I've gotta work.

MEAGAN

Hey, you can quit. That's what I'm
doing.

JAZZ

(playfully)

I need the money---my mother doesn't
send me checks every month like some
people I know. Besides, I can't
quit a job without givin' notice
just to go on a trip---I'd feel too
guilty.

MEAGAN

Hey, I asked them about it when they
hired me and they said, "No way." I
figure if I give them notice they'll
just fire me...so I might as well
quit. Besides, it's not like I'm in
charge of the country's national
defense---I'm just flippin' burgers
and dippin' fries. They can get any
moron off the street to do that.

JAZZ

(joking)

Is that how they found you?

MEAGAN

No. For your information I was one
of the few morons who went there
looking for a job.

They both laugh. They have a good relationship.

MEAGAN (CONT'D)

Jazz, do you know what you need?

JAZZ

No, what?

MEAGAN

A wealthy guy. Someone who can foot the bill for you and give you a taste of the good life.

JAZZ

I'll settle for someone who won't ask me to go Dutch at McDonald's!

MEAGAN

You could always play the lottery.

JAZZ

If I could afford it.

Jazz looks at the kitchen table and grabs a sweepstakes envelope off the kitchen table and displays it proudly.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

Look! My problems are solved! I won ten million dollars!

MEAGAN

Good, you can pay for pizza!

INT. ERIC'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Eric's apartment is small and dingy. He sits at his kitchen table looking at a few hundred dollars laid out in piles. He has a bottle of wine with some poured into a crystal glass. MUSIC: Mozart's "Requiem" is playing in the background.

He raises his glass and toasts to himself.

ERIC

To another exciting road trip!

He gets up and walks over to a closet and opens it, taking out a slightly worn black leather brief case.

He carries the brief case back to the kitchen table and sets it down.

He looks at his money.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Three hundred fifty-six dollars.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

That's not gonna get you too far.
You're gonna have to get creative.

He takes a sip of wine and prepares to open the case. He puts in the combination, POPS the latches, then opens it.

A satisfied grin fills his face.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

It's a sunny spring day on a busy college campus. Meagan walks in a courtyard where Jen and a COUPLE OF STUDENTS are lounged out studying for their midterms.

MEAGAN

Hey, guys! What's up?

JEN

Hi Meg! We're tryin' to study.

MEAGAN

(joking)

What? This group---study?

STUDENT #2

We've gone over...what...four questions?

JEN

No, five CARA.

CARA

You sure it's five? I've got notes on four.

Jen hands Cara her notes.

JEN

It's five. Look.

MEAGAN

At least you all have the same text book.

In the b.g. Eric walks into view. He sits a short distance away within earshot. He has a couple of books and appears as though he is studying.

CARA

Yeah, we wasted an hour tryin' to figure out what to study first.

JEN

(to Meagan)

Are you psyched and ready for break?

MEAGAN

Almost. I have to finish packing tonight....

CARA

(to Meagan)

We're you goin'?---I missed the drawing.

MEAGAN

Virginia Beach.

CARA

I still can't believe you're not goin' to Ft. Lauderdale with us.

MEAGAN

A hundred-thousand people fighting for a patch of sand to lay on was not fun.

JEN

Fort Lauderdale's totally awesome! It's one big, endless group party.

MEAGAN

Jen, you really like that?

JEN

Hell yeah!

CARA

Jen, you'd like any place that had lotsa men in skimpy bathing suits.

JEN

Shut yer trap. I've got some pictures of you in some pretty compromising positions.

MEAGAN

Cara, I've seen those pictures, and if I were you I wouldn't think about goin' into politics until the negatives are destroyed!

The women laugh a bit.

JEN

(to Meagan)

You goin' to Jerry's pre-break party tonight?

MEAGAN

No. I'm just gonna rent a video and eat some popcorn. If I go to Jerry's tonight I won't get home 'till tomorrow.

JEN

Your loss. It's gonna be a killer party!

Meagan looks at her watch.

MEAGAN

I'd better get goin'. I still have to pack for the trip.

JEN

Later.

Eric watches Meagan as she walks off.

INT. MILES' COUNSELING OFFICE - NIGHT

Miles' office is modestly furnished with an old wooden desk that has a briefcase on it. There is a love seat with a flowered pattern and his counseling chair---wooden and on wheels.

Miles is finishing a counseling session with a COUPLE in their mid thirties who appear to be hanging on to the bottom rung of the class ladder. A CLOCK TICKS steadily---it's faced toward the clients as a reminder. Miles appears slightly distracted.

MILES

(standing up)

Well, I guess I'll see both of you in two weeks.

MAN

(unenthusiastically)

Yeah.

MILES

And don't forget to use the "I" messages when you're communicating wants and needs.

WOMAN

I'll bet I'm gonna need to remind
him.

The couple exits.

Miles sits in his chair. The WHEELS CREAK as he slides across
the floor behind the desk.

He opens up the briefcase, frowning, and pulls out a certified
envelope that's been opened. He turns the envelope over in
his hands before taking out the letter.

The PHONE RINGS. Miles looks at it then answers it.

MILES

(into phone)

Hello?

We don't hear the other side of the conversation, but we
know immediately it involves the letter.

MILES (CONT'D)

Yeah, I got it here. I still can't
believe she's doin' this.

Miles pauses listening. He's getting angry.

MILES (CONT'D)

Of course I didn't do it! She's
delusional! I can't believe you'd
even ask me a question like that.

Miles pauses listening again.

MILES (CONT'D)

(defensively)

Yeah, I was there. She told me it
was an emergency and I rushed
over...she said she was suicidal.

He pauses again, listening.

MILES (CONT'D)

Okay, I know it wasn't the best
judgment on my part.

He pauses listening.

MILES (CONT'D)

Okay, so it was horrible judgment on
my part....but nothing happened.

He listens again.

MILES (CONT'D)

The newspapers are gonna have a field day with this. They crucified me three years ago over the situation with Eric---I'm still trying to get my practice going again. I should've known better---but I thought she was suicidal and I didn't think the police would be much help.

He pauses listening again.

MILES (CONT'D)

Does the board have any position on this yet or are they gonna wait for the trial?

Miles pauses, listening, and looks relieved.

MILES (CONT'D)

Thanks, Stan. I appreciate it. Bye.

Miles hangs up the phone and looks pensive. He stares at the letter then tosses it on the desk.

INT. MEAGAN AND JAZZ'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Meagan tosses clothes into a suitcase. The stereo plays CLASSICAL MUSIC in the background. She smiles while looking at the contents of the over-packed suitcase.

MEAGAN

(to herself)

Well, that's done!

She struggles to close the suitcase, putting all her weight on it. The PHONE RINGS. Meagan looks at it, decides to ignore it---letting the answering machine pick up as she struggles with closing the suitcase. The person hangs up without leaving a message.

EXT. DARK STREET/PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

It's RAINING slightly.

Eric hangs up the phone looking disappointed. He has an open note pad in his hand and flips the page. It says, "JEN BAKER - 236 Virginia Lane Apt. 14."

He closes his pad, exits the phone booth and walks off into the rain.

EXT. JEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The rain has stopped and Jen weaves toward her apartment on foot. She's pretty drunk. She reaches her door and starts fishing through her large purse for her keys.

JEN

(slurred to self)

Damn, I know you're in there
somewhere. Keys, come out come out
wherever you are!

Eric walks into view and smiles warmly to Jen.

ERIC

Excuse me. Do you know where Jen
Baker lives?

JEN

Yep, that's me. Who're you?

Jen continues fishing for her keys.

ERIC

(smiling)

I'm Eric, Meagan's cousin.

JEN

Oh. I didn't know she had a cousin.
She probably doesn't know I have a
cousin---several of them.

ERIC

(smiling warmly)

She's got several cousins too.

JEN

What brings you here?

ERIC

I was coming through town on my way
to Fort Lauderdale. Meagan said you
were goin' down there with some
friends and thought I should visit
with you so we could get together in
Florida.

JEN

Yep, Cara, Liz, Eileen and me leave
bright and early...Why didn't Meagan
come with you?

ERIC
She's still packing for her trip.
Plus she's pretty rude sometimes.

JEN
(laughing)
Yep! She's totally rude....You wanna
come in?

ERIC
(smiling)
Sure.

INT. JEN'S APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

Jen's apartment has an ugly mustard yellow carpet and appears well lived-in and is cluttered with all sorts of partially eaten food (pizza, Doritos, twinkies, etc.) with many dirty plates lying around as well as empty coffee mugs and glasses. There's a phone on an end table and several suitcases packed.

JEN
Want some coffee?

ERIC
Sounds good. I think you could use
some yourself.

JEN
Yep. But that'll only make me a
wide-awake drunk. That's what they
taught me in high school.

Jen heads into the kitchen while Eric looks around the apartment. We hear a MICROWAVE being turned on in the background as Jen makes some instant coffee.

JEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Where da you go to school?

ERIC
Syracuse.

JEN (O.S.)
Awesome!! I know a few people who
go there. Do you know Ben Huber or
Kerry Clark?

ERIC
Hmm, I don't think so, but Kerry
Clark sounds familiar.

Jen walks back in with some coffee.

JEN
(excited)
Cool! I can't believe you know Kerry!

ERIC
It's a small world...How long have
you known Meagan?

JEN
About three years.

ERIC
You know, she only told me she's
going to Virginia Beach. She didn't
say if she's meeting anyone down
there.

JEN
No. She just picked it out of a hat.

Jen makes believe she's picking something out of an imaginary
hat.

JEN (CONT'D)
She had four other choices, they
were all kinda weird.

ERIC
Really? What were the others?

JEN
One was Bangor, Maine, another was
Lubbock, Texas, then there was the
Black Hills of South Dakota---an' I
can't remember the fourth one.

ERIC
They all sound pretty
interesting...When's she planning on
coming back?

JEN
Didn't Meg tell you?

ERIC
No, she was too busy packing.

JEN
I've known Meg a while an' she's
never too busy to talk!

ERIC
Everybody has their moments.

JEN IS GETTING A LITTLE UNCOMFORTABLE. Both her and Eric have nearly finished their coffee.

JEN

Ya know, I probably should be gettin' to bed.

ERIC

I just have a few more questions for you.

JEN

No, really, I'm totally tired.

ERIC

(explodes)

I don't give a shit if you're tired--- you're gonna answer all my questions!!!

Jen is shocked and frightened. She's shaking slightly.

JEN

Get out.

ERIC

I'll leave when I damn well feel like it.

Eric gets up and slowly walks toward Jen. He pulls out a .38 pistol from under his sweatshirt and points it at her head as he continues toward her.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(calmly and slowly)

Just stay where you are and don't make a sound or else I'll blow your brains out.

Jen stops moving. Eric continues toward her.

ERIC (CONT'D)

That's good. That's smart. I knew there was a reason you made it to college.

Jen shakes like a leaf in the wind.

JEN

Whadda you want from me?

ERIC

Not much...just some answers to some questions.

Eric is now face to face with Jen. He pushes the gun barrel on the tip of her nose. She winces.

ERIC (CONT'D)

They're pretty simple questions.
Very simple questions about my cousin,
Meagan.

JEN

You're not her cousin.

ERIC

No. But these questions are
relatively easy.

He pauses, examining Jen's face as he would a slightly cracked vase.

ERIC (CONT'D)

When is she supposed to return from
spring break?

JEN

N-n-next Saturday.

ERIC

Very good. What's her major?

JEN

S-s-psychology.

ERIC

Very interesting. How 'bout you?

JEN

Accounting.

ERIC

Boring...numbers are so boring. Don't
you agree?

JEN

Yes.

ERIC

(raising his voice)

Then why the fuck are you majoring
in accounting?!

JEN

I-I-I dunno.

ERIC

(calmly)

Because you must be incredibly stupid.

(pauses)

Does Meagan have a steady boyfriend?

JEN

No.

ERIC

A job?

JEN

Yeah, but she's quittin' in the morning before she leaves.

ERIC

I like that! Now that's classy!

Was she gonna write to anyone?

Friends? Family?

JEN

Whadda you mean?

ERIC

Was she planning on sending fuckin' postcards to people when she's on her trip?

JEN

I-I-I think so...she usually sends some to me, her roommate Jazz an' friend Cara.

ERIC

What about her parents?

JEN

Her dad's dead and she doesn't talk to her mom much. They don't get along.

Eric walks slowly around her, keeping the gun inches from her head.

ERIC

What about brothers or sisters?

JEN

She's an only child.

ERIC

Good. How's her money situation?

JEN

When her dad died he left her some money...and her mom sends her a check every month.

ERIC

Where're you from.

JEN

Evansville, Indiana.

ERIC

Has Meagan ever been there?

JEN

No.

ERIC

Have you told her about it?

JEN

No, I don't talk 'bout home.

ERIC

Very good. You've been very helpful. Now I need you to do one more thing for me.

JEN

W-w-what?

ERIC

Write a suicide note.

Jen is scared as hell.

JEN

W-what?

ERIC

What part didn't you understand? I want you to write a suicide note.

JEN

N-n-no. I don't wanna.

ERIC

(menacing)

You don't tell me what you don't want to do! I don't care what you want! You're gonna write the fuckin' note if you know what's good for you!

Eric looks at her more calmly and more menacing.

ERIC (CONT'D)

If you want I can kill you right now. I can splatter your fuckin' brains all over your carpet.

He looks at the mustard yellow carpet.

ERIC (CONT'D)

It's a pretty ugly carpet, but I think your brains would go nicely there.

JEN

(quivering)

Please, please...I haven't done anythin' to you. I-I don't wanna die. Please don't kill me!

ERIC

Stop your whining. I want you to write a suicide note to make people *think* you're dead for a couple of days. I'm not gonna kill you. I just need to have you hidden before Meagan leaves.

JEN

(in disbelief)

Yeah, right.

ERIC

Would you rather I kill you now instead of letting you live?

JEN

No.

ERIC

Then you need to write a note.

Eric seems calm and begins looking around.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(very calmly)

We need a pen and paper. And, do you have anything stronger to drink than coffee?

JEN

(still very nervous)

Yeah, I've got some tequila.

ERIC

Sounds good. I think you can use some. I have a tendency to get a bit over-excited.

INT. MILES' COUNSELING OFFICE - NIGHT

Miles is sitting at his desk with a file that says "ERIC ANDERSON" on it. He opens it up. We see a newspaper clipping with the headline: "COUNSELOR FALSELY ACCUSES CLIENT OF MURDER - POLICE FIND NO EVIDENCE" and Miles' picture accompanies the article. Miles has a pensive look as he remembers back...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COUNSELING OFFICE - DAY

Miles is a few years younger and casually dressed. Sitting across from Miles is Eric.

ERIC

I'm not gonna try and justify what I did to her.

MILES

But, Eric, do you want to?

ERIC

Mr. Fletcher, I...

MILES

(correcting)
Miles.

ERIC

I don't think I could ever justify beating a woman....I still don't know what came over me....

MILES

You've made a step many men never take. Most men don't see it as their problem. You're taking responsibility for your actions. That's important.

Miles pauses and looks intensely at Eric.

MILES (CONT'D)

You said you left her and you don't plan on going back?

ERIC

No, sir.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

I don't think I could look her in the eye again and expect her to trust me. I know what I did was horrible...just horrible.

MILES

Was this the first time you were aggressive toward a woman?

ERIC

(appearing emotional)
No, there was another time...

MILES

Tell me about it.

ERIC

I...I don't want anyone to know about this.

MILES

Everything you say is completely confidential. I can only break confidentiality if you pose an immanent danger to yourself or others or if I suspect you're abusing a child.

ERIC

I know that, but I don't want this going in your notes or in my file.

Miles puts down his pen and note pad.

MILES

Okay.

ERIC

Can you promise to never tell a soul?

MILES

Yes.

ERIC

This is difficult to tell, but I'll try.

Eric pauses for effect....He closes his eyes for a moment.

ERIC (CONT'D)

About five years ago when I was in college, I met this girl.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

She was really nice and very intelligent, with beautiful red hair. We hit it off and started dating. Things went well for a while, but then I started having these weird thoughts...

MILES

What kind of weird thoughts?

ERIC

I kept having...I don't know... I wanted to control her...I wanted to feel the power of having her as my own...the way someone might own a dog. You feed it when you want, play with it when you want and beat it if it's been bad.

MILES

Not everyone beats their dog.

ERIC

I know, but my dad always beat the shit out of my dog for no reason. I guess that's where I learned it from...I wanted to own her like I did my dog.

MILES

So what happened with the woman you met?

ERIC

I talked her into going on a trip with me for a couple of weeks. We took off in the middle of the semester. As soon as we got on the road she started getting on my case and giving me shit---reminded me of my old man, telling me to do this and do that...it was driving me crazy. She was a redhead---just like my mother.

MILES

Did your father abuse your mother?

ERIC

(defiant)

You're the counselor---figure it out.

MILES

I figure he did.

ERIC

Good guess.

MILES

So what happened with the woman?

ERIC

I started treating her badly. She wanted to leave, but I wouldn't let her. We'd stay in the same place for a week, then move on to another hotel.

MILES

What do you mean you wouldn't let her leave?

ERIC

She was my prisoner.

MILES

How did you travel around if you were keeping her prisoner?

ERIC

If people don't want to believe something's going on it's easy to convince them nothing is---it was real easy---easier than you think.

MILES

Didn't the police come after you?

ERIC

No. I started to worry when I knew her friends were expecting her back. I figured they'd call the police if they thought something was wrong. So I started to pick up postcards and had her write to her friends.

Miles looks confused.

MILES

You let her send postcards to her friends?

ERIC

No, I forced her to write postcards. At first she refused, but I convinced her to do it.

Eric rubs the back of his neck to look stressed.

MILES

How'd you do that?

ERIC

It's not too hard to motivate someone...if you press the right buttons.

MILES

And then what?

ERIC

I took her to the abandoned house where I used to live in western Nebraska. I put a dog collar on her and made her beg for food and water. Then she started asking me to just kill her and get it over with.

MILES

What did you do then?

ERIC

I gave her what she wanted---I killed her.

Miles is stunned but he tries not to show it.

MILES

Then what?

Eric suddenly seems upset...he puts his face in his hands.

ERIC

(sounding upset)

There wasn't much else to do so I took her body to a hill nearby and buried her...I said a prayer for her...and I...I marked her grave with a single square stone...I really feel horrible.

Miles writes something on his notepad.

Eric lifts his hands from his face and smiles a devious smile while Miles isn't looking.

INT. JEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jen walks over to an end table and pulls out a bottle of tequila. Eric follows her with the gun the whole time. She brings the nearly full bottle to him.

ERIC
Do you have any glasses?

JEN
Yeah.

ERIC
Why don't you get some large ones.

JEN
They're in the kitchen.

ERIC
That's fine. I trust you won't try anything stupid.

Jen heads for the kitchen.

Eric picks up a nearby phone and dials a few numbers and listens into the receiver.

INT. JEN'S KITCHEN - SAME

Jen shuffles some glasses around as she picks up the phone and dials 9-1-1. She listens into the receiver.

ERIC (O.S.)
(sarcastically)
I'm on the phone! You probably should get out here with those glasses.

Jen nervously drops the phone, then picks it up and hangs it up in its cradle. She quickly grabs two 12 ounce Peanut's glasses and returns.

INT. JEN'S APARTMENT (LIVING ROOM) - CONTINUOUS

JEN
(handing him glasses)
Here.

He puts the glasses down.

ERIC
Why don't you sit down and then fill them both up. Completely.

Jen follows his instructions and sits down in a recliner. She's shaking as she puts the bottle down.

ERIC (CONT'D)
(points with the gun)
Why don't you drink about half of that glass now.

JEN

You're crazy. I can't do that....I'll puke.

ERIC

(calmly menacing)

Maybe I should rephrase the question.

He raises the gun to her head.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Why don't you drink about half of that glass.

Jen shakes as she picks up the glass, spilling some, then begins drinking the tequila.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(coaching her)

A little more...a little more. Okay, you can stop now.

Jen stops and coughs from the alcohol.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Come on! I know you can handle that!

Eric grabs a nearby pen and paper.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Okay, now that you're a little more relaxed, I want you to write a suicide note. Write it just as you would if you were really going to kill yourself--- even though you won't.

He hands her the pen and paper. She takes them shaking slightly.

JEN

I don't know what to write.

ERIC

(pressing gun at her)

Listen, you have exactly forty seconds to write and sign a short suicide note. And I started counting about ten seconds ago.

Jen begins writing. She writes as fast as she can. Eric looks around as she writes. She finishes the note quickly and puts the pen down.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Finished with at least twenty seconds
to spare---read it to me.

JEN

To everyone I love: I'm sorry. My
life sucks and I can't stand livin'
in pain anymore. I hope you forgive
me for killin' myself. Jen Baker.

ERIC

Excellent! Excellent! Short and to
the point. Why don't you go over and
put that on the table over there.

Jen gets up and loses her balance but catches herself. She
walks unsteadily over to the table and places the note on
it. She returns.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(pointing to glass)

Okay, now I want you to finish the
rest of that glass.

JEN

(slurring badly)

I'm gonna pass out.

ERIC

Well, that's what I figure will happen
eventually. It'll make people think
you're dead.

Eric seems as though he's struck by an idea. He reaches into
his coat pocket and pulls out a bottle labeled "VITAMIN B."

ERIC (CONT'D)

(handing her six pills)

Here. These are some vitamin B pills
that should help prevent the hangover
to end all hangovers.

Jen looks at them unsteadily.

ERIC (CONT'D)

They're fine. See.

Eric quickly pops something in his mouth and swallows it.
Jen looks at him, but isn't sure of what she saw.

ERIC (CONT'D)

They'll do you good. Trust me. You'll
feel better tomorrow if you take
them today---then finish that glass.

Jen takes the pills and swallows them one by one with the tequila. She puts the glass down without finishing.

ERIC (CONT'D)
You're not done yet.

JEN
I can't do it. I'm 'ready plastered.

ERIC
Come on, I know you can.

He raises the gun to her head again.

ERIC (CONT'D)
I know you will.

Jen picks up the glass and finishes it. Eric smiles.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Okay, only one more glass to go.

JEN
What the fuck? You said I wuz done?

ERIC
(calmly and politely)
No, you need to finish that other glass.

JEN
I can't.

ERIC
Can't and won't shouldn't be part of your vocabulary. You just need the proper motivation. I know you can and will do it within ten seconds--- or else I'll blow your brains out.

Eric cocks the .38. Jen grabs the glass and begins chugging it quickly. She finishes it, with some spilling down her cheeks.

Eric APPLAUDS.

ERIC (CONT'D)
(laughs lightly)
I knew you could do it!

Jen is nearly passed out. Her head is bobbing.

JEN
I don't givva fuck.

Eric hands her another half dozen pills.

ERIC

Here. Why don't you take these and we'll call it quits? You'll still feel bad tomorrow, but not as bad.

Jen shakes her head, "no." Eric grabs her face and shoves the gun in her mouth. Her eyes perk up a bit.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Take these now or else.

Eric removes the gun and Jen takes the pills, swallowing them with a bit of tequila.

JEN

Fuckin' ass-hole.

Jen passes out. Eric smiles slightly as he looks at her. He reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out some gloves, a dust rag and a bottle of over-the-counter sleeping pills.

He puts the bottle in Jen's hand to get her prints and then lets them fall.

He looks at her fingers for a moment and removes a friendship ring from one finger and puts it in his pocket. He dusts off the phone and the tequila bottle then places the bottle in Jen's hand for prints.

He tilts her head back to make sure that if she vomits she'll choke on it. He takes some money out of her purse, but leaves some in. He puts the gloves in his pockets and heads out the door.

INT. MEAGAN AND JAZZ'S APARTMENT - DAY

It's the morning and Meagan is downing the remains of some coffee in a travel mug. Jazz eats a bagel.

JAZZ

(chewing)

So you'll be back Sunday night?

MEAGAN

Yeah, unless I meet a millionaire who wants to marry me.

JAZZ

Make sure you send me an invitation to the wedding.

MEAGAN

I'll probably send you a postcard first.

Meagan fills up her travel mug with coffee and grabs a doughnut to nibble on.

JAZZ

You know, the one thing I miss about the coast is all the seafood. I love fresh swordfish!

MEAGAN

I can't stand seafood! It's too slimy for me....And I'm deathly allergic to shrimp.

JAZZ

Shrimp?

MEAGAN

Yeah. When I was a kid my mom tried to get me to eat it. She said, "It's not gonna kill you to try it." I tried it and thought it was gross, but then I nearly died from eating it! I was taken to the hospital and they had to revive me.

JAZZ

I feel sorry for you, I love shrimp! Maybe you can bring me some back?

MEAGAN

I will if I can stand having those slimy critters in my truck.

JAZZ

Just stick 'em in a cooler in the bed.

MEAGAN

We'll see....I'd better get moving if I'm gonna get there at a decent hour. Plus I've got all my stuff out there on the curb. My luck someone'll steal it.

JAZZ

Try an' stay outta trouble.

MEAGAN

You know me.

JAZZ
 (laughing)
 Yeah, that's why I worry!

Meagan heads for the door and opens it.

MEAGAN
 See ya next week.

JAZZ
 Have fun!

MEAGAN
 I hope so! Bye!

Meagan exits.

EXT. MEAGAN AND JAZZ'S APARTMENT - DAY

Meagan is finished loading up her fairly new purple Chevy King Cab Pickup with a topper on the back. As she closes the rear gate...

Eric arrives slightly out of breath. He carries his worn briefcase, a small suitcase and wears a backpack.

Eric seems genuinely friendly.

ERIC
 (smiling warmly)
 Hi! You're Meagan, right?

MEAGAN
 Yeah?

ERIC
 I'm Eric, Jen Baker's cousin. I'm down from Syracuse and was tryin' to catch a ride to Arlington, Virginia. Jen said you were heading to Virginia Beach.

MEAGAN
 (still unsure)
 Yeah.

ERIC
 I know I'm kinda catching you at the last minute, but my car broke down when I got into town. I'm supposed to be meeting a friend who's coming up from Florida. I'd pay you for gas and buy your meals---plus I can help with the driving.

MEAGAN

What about going with Jen? She's headed down that way.

ERIC

We tried to rearrange the car this morning so I could fit. But between her, Cara, Liz and Eileen---plus all the stuff Jen wanted to pack, I would've had to sit on the hood.

MEAGAN

(laughs a bit)

I know! I've traveled with Jen--- she's not happy if she can't bring her apartment with her.

Meagan looks down at Eric's briefcase and suitcase.

MEAGAN (CONT'D)

Is that all you have?

ERIC

I've got some more things in my backpack. I'm the opposite of Jen. I try to pack light 'cause I buy tons of stuff when I travel. Do you want me to take the first shift?

MEAGAN

No, I can do it.

Meagan and Eric get into the pick-up truck and pull away.

INT. MEAGAN AND JAZZ'S APARTMENT - SAME

Jazz looks out the window at Meagan pulling away.

Jazz's POV: She sees a second person in the truck, but can't see the figure clearly.

Jazz looks puzzled by this.

EXT. JEN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Cara arrives to pick up Jen for spring break. She appears hurried as she RINGS THE DOORBELL and waits for a second or two. She RINGS THE DOORBELL again.

CARA

(yelling)

Hello in there! First you don't answer your phone, now you won't answer your door!

Cara pauses briefly looking around.

CARA (CONT'D)

Jen, if you don't get out here this minute we're gonna leave without you!

Cara looks at the front windows next to the front door. She walks over and looks through.

Cara's POV: She sees the back of the sofa and Jen's white hand hanging limply over the arm. She also sees the bottle of sleeping pills on the floor.

CARA (CONT'D)

(screams)

Jen!!!

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

It's a little later in the day and Miles is walking around campus. He sees Cara sitting on a bench with her feet up and with her arms wrapped around her legs as she sobs. Miles slowly approaches her.

MILES

Hey, Cara, what's wrong?

CARA

(sobbing)

Jen's dead...

MILES

Jen Baker?

CARA

Yeah, she...

Cara starts crying again. Miles tries to comfort her.

MILES

What happened?

CARA

She killed herself...

MILES

(surprised)

What?

CARA

She killed herself...she took a buncha sleeping pills and---and drank herself to death.

Cara breaks down and begins to cry more vigorously.

MILES

Does anyone know why she did it?

CARA

No...she left a note that didn't say much, just she was tired of life.

MILES

I talked to her yesterday and she was excited about spring break.

CARA

I know. I was with her last night...we were makin' last minute plans....it just doesn't seem real...I can't believe she's gone...

Cara continues sobbing and Miles tries to console her.

INT. MEAGAN'S PICKUP - DAY (MOVING)

Meagan and Eric are cruising down the interstate at a good clip. Meagan's got her stereo on playing the *Talking Heads*, "*Psycho Killer*."

Meagan and Eric seem to get along well.

ERIC

Jen said you're a psychology major. I majored in psyche as an undergrad. What's your favorite class so far?

MEAGAN

Mental pathology.

ERIC

I thought that was great. Learning about all the weird disorders out there.

MEAGAN

My professor's really good. Dr. Fletcher's brought in videos so we can actually get some real life experience.

Eric's eyes widen with curiosity.

ERIC

Did you say Dr. Fletcher?

MEAGAN

Yeah, do you know him?

ERIC

What's his first name?

MEAGAN

Miles.

Eric tries to conceal a smile.

ERIC

No. I had a Jim Fletcher who had transferred to a school in Pennsylvania. I thought it might have been the same. Oh, well.

There's a brief pause.

MEAGAN

So, do you live near Jen?

ERIC

I used to live on the outskirts of Evansville when I was a kid, then my folks moved to Nebraska when I was ten.

MEAGAN

Do you like it there?

ERIC

It's nice and quiet, but I wanna move to the Black Hills when I finish my masters.

This strikes a chord with Meagan.

MEAGAN

The Black Hills?

ERIC

Yeah, it's really beautiful there.

MEAGAN

I almost went there for spring break.

ERIC

Why didn't you?

MEAGAN

I picked a piece of paper that said Virginia Beach.

Eric acts genuinely surprised even though he's researched this.

ERIC

What, like out of a hat?

MEAGAN

Actually it was a Colorado Rockies baseball cap.

ERIC

That's pretty cool....though I'd pick the Black Hills over Virginia Beach any day.

MEAGAN

Really?

ERIC

Yeah. You've been to one beach you've seen 'em all. But the Black Hills are different from any other mountains. Mount Rushmore's pretty cool too.

MEAGAN

(sounds remorseful)

You know, I never really thought of that. I'll have to go there some day.

ERIC

Oh, so you're a "some day" person.

MEAGAN

Huh? Whatta you mean?

ERIC

Most people who put off doing things always say, "I'll do that some day." Then they never do and end up on their death bed regretting the things they put off 'till some day.

MEAGAN

I wouldn't consider myself a some day person.

ERIC

If you weren't a some day person you'd call your boyfriend or whomever you're meeting in Virginia Beach and convince them to head for the Black Hills with you.

There's silence. Eric has struck a chord with Meagan as she prides herself on being spontaneous.

MEAGAN

I'm not meeting anyone down there.
 (she smiles)
 I might just make a detour after I drop you off in Arlington.

ERIC

(sounding impressed)
 Really?

MEAGAN

If it's as good as you say I might as well make today my some day.

Eric briefly looks out the window to hide his victory smile, then he turns back to Meagan.

ERIC

You know, it'd be good if you had your own tour guide.

MEAGAN

(surprised)
 Who? You?

ERIC

Yeah, I love the Black Hills.

MEAGAN

What about your friend in Arlington?

ERIC

How about you stop at the next rest area and I'll give him a call.

EXT. REST AREA - DAY

A typical rest area with a sign indicating a PAY PHONE inside. Meagan and Eric head toward the building.

ERIC

It sure feels good to stretch my legs finally.

MEAGAN

Yeah, I hate feeling cooped up.

INT. REST STOP BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

The pay phone is in the lobby area. There are TWO TEENAGE BOYS trying to use it but it's not working.

MEAGAN

(to Eric)

I'm gonna use the bathroom while you make your call.

ERIC

Okay.

TEENAGER #1

This sucks.

TEENAGER #2

Do you got a dial tone?

TEENAGER #1

No, it's busted.

Teenager #1 BANGS the phone. Eric stands there and watches. The teenager notices.

TEENAGER #1 (CONT'D)

(to Eric)

This damn thing's busted.

ERIC

Let me give it a shot.

They step aside and let Eric use the phone. He picks it up and begins dialing a number.

TEENAGER #1

It's not working, right?

ERIC

(slightly annoyed)

Hsh, it's ringing.

Eric makes believe someone answered and proceeds to fake having a phone call.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Hey, Mike! How's it goin'?---Listen, I'm traveling with this woman, she's a friend of my cousin, Jen. We were thinking of heading to the Black Hills instead of going down there.

(pauses)

What?! You were gonna leave without me?! Who is she this time?

(pauses)

It's a good thing I've got other plans. Anyway, I gotta go. I'll call you for the details when I get back to Syracuse.

Eric hangs up the phone. Teenager # 1 picks up the phone and looks confused as Meagan walks out of the bathroom.

TEENAGER #1
There's still no dial tone.

ERIC
That's weird. It just worked fine for me. Keep trying.

Meagan raises an eyebrow but says nothing. They head back out to the car.

EXT. REST STOP - CONTINUOUS

MEAGAN
So, what's the scoop?

ERIC
Well, Mike said he met a girl and was gonna leave without me.
(pauses and grins)
Let's head west.

MEAGAN
Cool, lets do it!

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Miles sits in a booth across from Stan who has a half empty beer and is enjoying a burger as a baseball game is BROADCAST from a TV nearby. Miles has a wine cooler and a hardly touched burger in front of him. Stan looks at Miles' burger.

STAN
Aren't you gonna eat?

MILES
No.

STAN
Worried about going to court?

MILES
No, I didn't do anything with her.

STAN
Maybe not, but it doesn't look good.
The board's gonna wait to see what happens in court.

Miles looks across the bar for a moment and appears to be in deep thought.

STAN (CONT'D)

If that's not bothering you what's the problem?

MILES

A student of mine committed suicide. But it just doesn't add up. If she was suicidal I should have seen something...some clue.

STAN

Sometimes people commit suicide with little warning. Was she the quiet type?

MILES

No, that's just it. She always would let everyone know how she was feeling--- she didn't show any signs of depression.

STAN

But you said she left a note.

MILES

Yeah, but it didn't say much---and two hours before she died she was at a party making vacation plans.

Stan takes a bite of his burger.

STAN

(with his mouth full)

That's a bit unusual for someone committing suicide---I'll give you that.

MILES

I can't think of anything that indicated she was depressed.

STAN

If she was at a party maybe it was a result of the alcohol impairing her judgment. Alcohol is a depressant--- maybe it was a spur of the moment decision and she was just really good at hiding her feelings.

MILES

Maybe, but I should've noticed something.

STAN

It's not impossible for you to be fooled---it wouldn't be the first time.

MILES

Don't rub it in.

Stan bites into a french fry and talks as he chews.

STAN

I'm just trying to get you to see you can't save the world without losing a few along the way.

MILES

Who said I'm trying to save the world?

STAN

I did. I've known you long enough to see you want to take responsibility for everyone out there. You said you "should have" seen she was suicidal. You were her teacher--- not her counselor.

MILES

If I would've known, things might have been different....

STAN

Yeah, you could have talked to her about it and she could have killed herself anyway.

Miles looks shocked and insulted.

STAN (CONT'D)

Don't look so appalled. It happened to me...fifteen years ago. Young girl, good student.

MILES

What happened?

STAN

She was raped and her parents blamed her. I saw her upset and talked to her for a couple hours until she seemed much better. She promised me she wasn't suicidal. Then she went home and slit her wrists in the bathtub.

MILES

I'm sorry.

STAN

It wasn't your fault. I beat myself up for a couple of years after that wondering what I could have done differently. Do you know what I came up with?

MILES

No, what?

STAN

I should have stayed later grading papers...I would have never run into her that night. Then I wouldn't feel so guilty.

Stan pauses and takes a sip of his beer.

STAN (CONT'D)

What do you think happened to Jen if she didn't commit suicide?

MILES

(shakes his head)

I don't know. I just don't want to accept that I may have screwed up and missed a clue.

INT. MEAGAN'S PICKUP - NIGHT (MOVING)

Eric drives and Meagan is falling asleep in the passenger seat. They're on an Ohio interstate that's fairly quiet. A RELIGIOUS PROGRAM IS ON THE RADIO.

ERIC

I'm getting pretty tired. I think we should stop for the night.

MEAGAN

If you want I can drive. I'm not too tired. I'd rather get there sooner.

ERIC

No, you were nearly asleep. I really wanna stop for the night. I've never been able to sleep in moving vehicles.

Meagan knows she's tired and wouldn't last long behind the wheel.

MEAGAN

I guess we can stop. Pick a place.

ERIC

I go with whatever's cheapest and quiet.

MEAGAN

Fine by me. Do you wanna share a room to save on costs?

Meagan quickly realizes how this sounds and corrects herself.

MEAGAN (CONT'D)

I mean we can get a room with two separate beds. It'd be cheaper.

ERIC

Only if we can use an alias.

MEAGAN

Huh?

ERIC

It'd be fun to make believe we're a married couple. Or tell them we're someone else. Haven't you ever done that?

MEAGAN

No.

ERIC

It makes it more interesting....keeps people guessing what's really going on. Being no one knows us out here. We could be anybody.

Meagan likes the idea. It's twisted but interesting.

MEAGAN

Okay, who do you wanna be?

Eric pauses to think for a brief moment. Then he raises a finger as though he's struck by an idea.

ERIC

I've got it! We can be brother and sister.

MEAGAN

Is that it?

ERIC

No, I figure you could be my sister who's delusional and I'm watching out for you.

MEAGAN

How 'bout I watch out for you and you play my delusional brother?

Eric seems to briefly consider her idea.

ERIC

No, it was my idea so I should choose the roles---besides, I think you'd make a very good delusional sister.

Eric flashes her a warm smile that seems to tell her it's okay. Meagan smiles back.

MEAGAN

Okay, what's my delusion?

ERIC

How about you think you're being followed by the CIA who had held you hostage earlier.

MEAGAN

Okay, how do I do it?

ERIC

Just act paranoid and talk a lot about the CIA following you and how you've been held hostage by them. You could even tell them you think I'm part of the conspiracy.

MEAGAN

Okay, but I can't vouch for my acting.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE - NIGHT

The small motel office is furnished with late sixties and early seventies decor indicative of a cheap motel. There's a male CLERK who's in his late sixties sitting behind the front desk intently watching an INFOMERCIAL ON TV.

Meagan and Eric enter. Meagan looks around and appears to be paranoid. Eric seems calm and acts as if he's trying to calm down Meagan.

ERIC

(to Meagan)

It's okay, don't worry. This place is fine.

(then to hotel clerk)

Hi. We're looking for a room.

The clerk sizes up Eric and then looks at Meagan who's still checking out her surroundings.

CLERK

Will you be needing one bed or two?

ERIC

Two. She's my sister.

Eric leans over the desk and whispers to the clerk.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(whispering)

She's mentally ill.

The clerk looks slightly surprised, then leans over to whisper to Eric.

CLERK

(whispering)

Is she dangerous?

ERIC

(whispering)

No, not at all. She's just a little paranoid. She thinks the CIA's after her.

CLERK

I see. Will this be cash or credit?

Meagan comes over to be involved in this decision.

MEAGAN

Cash! It's harder for the CIA to track us if we don't use our credit cards!

ERIC

Okay, cash.

CLERK

I just need you to fill out this card here.

He slides a small registration card to Eric. Eric begins filling it out. Meagan interrupts him.

MEAGAN

What're you doin'?! You can't use our real names! They'll find us! I know they will! You need to change it!

ERIC

Okay...okay.

Eric looks at the clerk and the clerk looks at the card.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Is it okay if I cross out our names and put different ones in there.

The clerk scratches his head. It's late.

CLERK

I guess it's okay.

We see the card. Eric had written Jenny and John Thomas. He draws a single line through it and writes Ralph and Alice Cramden and hands the card back to the clerk.

Eric notices a display with postcards. He immediately rifles through them and grabs a bunch.

ERIC

We'll also take ten postcards.

CLERK

That'll be \$46.42 for everything.

Eric hands him a few twenties and the clerk gives him change.

CLERK (CONT'D)

(hands Eric room key)

Thank you---Mr. Cramden.

Meagan smiles. She's having fun.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

The hotel room is cheap and looks as though it was last decorated in the early 1970's by someone who was color blind. There are two double beds with flower bed spreads on them. The bathroom is at the far end of the room.

Meagan and Eric put their luggage down and Eric sits on his bed. Meagan lays down spread eagle on hers.

MEAGAN

I probably should shower tonight so we can get an early start. Did you need to use the bathroom?

ERIC

No, I'm fine for now.

Meagan gets up and grabs some toiletry items out of her suitcase as well as some sweats.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(hands her postcards)

Oh, here are some postcards for you. This way you can let your friends know you're heading in a different direction and they don't think you've been abducted by some weirdo.

Eric smiles his warm, charming smile. Meagan smiles back.

MEAGAN

Thanks, that's a good idea. I know if my roommate, Jazz, tried to call me in Virginia she'd flip out.

Meagan grabs her things and heads into the bathroom. Eric looks at his briefcase and then at the bathroom door, which is open a crack.

We HEAR THE SHOWER turn on. Eric picks up his briefcase and opens it. Again we cannot see what's inside, but we see Eric smiling mischievously.

Meagan steps out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her.

MEAGAN (CONT'D)

Oh, I forgot my shampoo.

Eric SLAMS his briefcase closed and shoots her a look that could turn a tree into petrified wood.

Meagan gets her shampoo out of her suitcase and turns to Eric, still too curious to let it go.

MEAGAN (CONT'D)

What do you have in there?

ERIC

(don't ask)

Nothing that would interest you.

MEAGAN

You never know---it might.

ERIC

(don't ask again)

No, it wouldn't. Trust me.

Meagan is curious but is very uncomfortable with Eric's sudden change of tone. She heads back into the shower.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Eric is up early. He grabs some clothes and checks his briefcase which is beneath the bed. He also makes sure Meagan is still sleeping before he heads into the bathroom.

As soon as the SHOWER TURNS ON, Meagan gets out of bed quickly and looks for the briefcase. She finds it and puts it on the bed. She examines it to see if she can open it, as it has combination lock latches. She quickly looks at the bathroom door, then gets a pair of scissors from her toiletry bag and begins to carefully try to pry the lock open.

She pushes and pries at it and then breaks the latch. She looks around in panic as she tries to figure what will cover the problem.

Eric comes out of the bathroom fully dressed.

ERIC

(menacing)

What're you doing?

MEAGAN

Uhhh...uhhh...I was just curious.

ERIC

(coldly)

Remember that curiosity killed the cat.

MEAGAN

I'm sorry...

Eric is a man to reckoned with. His face and posture seem far removed from the seemingly friendly persona he portrayed.

ERIC

It looks like I caught you with your hand in the cookie jar---did you know the Muslims would cut off your hand for that?

MEAGAN
(nervously)
I never thought about it.

Eric slowly moves across the room to Meagan like a cat on the prowl.

ERIC
Do you really want to see what's
inside here?

MEAGAN
I was just curious...it's not that
important.

ERIC
It must have been very important for
you to break it.

Meagan is backed up against the wall near the bed. Eric stands near the briefcase.

ERIC (CONT'D)
(patting bed)
Come over here and sit down.

Meagan doesn't move.

ERIC (CONT'D)
(loudly)
Sit here!

Meagan slowly moves toward the bed and cautiously sits without a word.

ERIC (CONT'D)
(more calmly)
Don't worry, there nothing too unusual
in here.

Eric puts in the combination. The latches SNAP OPEN. He looks at Meagan and smiles. Then he opens the briefcase...

SHOCK CUT:

The case contains a dozen bottles containing a finger from each of his victims. Some have rings on them. They're all packed in formaldehyde.

There are surgical tools neatly packed in the briefcase along with some empty jars and a bottle of formaldehyde for packing new trophies. There are also two pair of handcuffs neatly tucked into the briefcase.

It's clear that Eric takes pride in his work.

Meagan SCREAMS! Eric smiles.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You mean this isn't what you expected?

Meagan stops screaming and moves over the bed toward the door. Eric quickly grabs her ankle. She SCREAMS!

ERIC (CONT'D)

You're not going anywhere.

Eric swiftly grabs the handcuffs and slaps one on her left ankle and begins pulling her toward him as she struggles to push him away! He quickly grabs the other cuffs and puts them on her other ankle and wrist while she struggles.

Meagan is now immobilized!

MEAGAN

(screaming)

Help! Help me! Someone help me!

Eric goes into his back pack and pulls out a roll of duct tape. He tears off a piece and puts it over her mouth, smothering her screams. She struggles.

ERIC

(calmly)

Now that you've seen what's in my briefcase do you like it?

Meagan's eyes are wide with panic. She shakes her head no.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Well, I still need to take a shower.

Meagan looks at the handcuffs and sees there are blood stains on them! She's not the first to wear them....she tries to scream, but it's muffled. She looks around for a way to escape.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Oh, don't think I'm going to leave you out here unattended. I know you can be mischievous.

Eric pulls out a small bottle from his briefcase containing a clear liquid. He grabs a rag from his backpack.

ERIC (CONT'D)

This is chloroform. It should help you get some rest.

He dabs the cloth with the chloroform and holds it to Meagan's nose. She struggles and then is unconscious.

INT. MILES' HOUSE - DAY

Miles' house appears to be cozy and well kept. There are numerous antiques throughout the well-lit house. Miles is in the living room with MUSIC---Albinoni's "Adagio" playing. He's trying to hammer a nail to hang up a painting when the PHONE RINGS, causing him hit his thumb.

MILES

Shit!

He grabs his thumb in pain and tries to run out to the phone, nearly tripping over the painting. We follow him as he gets to it on the fourth ring.

MILES (CONT'D)

Hello?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eric sits on the bed with Meagan handcuffed behind him unconscious.

ERIC

Hi, I hear you're teaching now.

INTERCUT

MILES

Who's this?

ERIC

An old friend.

MILES

(skeptical)

I know most of my old friends by their voice. How old?

ERIC

Oh, it's only been about three years, but we---actually I---shared many dark secrets.

MILES

(uncertain)

Eric?

ERIC

Good guess counselor!

Miles is visibly disturbed.

MILES
(cautiously)
Why are you calling me?

ERIC
It's been such a long time since we
talked....I thought I'd see how you're
doing.

MILES
(somewhat coldly)
I'm fine, thanks. How are you?

ERIC
I'm doing quite well. I was working
for a battered women's shelter for a
while. Now I'm traveling around the
country with a friend....well, really
more of an acquaintance.

Miles suddenly looks riveted and intense.

MILES
Why are you telling me this?

ERIC
It's someone you know.

MILES
Who?

Eric stokes Meagan's hair.

ERIC
You'll figure it out eventually.
She's quite nice....very bright.

MILES
(intense)
Who is she?

ERIC
All in good time.

MILES
What've you done with her?

ERIC
(sarcastically)
Why would you even insinuate I'd do
anything to hurt anyone?

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

Didn't the state licensing board teach you anything? I was just playing with you those other times...like I'm playing with you now.

MILES

You'd better be.

ERIC

Well, I'd better get going. We've got more sights to see. I'll talk to you soon enough.

MILES

No need to rush it.

ERIC

Don't worry, I won't. Later.

CLICK. Eric hangs up the phone. Miles looks at the phone as he tries to figure out what Eric is up to.

INT. MEAGAN AND JAZZ'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jazz pulls a piece of paper off the refrigerator and sits down at the kitchen table holding the cordless phone. The paper has the following hand-written information on it: Meagan in Virginia Beach (In Case of Emergency) - Surf Spot Motel (804)555-3900. There is an open newspaper on the table.

Jazz dials the phone.

JAZZ

Hello. Can you put me through to Meagan O'Neill?

INT. HOTEL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

DESK CLERK

Let's see, Meagan O'Neill...I don't see her listed...Oh, wait, I see--- she called to cancel.

INTERCUT

JAZZ

She canceled?

DESK CLERK

Yep. It looks like she called yesterday afternoon to say she wasn't coming.

JAZZ
 (still confused)
 Thanks.

Jazz sits at the table looking confused. She looks down at the newspaper where we see Jen Baker's picture and obituary.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Eric is walking toward the hotel office while leafing through Meagan's postcards. He sees one addressed to Jen Baker and tears it up. He tosses the pieces on the ground to let the wind scatter them. He then enters the hotel office.

INT. HOTEL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The clerk from last night is at the front desk.

CLERK
 Good morning. How was everything?

ERIC
 Oh, everything was perfect. Do you work twenty-four hours?

CLERK
 Well, sort of, being me and my wife own the place. Keeps us busy.

ERIC
 I was looking for a mailbox but didn't see one.
 (extending postcards)
 I was wondering if you could mail these for me?

CLERK
 Well certainly.

The clerk takes the postcards from Eric.

CLERK (CONT'D)
 How's your sister doin' this morning?

ERIC
 Oh, she has her good days and her bad days. Today's one of her bad days. The meds they have me give her when she's like this knock her completely out---I'll probably have to carry her out to my truck.

CLERK
 That must be tough to deal with.

ERIC

Yeah, but I'm used to it.

Eric pauses and turns to leave.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Well, I'd better hit the road while she's still out. I know when she wakes she'll be ranting non-stop to make up for lost time.

(smiles warmly)

You take care.

CLERK

You too. Thanks. Hope to see ya again!

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Eric carries an unconscious Meagan out to the pickup truck. The clerk comes out of one of the other rooms. He waves to Eric. Eric waves back.

Eric hops into the drivers side and pulls away.

INT. MEAGAN AND JAZZ'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jazz is sitting at the kitchen table looking at a postcard from Meagan. We see what's written on the postcard:

INSERT: I'm really tired so I won't write much. Just wanted to let you know I've had a change of plans. I'm traveling with Jen's cousin, Eric and we're heading to the Black Hills of South Dakota. He's interesting. I'll write again soon! Love, Meagan.

JAZZ

(to herself)

What the fuck's goin' on?

INT. MEAGAN'S PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT (MOVING)

Eric is driving and Meagan is behind the front seat under a tarp. Classical MUSIC is playing on the radio as Eric turns back and pulls the tarp back from Meagan's head. She's conscious and has duct tape over her mouth and is handcuffed.

ERIC

If you cooperate and be quiet I'll remove your tape. Do you think you can do that?

Meagan nods "yes". Eric pulls her to a sitting position then RIPS THE DUCT TAPE from her mouth.

MEAGAN
Shit, that hurts!

ERIC
I can put it back on...

MEAGAN
No.

There's a moment of silence as Meagan tries to see where they are. She sees a highway sign in their headlights that says "Chicago 40 Miles".

MEAGAN (CONT'D)
Where're you taking me?

ERIC
All over. We're gonna tour the states for a bit.

MEAGAN
Why are you doing this to me?

ERIC
Because it's fun. Don't you love the excitement?

MEAGAN
No.

Meagan pauses for a moment to look out the window at the passing highway lines.

MEAGAN (CONT'D)
If you plan on ransoming me my mom doesn't have much money.

ERIC
(reassuringly)
Don't worry, I'm not gonna ransom you.

MEAGAN
Then what're you gonna do with me?

ERIC
I'm gonna kill you.

Meagan's eyes look panicked.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Relax, I'm not gonna do it anytime real soon---unless you piss me off.

QUICK CUT TO:

IN BLACK AND WHITE: The inside of Eric's briefcase.

Meagan shudders thinking about it.

MEAGAN

Where did you get those fingers
from?

ERIC

Dead red-heads.

MEAGAN

If you wanna kill me why don't you
just do it and get it over with?

ERIC

(smiling coldly)

Some things are worth the wait.

Eric enjoys toying with Meagan's mind.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I also like the challenge of taking
a beautiful and intelligent woman
hostage.... The actual killing's fun
too.

Meagan tries to put her psychology to use...

MEAGAN

I don't think you enjoy killing.
Maybe you act impulsively---like
when you abducted me---and then you
don't see any alternatives.

ERIC

(smiling)

No, that's not it. I enjoy killing.

Meagan knows she needs to convince him otherwise.

Out the front window of the truck we see a HITCHHIKER in the
distance. The highway is quiet.

MUSIC: Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" begins playing. Eric
turns it up a bit.

MEAGAN

(still nervous)

I don't think killing is a natural
thing for anyone.

(MORE)

MEAGAN (CONT'D)

Just think about all the pain it would cause all their family and friends.

ERIC

I do think about it. It gives you a sense of power....like this music.

Eric sings to the music...He's into it!

ERIC (CONT'D)

Ba ba da dum dum! Ba ba da dum dum!
Isn't this magnificent?!

The hitchhiker is getting closer.

When the pickup is within ten feet of him, Eric turns the wheel and hits the gas! The TIRES SQUEAL!

Eric runs over the hitchhiker...Meagan SCREAMS! The back tires roll over his body with a THUD! Eric turns the steering wheel so the pickup is back on the road again.

We see the mangled dead body lying on the shoulder.

Eric doesn't miss a beat.

ERIC (CONT'D)

See how easy that was. I feel great!
Ba ba da dum dum!

He turns to Meagan.

ERIC (CONT'D)

(smiling)
Wasn't that fun?!

Meagan is crying and cowering in the back.

ERIC (CONT'D)

By the way, I'm gonna have you write out some postcards later. You might want to think about what you wanna write your friends about---let them know how much fun you're having.

INT. MEAGAN AND JAZZ'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jazz is sitting at the kitchen table going through the mail when she sees another postcard from Meagan. This postcard has a picture of the Oregon coast on it. It reads

INSERT: Hate East. Love Pacific! Many exciting, natural oceanic wonders! I love the shrimp here! Could eat it all day! I hope all is well with you! --- Meagan.

There appears to be a blood stain on the corner of the card. Jazz looks at the card and the blood stain.

INT. MILES' HOUSE - DAY

Miles is eating a spaghetti dinner on his own in his kitchen with a glass of red wine. The PHONE RINGS. He gets up to answer it.

MILES

Hello?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eric is in a different hotel looking at Meagan lying on the bed, tied up. She struggles to scream, but duct tape covers her mouth.

ERIC

(cheery)

Hey, how's it going, counselor?

INTERCUT

MILES

Not bad. What do you want?

ERIC

That's no way to treat a former client. What if I was suicidal?

MILES

Did you forget, you terminated services and sued me? If you need a new counselor I can refer you to one.

ERIC

No, I like you. You were always very persistent and intuitive. I like that.

MILES

What're you up to?

ERIC

Not much, just hangin' around with a mutual friend.

MILES

Who are you with?

ERIC

Do you remember what color my mother's hair was?

MILES

(sarcastically)

Why? Have you forgotten?

ERIC

No, it's just I've always been fascinated with red heads...I don't know if it's their flare or the dark side I always seem to find hidden in them.

MILES

Why don't you tell someone else about your fascination?

ERIC

Because they wouldn't care. I know you do. You want to save the world one lost soul at a time....I know you regret I never gave you the chance to save mine.

MILES

Don't mess with me. You screwed me over once and I won't let you do it again!

ERIC

What makes you think I'd want to screw you over?

MILES

It's my intuitive nature you mentioned before.

Miles pauses for a moment.

MILES (CONT'D)

(with more compassion)

I know you're angry at the world and you still need help.

ERIC

I'm not angry at the world...just parts of it.

Eric pauses briefly.

ERIC (CONT'D)

It was nice talking with you but
I've got to go. Later.

Eric hangs up the phone. Miles SLAMS down the phone.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Jazz is standing outside a brick classroom building looking for someone. A class is exiting the building. Jazz sees Cara.

JAZZ

(waving to her)

Hey, Cara!

CARA

Hi, Jazz! What's up? Any news from
Meg?

JAZZ

That's what I wanna to talk to you
about. Do you have a few minutes?

CARA

Yeah, sure.

The two walk over to a nearby bench under an oak tree and sit down.

CARA (CONT'D)

What's up with Meg? Is she coming
back---or what. It's been almost
three weeks.

Jazz pulls out three postcards she's received from Meagan and hands them to Cara.

JAZZ

I dunno. You tell me what you think.

Cara looks at the postcards and quickly reads them. We see her face turn from looking normal to one that appears puzzled.

CARA

Meg's allergic to shrimp!

JAZZ

Yeah. She told me about it just
before she left. Do you know anything
about Jen's cousin?

CARA

No. I was with her the night
before...

Cara gets a little teary eyed thinking about Jen's death.
She pulls out a tissue and wipes her tears.

CARA (CONT'D)

She didn't say anything about a cousin
visiting. I still can't believe Jen
killed herself, but with a relative
coming in---and wouldn't he know
about it?

JAZZ

That's what bothers me. That and
her last postcard.

CARA

Yeah, I know. That's just too weird---
it doesn't make sense.

JAZZ

When I got one sayin' she wouldn't
be back in time for the start of
classes I got worried. Now this---I
think something's happened. These
are too fuckin' weird. I'm gonna go
to the police.

INT. MILES' CAMPUS OFFICE - DAY

Miles paces back and forth in his small office. He stops
pacing and stares out the only window in the office.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MILES' COUNSELING OFFICE - DAY

We see Miles and Eric in a counseling session a few years
earlier. This time Eric is dressed in torn jeans and a black
Megadeath concert T-shirt.

MILES

When did your parents die?

ERIC

About 15 or 16 years ago.

MILES

You were quite young when they died.

ERIC
Physically, yeah...but in some ways
I was much older.

MILES
Was it a car crash?

ERIC
Hell no! I don't think my parents
ever went out together.

MILES
What happened?

Eric leans back on his chair as though he's talking about
his favorite baseball game.

ERIC
My dad was drinking as usual. He
got pissed at my mom for something
or other and shot her a few times.
Then he blew his own brains out.

Miles is caught off guard by Eric's attitude.

MILES
How does that make you feel?

ERIC
(smiling)
Fuckin' Great. I hated them. They
deserved to die. I would've done it
myself if I would've had the guts
back then.

MILES
You would've killed your parents?

ERIC
(sarcastically)
Isn't that what I just said? It's
too bad my old man beat me to it.

MILES
Do you have any remorse for them?

ERIC
Fuck no. They treated me like shit
and deserved to die. I just wish I
would've been the one to pull the
trigger.

Eric smiles coldly.

INT. POLICE STATION, DETECTIVE OFFICE - DAY

Jazz is sitting opposite an OVERWEIGHT police detective with a large paper-strewn desk in between them. His name plate reads DETECTIVE STEVENS. He listens to her with only mild interest.

JAZZ

...And then in the last postcard she said she loves the shrimp---She's allergic to shrimp. I think she's in trouble.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

So, you don't really know who she's with or where she is now?

JAZZ

No. I know she wuz in Oregon six days ago.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

In six days a person can drive across the country and back.

Jazz looks frustrated and begins tapping her fingers.

DETECTIVE STEVENS (CONT'D)

You said she quit her job just before she net on break, right?

JAZZ

Yeah.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

Isn't it possible she planned on traveling around but didn't want to tell anyone?

JAZZ

She's not like that! Meagan is pretty responsible!

DETECTIVE STEVENS

You think her boss would say that as well?

Jazz doesn't have a good answer.

DETECTIVE STEVENS (CONT'D)

Maybe she's smitten with this guy.

JAZZ

I don't think so...

DETECTIVE STEVENS

(cutting her off)

Listen. Even if we knew she was in trouble---which I doubt---we couldn't do anything about it. She out of the city and it seems she's keeping in touch with you---even if you don't like what she has to say. No police department would use resources to find out about a college student's love life. Sorry, I can't help you.

Jazz bites her lip as tears start to stream down her face and she storms off.

INT. MILES' COUNSELING OFFICE - DAY

Jazz has tears streaming down. She is in the midst of meeting with Miles. Miles is intently listening. He hands her a tissue and she wipes her tears.

JAZZ

It seems like the police don't care.

MILES

Has your roommate done anything like this before?

JAZZ

No. Not to say that she would never do anything like this---it just doesn't fit.

(pauses)

And there are weird postcards I've been getting from her.

MILES

What do you mean, weird?

JAZZ

Meagan has sent me three postcards so far and...

MILES

(cutting her off)

What's Meagan's last name?

JAZZ

O'Neill.

Miles looks surprised.

MILES

Meagan is a student of mine.

JAZZ

I know. That's why I came to you.
I thought you might understand.

MILES

I can't counsel you if you have
problems with one of my students.
It would be unethical.

Jazz looks like she's ready to lose her cool.

JAZZ

What? I need some help! No one
seems to give a shit!

MILES

Hold on! I just can't counsel you
about this. I want to help.

(pauses)

She's not the most conventional
person, but I wouldn't expect her to
take off without real notice.

(thinks)

But she has let you know. I mean
she's sending you postcards.

Jazz rolls her eyes.

JAZZ

But it's weird.

MILES

What's weird about them?

JAZZ

I've gotten three so far. The third
one bothered me the most because she
says she loves the shrimp and I know
she is deathly allergic to it.

MILES

Do you have them with you?

JAZZ

Yeah.

Jazz rifles through her purse and pulls them out and hands
them to Miles.

Miles looks at them briefly, then suddenly it looks like he
is seeing something different.

MILES

Do you know this last one looks like
it's meant to be an acronym?

JAZZ

Huh?

We see the postcard: Hate East. Love Pacific! Many exciting,
natural oceanic wonders! I love the shrimp here! Could eat
it all day! I hope all is well with you!--- Meagan

MILES

Her first three sentences spell out
"help me now!"

Jazz grabs the postcard from him and stares at it, seeing it
for the first time.

JAZZ

We've got to help her!

Miles seems to be in deep thought but whatever it is doesn't
seem to be pleasant.

MILES

Something else is bothering me on
this. I need to check on some things.

JAZZ

(anxiously)

When can we get together to figure
out what to do?

Miles looks at a paper.

MILES

Is this the best number to reach
you?

JAZZ

Yes.

MILES

I'll call you later today.

Jazz gets up from her chair and turns to walk out. She stops
at the door and turns back to Miles.

JAZZ

(smiling a bit)

Thanks for helping.

MILES

I haven't done anything yet.

JAZZ

But I believe you will.

JAZZ EXITS. MILES heads toward his filing cabinet and BEGINS SEARCHING FOR A FILE. He pulls out a thin folder that says "ERIC ANDERSON" on it. He quickly skims through the ten page file.

INT. POLICE STATION, DETECTIVE OFFICE - DAY

Miles is in Detective Stevens' office trying to explain the situation to him. Detective Stevens appears more interested as this is the second time he's heard this story.

MILES

This guy has done this before. I counseled him several years ago....it's the same story as far as the postcards.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

Can you sit tight for a moment?

MILES

Sure.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

I'll be right back.

Detective Stevens gets up and walks out of the office.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He walks past a busy office area with PHONES RINGING and CONVERSATIONS taking place. He enters his chief's office.

INT. CHIEF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The office is very neat and appears dust free. The CHIEF looks intelligent, but fragile. He also looks like he's spent his entire career indoors. His hair is iron gray and he wears glasses.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

I've got something unusual. I had a woman in here yesterday who thought her roommate had been abducted. She said she was gettin' weird postcards from her.

(he pauses)

Now I've got a counselor who said he worked with someone named Eric Anderson who told him he did this to another girl a few years ago.

CHIEF

Who was the other girl?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

He said he didn't know. The guy never told him her name.

CHIEF

Does this former client of his have a record?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

Nothing big. Not even a simple assault--just some shoplifting charges.

(he pauses)

But here's the catch. This counselor reported the guy a few years back. We investigated and found nothing.

CHIEF

Who's the counselor?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

He's local. This Eric Anderson guy sued him a few years ago. He also tried to sue our department. Counselor's name is Miles Fletcher.

The Chief starts laughing.

CHIEF

Miles Fletcher?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

Yeah.

CHIEF

That's the counselor who *allegedly* screwed one of his patients. She's taking him to court....It was in the paper a few weeks ago.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

(sarcastic)

I thought counselors were only supposed to get into people's minds.

The chief smiles dryly. He ponders the situation for a moment the way someone might think about a chess move.

CHIEF

Sounds like he might be just trying to make himself look good for someone or trying to get a little revenge on this Eric Anderson before he loses his license.

The chief pauses and TAPS HIS PEN on his desk.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Tell him we'll put out an attempt to locate on the missing girl.

Detective Stevens nods in approval.

INT. DETECTIVE STEVENS' OFFICE - SAME

Miles is sitting down looking around the office for anything interesting when Detective Stevens walks back in and heads toward his desk.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

Well, Mr. Fletcher, what we can do is put out an attempt to locate on...

The detective looks at the file on his desk for Meagan's name.

DETECTIVE STEVENS (CONT'D)

(finding her name)

Meagan O'Neill.

MILES

What's that mean?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

An attempt to locate, means that if the police happen to see her---like if she's pulled over---they'll notify us of her whereabouts.

MILES

(incensed)

What?! That's it?! I tell you this woman is in serious danger and you tell me if the police just happen to bump into her you'll be called?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

(calmly)

That's about the upshot of it. Though you'd be surprised how many people are found that way.

MILES

What about Eric Anderson?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

Well, he only has a minor criminal record and we don't have any real suspicion of him at this point. When you reported him a few years ago we investigated and found nothing.

MILES

What about what I just told you?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

Right now you don't have much credibility. From what the newspapers say you may be in more trouble than he is.

Miles shakes his head in disbelief.

MILES

(protesting)

That's a completely different matter that has nothing to do with this.

Detective Stevens stands up. The meeting is over as far as he's concerned.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

That's about all we can do for you. Have a good day Mr. Fletcher.

Miles stares in disbelief.

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Miles is staring in disbelief at Stan. Stan has a beer in front of him and Miles a wine cooler. Their table is dark and away from other customers.

MILES

This can't be real...this has to be a nightmare. Maybe he's bluffing just to get me riled up.

STAN

Let's look at the facts here. He confessed to murder in the past. He called you twice and said he's traveling with someone you know who has red hair. By coincidence you've got a student with red hair who hasn't returned from break.

MILES

But I got a note she won't be back
this semester.

STAN

Oh yeah, that's right. But you also
have her roommate saying she's gotten
strange postcards from her that don't
add up.

Miles sighs and takes a sip of his wine cooler.

MILES

I know that. I just think he might
be trying to screw me over again.
Besides, I've already gone to the
police.

STAN

But they aren't doing anything, are
they?

MILES

They put out an attempt to locate.

STAN

Which means they aren't doing
anything. You have a person in danger---
what do you need to do?

MILES

Don't do this to me, Stan.

STAN

I'm not doing anything to you. I'm
just checking to make sure you know
the code of ethics you swore to live
by when you became a counselor.

MILES

But what do you want me to do?!
Leave my job and scour the country
for a former client who sued me?!

STAN

(calmly)

If that's what you need to do to
protect a person in danger.

Miles shakes his head in dismay. He wants to avoid this.

MILES

I'm supposed to be in court this week. If I postpone the press will crucify me and I'll look guilty as sin.

STAN

You're right. You will look guilty. You look guilty now.

MILES

But I'm not. You of all people have to know that.

STAN

Yes, but I'm only one vote. The board is set to begin preliminary discovery. If you postpone court the board will likely move forward and review your conduct.

(he hesitates)

You can lose your license.

Miles shakes his head. His stress level is going through the roof. Stan looks him in the eye.

STAN (CONT'D)

Both you and I know Eric isn't bluffing. I think we both know he wasn't bluffing three years ago...and things would have been different if the police would've found some evidence, but he's too smart for that.

MILES

But what if I get to him and the police don't find any evidence?

STAN

What if? I guess it depends on whether or not you've saved a life.

Stan pauses to take a sip of his beer.

STAN (CONT'D)

Can you look me in the eye and tell me you think he's bluffing?

Miles looks at Stan for a moment without saying a word, then looks away.

STAN (CONT'D)

You know what you need to do. The Tarasoff Decision makes it pretty clear...you've tried to warn and that's not enough.

MILES

(reluctantly concedes)

I know. Everything in my power to protect a person in danger---but it won't make much difference if I lose my license.

STAN

I can't tell you anything else. You need to make the decision. I can't make it for you---and I wouldn't want to if I could.

Miles remains silent as he searches his soul for answers.

EXT. HOTEL COTTAGE - NIGHT

A small cottage with a light on inside. There are other cottages, but they are fairly well spread out and the ones nearest it are dark and appear unoccupied. We hear COYOTES HOWLING in the distance.

INT. HOTEL COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

The cottage is another inexpensive, outdated family run business that Eric has chosen for its anonymity. Meagan has several cuts and bruises and is gagged with a blue bandanna tied around her head. She sits on the bed with her hands handcuffed to her ankles.

She has a pen in her right hand and several postcards on top of a writing pad in front of her. Eric is trying to coax her to write, but she is resisting.

CLASSICAL MUSIC PLAYS FROM A BOOM BOX on the dresser.

ERIC

Okay, how about you try for something a little different today. How about you write about all the beautiful forests you've gotten to see.

Meagan shakes her head "no".

ERIC (CONT'D)

You know I'm not asking you to write...I'm telling you.

Meagan again shakes her head "no", but this time is more defiant.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You've got twenty seconds to start writing, and I started counting ten seconds ago.

We see Meagan's look worried, but she does not make a move to write, instead she throws her pen at Eric.

Eric is pissed. He picks up the pen and goes face to face with Meagan. He grabs her right wrist and holds the pen tip an inch from her eye!

ERIC (CONT'D)

Do you realize all I need to do is just thrust my hand forward and I can go right through your eye and into your brain?

He pauses for a moment looking at Meagan's panicked looking eyes.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Snapping fingers)

You'd be dead---like that!

Eric then stands up and begins walking around the room like a politician trying to make a point.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Of course that's not what I want to do with you. No. I want you to have more fun before you die. I want you to know what suffering is. I don't want you to just wish you'd never been born---but to wish your parents had never been born.

Eric smiles his menacing smile at Meagan.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I guess you still don't want to write, do you?

Meagan shakes her head "no" again.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Well I'm sure I can change your mind...

Eric picks up his briefcase and puts it on the bed. He puts in the combination and POPS THE LATCHES. He opens it up and smiles.

Eric turns toward Meagan and looks at her fingers.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You don't wear any rings, do you?

Meagan shakes her head, "no". Eric pulls a ring out from his briefcase. It's Jen's friendship ring!

ERIC (CONT'D)

I wonder if this will fit you.

Meagan's eyes light up, realizing that the ring looks like Jen's.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Oh, I took this from your friend Jen after I killed her. It would look nice in my trophy case on your finger.

Meagan's eyes look extremely panicked! She tries to scream but is muffled by bandanna.

Eric forces the ring on Meagan's finger on her left hand, tearing her knuckle in the process.

ERIC (CONT'D)

You look as though you've changed your mind about writing. Have you?

Meagan nods "yes" this time.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Why don't you write out a couple of quick postcards.

Meagan begins writing as Eric gets lost in the classical MUSIC. She writes out two postcards and hands them to Eric. He reads them quickly.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Bravo! Very good! I knew you had it in you!

He pauses again, then slowly speaks to Meagan in a menacing tone.

ERIC (CONT'D)

It's unfortunate it took you so long to write these. I'm really disappointed.

Meagan looks panicked. Eric goes into his briefcase and pulls out a scalpel.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 Don't worry, this won't hurt much.
 It'll be more painful than anything
 you've experienced in your life.

He pauses to act as a conductor to the classical music with the scalpel as a baton. He TURNS UP THE MUSIC.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 (loudly)
 Isn't music magnificent!

He inches closer to Meagan who is squirming to get away from him.

ERIC (CONT'D)
 (whispers in her ear)
 Don't worry, I'll stitch you up when
 I'm done...that's half the fun.

Eric smiles a deranged smile. He moves closer to Meagan with the scalpel raised....

EXT. HOTEL COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Meagan's muffled agonizing SCREAM resounds above the classical MUSIC!

INT. MILES' COUNSELING OFFICE - DAY

Miles sits at his desk. There's a KNOCK at the door.

MILES
 Come in!

Jazz enters wearing a short black mini-dress. Miles gets up to greet her.

JAZZ
 Sorry I'm early.

MILES
 Oh, that's fine...I was hoping you'd
 get here early.

JAZZ
 Good. By the way, what was it that
 you needed to check on yesterday?

Miles appears uncomfortable with answering her question.

MILES

It's something I didn't want to think about.

JAZZ

(sarcastically)

Well that answers my question.

MILES

I'm sorry, I've got a lot going on right now.

JAZZ

I know, I saw the article in the paper.

MILES

Who didn't. Just so you know, it never happened.

JAZZ

Do you think I give a rat's ass about what happened? I don't. I just want to get Meagan back. I'm worried about her.

MILES

I am too.

He pauses and motions to her.

MILES (CONT'D)

Why don't you sit down. I've got something to tell you that doesn't make things any easier.

Jazz sits down and gives Miles her undivided attention. Miles gets up and paces as he talks.

MILES (CONT'D)

A few years ago I had a client who was referred to me for counseling after he had beaten up his girlfriend. After a few sessions he told me he had also abducted a college student and forced her to send postcards to her friends.

JAZZ

What happened to her?

MILES

He said he killed her.

JAZZ

So, did he go to jail?

MILES

No. He told me about it after it was done. I reported him and the police never found anything. He ended up suing me for breach of confidentiality.

JAZZ

What? You mean he killed someone and sued you?

MILES

Yeah, counselors aren't allowed to break confidentiality unless a person is in danger---we can't do anything after the fact.

JAZZ

Shit! Meagan is in danger! Can't you report him now?

MILES

(sounds defeated)

I did.

JAZZ

And what happened?

MILES

The police said they'd put out an attempt to locate on her. Basically if she gets pulled over for speeding they'll let us know...and that's about all they'll do. Right now they said I don't have much credibility.

JAZZ

What's that leave us as options?

MILES

I don't have a choice. I *have* to go after her. I know she's in danger and I don't think I've got much time.

JAZZ

(correcting him)

Who the fuck died and made you king? You mean *we*. We are going after her.

MILES

This guy is dangerous. He was playing with me when I worked with him and he's playing with me now.

JAZZ

I don't give a shit how dangerous he is, Meagan's in trouble and she needs our help.

Miles pauses for a moment to think.

MILES

Okay....this goes against my better judgment. Then again, if my judgment had been better the police might be helping us.

JAZZ

Where do we begin? We don't have much to go on.

MILES

The only leads we have are the postcards, right?

JAZZ

Yeah.

MILES

Okay, we need to get an idea of where they've been and more importantly, where they're headed. Do you have the postcards with you?

Jazz pulls them out.

JAZZ

Yeah, they're right here.

MILES

We're gonna need a map.

TIME CUT TO:

INT. MILES' COUNSELING OFFICE - NIGHT

It's much later and a road map of the United States is tacked up on the wall with different colored pins indicating where the postcards were mailed from. There's a mostly empty pizza box on the desk as well as a six pack of Diet Coke.

Miles and Jazz appear to have developed a good working relationship. Miles stands up looking at the map.

MILES

(tracing a route)

Okay. So we assume they headed down at least part of the way to Virginia. Somewhere along the way they changed course and headed northwest and mailed a postcard from

(pointing)

Here---Sandusky, Ohio.

Miles points to the first pin marking the first postcard in Ohio.

MILES (CONT'D)

Then we didn't hear anything from Meagan until over a week later when one was sent from Rapid City, South Dakota---here.

Miles points to Rapid City's marker.

MILES (CONT'D)

(mispronounces)

Then you received one from Core d' Eileen, Idaho...or however it's pronounced.

JAZZ

(corrects him)

Coeur d'Alene.

MILES

Okay. Then we got a postcard from the weirdest named place---Humptulips, Washington---here.

Miles points to HUMPTULIPS.

JAZZ

I wonder how they came up with that name....Gets me thinking of some pretty weird images.

Miles smiles at Jazz and continues.

MILES

Then we got a postcard today from Coos Bay, Oregon---here.

Miles points to Coos Bay.

JAZZ

It looks like they're heading down the coast. Maybe making a circle around the outskirts of country.

MILES

It looks that way.

JAZZ

I say we head to San Francisco. This way we can get ahead of them.

MILES

No, I think we need to get behind them. How are we gonna find them if we don't have anything to go on other than a week old postcard?

JAZZ

I don't know. I just don't want to lose any time.

MILES

Some of these towns they've been to are pretty small. Maybe someone's seen them.

JAZZ

Where should we go?

MILES

If you can get someone to check your mail, I'd say we should head to Coos Bay. It might be somewhere to pick up their trail.

JAZZ

I can get Cara to check it. I'll probably have quit my job, 'cause I doubt they'll give me time off without notice.

She pauses for a moment thinking.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

It's funny, I got on Meagan's case for quitting her job without notice and here I am doing the same damn thing to follow her.

MILES

(smiles wryly)

I'm sure she'd be proud of you.

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

We don't have much time---you'd better go pack. I'll book us a flight out of here for first thing in the morning.

EXT. COOS BAY AIRPORT - DAY

It's a sunny day and Miles' and Jazz's plane has just landed. They walk away from it discussing a plan of action. Propeller planes engines run in the background.

MILES

First, I think we need to check with the hotels in the area to see if anyone's seen them. Ask if they've seen anyone who acted strangely. Or if they've seen Meagan's pickup truck--- I'm glad it's purple---that should make it stand out a bit.

JAZZ

I checked the triple A guide and looked at the number of hotels. There're seven listed.

MILES

We don't have much time stop at all of them. If I know Eric right, he'd probably be staying at the lowest profile hotels. I don't think he'd stay at any chain so we'll try the mom and pop motels first. If we don't come across anything at those, then we'll try the others.

JAZZ

What should I ask about this Eric guy?

Miles and Jazz enter the airport terminal and continue walking toward the luggage pick up.

INT. COOS BAY AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

The terminal is small and there's only one luggage claim area. Their luggage is already out by the time they get there.

MILES

First of all, he's good looking and charming.

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

That may be to our advantage because he may have left an impression on some people---particularly women.

JAZZ

How do we want to do the search?

MILES

I reserved us two cars so we can get to all the hotels faster.

A look of concern crosses Jazz's face because she doesn't have much money.

JAZZ

(sheepishly)

How much will that cost?

MILES

(smiles warmly)

Don't worry about it---I'm paying for it. I remember what it's like to be a college student.

EXT. HOTEL COTTAGE - DAY

It's the hotel with small cottages we saw earlier where Meagan lost her finger. There's a red Toyota Corolla rental car parked outside the office.

INT. HOTEL COTTAGE OFFICE - DAY

Miles is talking with the desk clerk, a forty-five year old woman with a worn face wearing a name tag that says SALLY. Jeopardy is on TV in the b.g.

SALLY

Yeah, I remember them. He checked in 'round eleven at night when my shift was done. He said he didn't want no maid service 'cause his wife was 'lergic to cleanin' supplies. I seen him bringin' her in---she wuz passed out, dead drunk.

MILES

When were they here?

SALLY

They got here a week an' a half ago an' left 'bout three days ago.

MILES

(surprised)

They were here for a week?

SALLY

Yeah, they wuz pretty quiet. I never seen her much at all after the first night. I seen him goin' in an' out a few times.

MILES

Do you know where they were headed?

SALLY

Nope, they left in the middle of the night. The maid found some real blood stained towels in there. Are they runnin' from the law?

MILES

(somewhat bitterly)

No, but they should be.

EXT. OUTDOOR CAFE ON OREGON COAST - DAY

Miles and Jazz are having lunch at an open air cafe with a beautiful view of the Oregon coast. Miles has a hamburger while Jazz picks at a chef salad. They continue to work out their plan of action.

MILES

What we need to do is keep checking with hotels as we head down the coast.

JAZZ

(questioning)

But we don't know we're they're headed...

MILES

I don't think he'd backtrack---it wouldn't make any sense.

JAZZ

Dragging Meagan around doesn't make sense either. It seems pretty stupid to run the risk of gettin' caught.

MILES

That's where he's different. He gets off on the idea he's outsmarting the police and everyone else. He knows he did it with me before.

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

He knows how the system works and
how people think. Eric's a genius---
but he's sick.

There's a brief moment of silence between them.

JAZZ

How long do you think he'll keep
Meagan alive?

Miles hasn't wanted to think about his. He shakes his head.

MILES

I don't know---I don't know...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DUSK

Eric and Meagan are in another hotel, this time somewhere in California. Meagan is handcuffed to the bed and wearing blood stained underwear and a bra. Her legs are severely cut and bruised around the crotch area. Her left hand is bandaged. Her mouth has duct tape over it.

Eric stands at the dresser looking down at several long objects. CLASSICAL MUSIC plays from the radio.

ERIC

(menacing)

Let's see...what should we use
today...

Meagan tries to scream through the duct tape, but only a muffled sound comes through.

ERIC (CONT'D)

We've got the candle holder, but we
used that last night. How about the
crow bar? We haven't used that.

Eric turns toward the bed and smiles while holding up the crow bar. He begins walking toward the bed.

CLOSE UP: on the crow bar.

EXT. OREGON HIGHWAY - DUSK

A crow bar being handed over to Jazz as she changes a flat tire.

JAZZ

Thanks.

MILES

You're welcome....Are you sure you don't want any help?

JAZZ

I'm capable of changing a tire.

Miles looks for something to do but doesn't see anything.

MILES

I'll check the map to see how much further we have to go 'till we hit the California border.

JAZZ

(without looking up)
About ten miles.

Miles looks down at her.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

I've been counting down the miles.

MILES

Oh.

JAZZ

I wish we had more to go on than we do.

MILES

Well, we've checked every hotel along the highway for the last hundred miles and no one's seen them. They may be staying in the same place for a while then moving on after a week or so.

Jazz removes the old tire and puts the new one on as Miles looks around at the mostly empty and dark stretch of highway.

MILES (CONT'D)

Are you sure you don't need any help?

JAZZ

(a little annoyed)
How many times are you gonna ask?

MILES

Obviously one too many.

JAZZ

That's okay. I'm sorry, I like to do things on my own.

She pauses for a moment, then looks up at Miles.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

How long did you counsel him?

MILES

Not long. Only a month or so.

JAZZ

What was he like?

MILES

He seemed genuinely nice and at other times he had an attitude. On my first impression I liked him. Though the more I learned about him the more I realized it was a great illusion. He played with me like a toy. I should've never broken confidentiality when I did. If I would've waited another week I might've found out where he buried the woman's body. He lied when he told me the first time.

Jazz is done changing the tire. She stands up and stretches. She looks at Miles with tears in her eyes.

JAZZ

We're not gonna find Meagan alive, are we?

Miles hugs Jazz and rocks her a bit, soothing her.

MILES

We are gonna beat him this time.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

Jazz returns to the car with a note pad in her hand. Miles leans against the car eating peanuts.

MILES

Any good news?

JAZZ

Well, Meagan sent another postcard....from Elko, Nevada.

MILES

(surprised)
Nevada?

JAZZ

Yeah. It was postmarked just four days ago.

MILES

Shit! I thought for sure he'd stick to traveling along the coast.

JAZZ

How long's it gonna take us to get to Elko?

Miles pulls out the road atlas and opens it up on the hood of the car.

MILES

On a quick guess it looks like it's about 400 miles away. That'll take us five or six hours---provided we don't get any more flat tires. We'd better get moving.

Miles and Jazz hop into the car, SPINNING THE TIRES as they drive off.

INT. DETECTIVE STEVENS' OFFICE - DAY

Cara is sitting across from Detective Stevens.

DETECTIVE STEVENS

We still don't have anything concrete that leads us to believe there's any foul play involved. I told that to your friend and Mr. Fletcher.

CARA

(angry)

Don't you think somethin's wrong?! I'm the third person to come to you! Haven't you done anything!

DETECTIVE STEVENS

As a matter of fact we have. We checked up on this Eric Anderson and found out he left his job.

CARA

Doesn't that tell you somethin'?

DETECTIVE STEVENS

Yeah, he decided he didn't want to work there anymore.

Cara looks dumbfounded.

DETECTIVE STEVENS (CONT'D)
Do you know where he had been working?

CARA
No.

DETECTIVE STEVENS
The Battered Women's Shelter downtown.
He was working as a counselor there,
and to quote his supervisor, he was
the most caring man she's ever met.

Cara looks confused.

DETECTIVE STEVENS (CONT'D)
I'm not about to put out an APB on a
philanthropist unless I've got
something more solid.

CARA
Did they say where he went?

DETECTIVE STEVENS
He decided to tour the country.

CARA
Yeah, probably with Meg as his
hostage.

DETECTIVE STEVENS
Listen, we're still looking into
this. We'll give you a call if we
find anything else.

Cara gets up and looks pissed.

CARA
(upset)
You don't care, do you?

DETECTIVE STEVENS
We're doing what we can.

Cara shakes her head in disbelief. She storms out and slams
the door behind her.

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - DAY

Miles and Jazz's red Corola cruises down a desert highway on
a sunny day. There's nothing around for miles.

INT. MILES' RENTAL CAR - CONTINUOUS (MOVING)

JAZZ

There's so much empty space out here.

MILES

Yeah, I like it.

JAZZ

Where're you from?

MILES

Pennsylvania. My parents own a ranch on the western side of the state with a good sized herd of cattle. I've got a getaway place near there. That's where I grew up. I like rural living.

JAZZ

How'd you end up at such a big college?

MILES

I always wanted to help people. If I moved back to my home town, there wouldn't be too many people for me to work with...and I don't think I could counsel cattle.

JAZZ

What about teachin' there?

MILES

I'd have to teach high school. That's not really for me---at least not yet. Maybe when I meet the right woman and can settle down.

JAZZ

You ever been married?

MILES

I was close one time. We dated all through grad school. When we were done we figured we'd get married. The only problem is she wanted to move to either New York or LA and I was willing to move almost anywhere else. So we went our separate ways. How 'bout you?

JAZZ

I've had some long relationships but usually the guys I've dated ended up bein' scared when it came to anythin' more serious than goin' out a couple of times a week. I just hope I meet the right guy before I hit forty.

MILES

I bet you will.

JAZZ

From what I hear, after forty women have a better chance of gettin' struck by lightning than gettin' married.

MILES

I know quite a few people who've gotten married after forty.

JAZZ

But wuz it their first marriage?

Miles pauses to think about this.

MILES

No, but I don't think it makes a difference.

JAZZ

Trust me, it does. Men are pretty fucked up about things like that. Kinda like sex on the first date...if you do it they think you're a slut but they want it anyway.

MILES

I never thought about it that way.

JAZZ

Meagan and I always joke about meeting someone wealthy who'd sweep us off our feet and take us away. She doesn't deserve this shit.

MILES

No one does. Sometimes bad things happen to good people for no reason.

JAZZ

What're we gonna do when we catch him.

Miles' eyes look vacant. He stares down the highway.

MILES

I'm not sure. I have a gun but I never thought I'd need one. I don't think he can be reasoned with. The only way to stop him is to kill him before he kills again.

INT. MEAGAN'S PICKUP - DAY (MOVING)

Eric is driving and Meagan is handcuffed behind the front seat. She looks thinner and very worn.

ERIC

You should take a look out here. you're missing all this great scenery. I'm sure you'll never get to see it again.

Eric smiles a sinister smile.

EXT. MEAGAN'S PICKUP (WYOMING) - CONTINUOUS

They're driving on the interstate. The Rocky Mountains are in the background.

INT. MEAGAN'S PICKUP - CONTINUOUS (MOVING)

ERIC

Don't worry, we're almost home. Alliance will be your last stop.

MEAGAN

(sounds exhausted)
I hope you rot in hell.

EXT. ELKO, NEVADA - DUSK

Miles and Jazz are parked in a lot at the edge of the small gambling town of Elko. Miles paces as he talks.

MILES

Not a soul has seen them here. No one at the hotels or the restaurants.

JAZZ

Maybe they didn't stay here.

MILES

That's what worries me. This could be just a diversion to throw us off the trail.

JAZZ

Do you think he'd do that?

MILES

Only if he thought we were getting close.

JAZZ

(hopeful)

Maybe we are! You don't think he'd just drive in this far to send a postcard?

MILES

No, that doesn't make any sense. Were you able to get a hold of Cara?

JAZZ

No, she usually works later on Wednesdays.

MILES

What do you think we should do?

JAZZ

If it's a choice of stayin' here tonight or heading somewhere else, I vote for somewhere else. I don't like sittin' around. It makes me feel like I'm doin' nothin' about Meagan.

MILES

Okay, then we'll keep going the direction that got us here. We'll stop in Utah tonight.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A .38 pistol sits on a dresser in the hotel room that is more modern than the ones we've seen earlier. Miles sits on the bed looking at a road atlas with the page open to California. Jazz hangs up the phone and holds a pen and a note pad.

JAZZ

Cara said she went back to the police but they weren't any help. They told her Eric had been workin' at a women's shelter.

MILES

I'm not surprised. Outward appearance means everything to him.

JAZZ

Cara also said Meagan sent me a postcard from Redding, California that was postmarked a week and a half ago---she said it looks like it was lost in the mail. Where's Redding?

MILES

To the southwest of us. But that's older than the one from Elko.

Jazz looks at the notes.

JAZZ

This doesn't sound at all like Meagan.

MILES

What did it say?

Jazz reads the postcard out loud from her note pad.

JAZZ

Dear Jazz, Met a new guy and seem to form a good alliance. It's been hectic and unfortunately I don't have much time before we move on to somewhere else....Now enjoyin' best runs along shore---keeping active! All My Love, Meagan

MILES

What parts don't sound like Meagan?

JAZZ

Well, just about all of it. First of all, she gave up runnin' 'cause she's got a bad knee. And I've never heard her refer to a relationship as an *Alliance*

MILES

Maybe it's another acronym.

JAZZ

Man gas tf. No, that doesn't work.

MILES

What about the sentence about running?

JAZZ

(slowly sounds out)
Neb-ras-ka....Nebraska! Maybe that's where they're headin'.

Miles turns the Atlas to look at Nebraska.

MILES

What did you say before about
alliance?

JAZZ

I said Meagan would never use that
word to describe a relationship---
unless it was really pathetic.

MILES

(smiling)

There's a town called Alliance in
western Nebraska.

JAZZ

(excited)

How far are we from Alliance?

MILES

It looks like maybe eight to ten
hours away.

Miles quickly grabs the few things he unpacked.

MILES (CONT'D)

I don't think we should wait---we
leave now and drive 'till we get
there.

Jazz grabs her things. They both quickly leave the hotel
room. As the door closes...

EXT. ALLIANCE, NEBRASKA - EARLY MORNING

Eric is driving through the small town of Alliance in the
early morning. The purple pickup goes slowly down the road,
carefully observing speed limits.

EXT. TEXACO GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Eric pulls into a Texaco gas station that looks like it was
last renovated in 1956. He gets out and pumps his own gas.

Sitting in front of the gas station in a folding chair is an
OLD MAN in his early 70's. He looks like a permanent fixture.
There's also a BEARDED MAN filling the oil displays by the
lone gas island.

The old man who looks at him as though he's seen him before.
Eric quickly looks the other way. Eric finishes and pays
the bearded man.

ERIC

Here you go.

BEARDED MAN

Thanks, sir. Have a nice day!

ERIC

You too.

The old man looks at Eric as he quickly leaves.

INT. MILES' RENTAL CAR - DAY (MOVING)

It's sunrise. The speedometer reads 95mph. Miles' eyes are intensely glued to the road. Jazz looks out the window.

JAZZ

How are we gonna find them when we get to Alliance?

MILES

I figure his parents used to live there, so we'll ask if anyone knows him. It's a small town, so it'll depend on how long it's been since he lived there.

He pauses for a moment.

MILES (CONT'D)

If that doesn't work, we'll ask if anyone's seen Meagan's pickup truck.

JAZZ

What then?

MILES

What do you mean, "what then"?

JAZZ

When we find them...what're we gonna do? What's your plan?

MILES

Uhm, I don't have one yet.

JAZZ

(unsure/sarcastic)

Okay, so we find this killer and he'll just say, "Oh, you're the two lookin' for Meagan. Here you go."?

MILES

(defensive)

I know, I always have a plan...I'm always organized, but this is the first time I've ever been thinking of facing a former client who's abducted my student. I'm entitled not to have a plan once in my life.

JAZZ

I'm sorry, I was just thinkin' we may be able to save time if we know what the fuck we're gonna do before we get there.

MILES

I've still got a hundred miles to think of a plan.

EXT. MILES' RENTAL CAR - CONTINUOUS

The car moves down a two lane highway quickly heading into the sunrise.

EXT. ANDERSON RANCH - DAY

Eric drives out of town and turn onto an over-grown dirt road. He drives past the barbed wire fence. There are numerous rusty "NO TRESPASSING" signs. The property appears to be abandoned.

The pickup truck heads down a dirt road toward a weather worn house, barn and a couple of other small sheds nearly a mile off the main road.

Eric parks in the driveway. He gets out, surveying the area. He pulls out Meagan from under a tarp, grabbing her by her handcuffed hands, one hand is bandaged. She has duct tape over her mouth.

ERIC

Welcome to your home where you'll spend the rest of your short life.

EXT. ALLIANCE, NEBRASKA - DAY

Miles and Jazz's red car drives slowly through town. They approach the same gas station that Eric stopped at earlier.

INT. MILES' RENTAL CAR - CONTINUOUS (MOVING)

JAZZ

So much for spottin' Meagan's pickup in town.

Miles looks at the gas gauge that reads "empty".

MILES

We need to stop for gas. I'll ask them if they know any Andersons.

EXT. TEXACO GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Miles gets out and begins filling up the car. Jazz gets out to stretch. Miles sees the bearded man step outside. The old man is still sitting out front.

BEARDED MAN

Howdy!

MILES

Hi! How's it goin'?

BEARDED MAN

Pretty good.

MILES

I've got a question, do you know where the Anderson's live?

BEARDED MAN

Which one? Paula and George Anderson or Carol Anderson the school teacher?

MILES

Uhhh...actually I'm looking for Eric Anderson.

The bearded man scratches his head.

BEARDED MAN

Never heard of him.

The old man looks up.

OLD MAN

Did you say *Eric* Anderson?

MILES

Yeah.

OLD MAN

He ain't lived here for about fifteen years. He went to live with relatives outta state after the tragedy.

MILES

What tragedy?

OLD MAN

His father killed his mother then shot himself. Eric watched the whole thing and was real messed up...It's funny, I thought I saw him earlier this morning but I wasn't sure. Is he back in town?

MILES

Yeah, for a bit....Do you know where he used to live?

The old man points in a direction.

OLD MAN

Yeah. About two miles down this road on the right. The place has been abandoned ever since.

MILES

Thanks!

INT. ANDERSON BARN - DAY

Eric ties Meagan up to four wrought iron rings on the wall in the barn so she is nearly spread eagle. A rusty sickle hangs from the wall.

Meagan tries to resist but is too weak to put up a good struggle.

INT. ANDERSON HOUSE CRAWLSPACE - DAY

Eric is in a dark crawlspace in the cellar lit by a lantern. He's nearly finished digging a shallow grave in an area where he has buried his other victims. A dozen square stones mark other graves.

EXT. ANDERSON RANCH - DAY

The Corolla pulls up slowly, stopping a short distance from the house and barn, but far enough where it's out of sight and earshot.

INT. MILES' RENTAL CAR - SAME

Miles removes his .38 pistol from the glove compartment then turns to Jazz.

MILES

You stay here. I'm gonna see if I can find them.

JAZZ

Fuck you! I'm goin' with you. I didn't travel across the country to sit in the car.

MILES

Listen to me. Just stay here.

JAZZ

What do you think I am, a dog?

MILES

No, I'm sorry. I want you to wait here and if you hear shots you just high tail it out of here and get the police.

JAZZ

(points to gun)

Do you know how to use that?

MILES

Yeah, I've shot at ranges a couple times in my life. Don't worry, I'll be fine.

JAZZ

(reluctantly)

Be careful.

Jazz leans over and kisses Miles.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

That's for luck.

Miles grins. He feels lucky.

MILES

Thanks.

Miles gets out of the car and heads toward the house.

INT. ANDERSON BARN - DAY

Eric eyes up various instruments he has laid out on a blanket. The assortment includes some surgical instruments as well as some non-surgical such as a small baseball bat, a crow bar, a rock hammer, a broken broom stick, a wire coat hanger, and a rusty curved metal bar. His .38 lies on the ground nearby.

There's a back door to the barn plus the main door.

ERIC

This time you can scream all you
want because no one will hear you.

Eric RIPS the duct tape off Meagan's mouth.

MEAGAN

You asshole.

Outside there's the sound of a RUSTY DOOR CREAKING.

Eric quickly puts the used duct tape back over Meagan's mouth.
He grabs his .38 pistol.

ERIC

(smiling to Meagan)
Don't go anywhere.

Eric exits the barn through the main door.

EXT. ANDERSON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Eric slowly approaches the two story house with his .38 in
hand. He looks around to see if there is any other area the
noise may have come from. He sees nothing.

Eric enters the house.

INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house has a decade of dust. The dingy windows let in
some light. Eric moves slowly through the living room and
through the kitchen.

A rat scurries across the floor.

Eric heads back into the living room.

INT. ANDERSON HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miles stands there with his gun drawn! This is foreign
territory for Miles. He looks awkward and nervous at best.

MILES

Drop the gun!

Eric isn't phased.

ERIC

(calmly)
I'll lower it...

Eric lowers his pistol to his side.

ERIC (CONT'D)

How's that?

MILES

No. Drop it! Or I'll shoot!

Eric doesn't comply. He's eerily calm in contrast to Miles' nervousness.

Sweat begins beading on Miles' forehead.

ERIC

(very calmly)

I'll tell you what. I don't think you can shoot me. You're entire life has been wasted trying to help people---you can't kill me or anyone else. It's not in your blood.

MILES

I'm prepared to kill you if I have to.

Eric sticks his chest out to make a bigger target.

ERIC

Well, go ahead---shoot me.

Miles doesn't shoot. He keeps his gun trained on Eric.

MILES

Eric, I know you were there when your parents were killed. I know it must have hurt seeing them die in front of you, but it doesn't make you a killer.

ERIC

(sarcastically)

It doesn't?

MILES

No.

ERIC

It does if you're the one who pulled the trigger. I guess someone sold you that old story too. My father didn't kill my mother, I did. Then I killed my father and made it look like suicide. I hated them. They treated me like dirt because they fucked up their own lives.

(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

I'm glad I killed them....I'm not touched by your sympathy because I don't givva fuck.

Eric pauses for a moment to smile a wry smile.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I guess you were able to figure out her coded postcards.

MILES

(surprised)

You knew?

ERIC

Yeah, I figured she was up to something when she wrote more eloquently. I had hoped they'd get to your hands.

MILES

Why me?

ERIC

Because you know me---we've shared dark secrets. I know you would be the one person who'd try to follow me and make it interesting. The police won't follow up on anything if they don't have evidence.

MILES

Where'd you bury that girl's body?

ERIC

Oh, yeah, the police never found any leads back then...if they had I would've been sitting in jail and you wouldn't have lost your license. Isn't strange how things work out? Now you're standing above her body.

Miles looks down at a dusty Persian rug on the floor.

ERIC (CONT'D)

There's a hidden door under the rug. I've got a crawl space under the house the police never searched....that girl I told you about is down there, but she's not alone. She's got company.

Eric smiles.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Lots of company.

MILES

Eric, this is where it ends.

ERIC

I don't think so.

(he pauses)

I'll give you 20 seconds to pull the trigger...and I started counting ten seconds ago....What's it gonna be, counselor?

There's a long pause. Miles' finger twitches on the trigger. He's sweating profusely.

MILES

I told you, drop the gun!

Eric doesn't flinch. He slowly raises his left wrist and looks at his watch.

ERIC

(calmly)

Time's up.

Eric slowly raises his .38.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Killing. It's always been in my blood.

BANG! BANG! Eric shoots Miles twice in the chest.

BANG! Miles fires a shot as he falls to the floor, grazing Eric in his left shoulder.

INT. MILES' RENTAL CAR - SAME

Jazz hears the shots. She knows she should get help but pauses with her hand on the door.

JAZZ

(to herself)

Fuck!

Jazz bolts out of the car, heading toward the house.

INT. ANDERSON BARN - SAME

Meagan struggles to free herself. The ropes are tight but her duct tape begins to come loose.

She shakes her head and tries to scream. It's still muffled. Thrashing her head about she finally gets the tape off and SCREAMS for help!

MEAGAN

Help! Anyone! Help me!

EXT. ANDERSON RANCH - SAME

Jazz heads for the house when she hears MEAGAN'S SCREAMS for help.

Jazz changes direction and runs toward the barn!

INT. ANDERSON BARN - CONTINUOUS

Jazz enters the barn through the front door.

MEAGAN

Jazz!

JAZZ

Meagan! Thank god you're alive!

Jazz starts trying to untie Meagan's ropes.

MEAGAN

Hurry Jazz! He'll be back, I know it!

Jazz quickly undoes Meagan's ropes.

JAZZ

You okay?

MEAGAN

No. But I can get out of here. We should go out the back door.

Jazz and Meagan are about to head out the back door of the barn when...

Eric enters through the front door.

He raises his gun.

ERIC

Excuse me, where do you ladies think you're going?

Jazz and Meagan stop cold in their tracks. Eric walks toward them slowly.

ERIC (CONT'D)
I knew Miles would follow, but I
didn't know I'd be this lucky.

He pauses for a moment as he walks around them menacingly.

ERIC (CONT'D)
(to Jazz)
I assume you came with my former
counselor.

JAZZ
Yeah, what's it to you, asshole?

ERIC
He has no sense of ethics, does he?
Not that it matters much now that
he's dead.

Jazz looks pissed and upset.

JAZZ
I hope you rot in hell, you bastard!

MEAGAN
No, that's too good for him.

Eric holds the gun up to Meagan's head and grabs her hand
that's bandaged.

ERIC
(to Meagan)
Is there something bothering you
that you can't quite put your finger
on?

Meagan is silent.

INT. ANDERSON HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Miles lies on the floor moving slowly. He struggles to get
to his feet. He holds his hand with the gun over his bleeding
chest. He slowly walks across the living room, leaning on
furniture for support...heading for the door.

INT. ANDERSON BARN - DAY

Eric has tied up Meagan and is tying up Jazz. He has his .38
in his hand.

ERIC
(to Jazz)
Aren't you glad you came?

JAZZ

You know the police are gonna be here any minute...we called them before we left.

ERIC

Nice try. I know Miles wouldn't have come if the police would have come here instead. He has no guts...or should I say *had*.

In the b.g. Miles enters the barn with his gun raised!

MILES

No, it's *has*.

Eric is startled and turns to see a bleeding Miles standing there, but he quickly regains composure.

ERIC

(calmly)

Oh, it's you. Why don't you put your gun down and come over here.

Eric has his gun pointed at Miles now.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I know you can't shoot me. You have no backbone. Here, I'll give you a clear shot again.

Eric lowers his .38.

MILES

Drop it or I'll shoot.

Eric is as arrogant as ever.

ERIC

Yeah, right.

BANG! Miles shoots Eric in the chest!

Eric falls down, clutching his chest. He rolls over in pain with his gun still in his hand and stops moving.

MILES

(to Jazz and Meagan)

Are you okay?

JAZZ

Yeah, just get us outta these.

Miles slowly walks across the room and reaches Jazz.

JAZZ (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

MILES

Yeah.

JAZZ

You look like shit.

MILES

Thanks, I feel like shit.

He turns to Meagan.

MILES (CONT'D)

So do you think you can make it?

MEAGAN

(weakly)

Yeah.

(she pauses)

You know, teachers don't get paid enough.

Miles puts his gun down and unties Meagan's hands, leaving her to untie her own ankles. Miles begins to untie Jazz. As he's finished...

Eric gets up with his .38 pointed at Miles' back.

ERIC

(to Miles)

Counselor, your time is up.

Jazz quickly pulls the sickle down from the wall. She swings it with all her might at Eric. SWOOSH!

Blood squirts onto Jazz. Meagan SCREAMS!

Eric stands with blood squirting out of his neck. He points his gun at Jazz.

Meagan picks up Miles' gun!

Eric turns toward her. Meagan shakes from fatigue, nerves and rage.

MEAGAN

Drop it, asshole!

ERIC

I'll give you twenty seconds and I started counting ten seconds ago....

MEAGAN
 (cutting him off)
 Time's up, asshole.

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! CLICK...CLICK...CLICK... Meagan unloads on Eric without hesitating.

Eric falls down.

Miles goes over to Eric to make sure he's dead. Eric is still breathing. He tries to speak to Miles.

ERIC
 (in a whisper)
 It was only a game....

Eric's body twitches briefly then stops breathing. His eyes are frozen in a dead stare.

EXT. ANDERSON RANCH - DAY

It's dusk and is RAINING. We hear THUNDER.

MUSIC: The Doors' *Riders On The Storm*. Several police cars, a couple of ambulances and a corner's vehicle are parked on the property.

Miles is about to be loaded into the ambulance.

Jazz leans over him.

JAZZ
 If you die, I'll kill you.

Miles manages a weak smile.

MILES
 How's Meagan?

JAZZ
 They're helpin' her.

Jazz pauses and smiles.

JAZZ (CONT'D)
 The important thing is that she's alive.

AMBULANCE ATTENDANTS load Miles into the ambulance.

AMBULANCE ATTENDANT #1
 (to Jazz)
 Sorry, mamm. You can't ride with him. Only family.

JAZZ
The hell I can't!

Jazz hops into the ambulance.

The ambulance attendant shrugs his shoulders and closes the doors. The ambulance pulls away.

FINAL FADE OUT.