

KATRINA

Written by

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Based on True Events

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INT. LIVING ROOM OF FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

JOEL KRAMMER, nice-looking blue collard bearded man with a southern accent, paces back and forth. His buttoned up flannel shirt is loosened; he checks his watch every fifteen seconds. Clearly he is very distraught.

JOEL

Linda, I-...Linda. Linda, listen to me. He's the contractor, okay? I can't lose this job. I understand... Let's talk about this in the morning, okay? We'll talk about it in the morning. Alright, good night.

He turns on the light, waking his daughter, ALLISON, on the couch.

ALLISON

Fun day at work?

JOEL

What are you still doing up? It's late.

ALLISON

Oh, what time is it?

JOEL

It's past your bedtime.

ALLISON

I was sleep until you woke me up.

JOEL

Honey, please not right now. I don't have the time for this.

Allison gets out a small gift box that's hidden under a pillow on the couch.

ALLISON

Here.

She hands him the box. Joel looks at it with question.

JOEL

What's this?

ALLISON

Your birthday.

He opens the box. Inside a photo album awaits. He takes it out, opens and studies the pictures on each page, before he turns to the next.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

That's the picture we took when we first moved in the house, you see.

JOEL

I see.

Joel turns the page. Allison points to pictures like a child shopping through a catalogue for her next Christmas gift.

ALLISON

And that's my first birthday and your birthday party together.

Joel chuckles at picture.

JOEL

I remember that. What made you do this?

ALLISON

You kept complaining about work and always being away from family... So I figured, you know. Post it around your office. You like it?

JOEL

Honey, this is...

ALLISON

What?

JOEL

It's nice, but I-...Where did you get the money for this?

ALLISON

Drugs. I sell hardcore drugs.

JOEL

Oh, good. You can start helping out with the mortgage then.

ALLISON

Stsh, can't. Using my drug money to start a rap label.

Joel chuckles and kisses Allison on the forehead.

JOEL

Well time to go to bed sweetie.
It's late.

ALLISON

Awe, alright.

Allison takes her blanket and reluctantly heads upstairs. Joel pops open a beer, grabs the remote and watches TV for a while.

JOEL

Good night, baby girl.

ALLISON

Night old man.

INT. ALLISON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Under the darkness of the room Allison is fast asleep tossing and turning between the sheets over a bad dream. The phone rings. She bemoans the noise of the phone and turns on her side. The phone keeps ringing until she answers it.

ALLISON

Hello?

She hangs up. Looks at the phone.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Mom's number. What was that all about? Dad? Daddy? You in here?

INT. LIVING ROOM OF FAMILY HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Allison walks down the steps into the empty living room. A TV report is on.

REPORTER

It appears that what we initially reported as explosion seem to be somehow connected to the earthquake.

ALLISON

Where the heck are you?

REPORTER

We've received reports that people are panicking at an alarming rate and are fleeing the city--

ALLISON
That's nearby.

In the report's background, a firefighter talks to his unit.

FIREFIGHTER
There's a gas leak. Hey -- move!

REPORTER
There's some commotion coming from
beh--

FIREFIGHTER
Lady, get the hell outta here right-

An explosion causes the feed to go dead. The house rattles as the boom sounds as if it is near.

ALLISON
Uh...what was that?

Allison sees the smoke from her window. She hears a cellphone ring.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
Dad? Dad?! Mom! What is goin' on?

The phone continues to rings. It stops just as she gets to it.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
There's his phone. Four missed
calls.

Joel bursts in, quickly shutting the door.

ALLISON (CONT'D)
There you are.

JOEL
Allison, you okay?

ALLISON
Yeah, I think so.

JOEL
Has anyone come in here?

ALLISON
No. Why would they? Where's mom?

He searches in a closet for his gun.

JOEL

I dunno.

ALLISON

Dad, you're freaking me out...
What's going on?

JOEL

Don't go near the doors.
Just...just stand back there...

A random person runs past the sliding glass door, startling the two.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ!

ALLISON

Dad!

JOEL

Honey, c'mere, c'mere.

Allison sprints to her dad.

JOEL (CONT'D)

It's okay.

ALLISON

Dad what's happening?

JOEL

Listen to me, there is something
bad going on. We have got to get
out of here. Do you understand me?

ALLISON

(crying)
Yes!

JOEL

C'mon let's go!

Joel takes Allison by the hand and they exit the home.

EXT. FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

As Joel enters with Allison in hand, a jeep speeds into the driveway, causing the two to stop in their tracks. Katrina gets out from the vehicle. Her baby bump is visible under her hospital scrubs.

KATRINA

Where the hell you been? You have any idea what's goin' on out there?

JOEL

Get back in the jeep!

KATRINA

Why are you--

Katrina is interrupted by the blood stains on Joel's shirt.

KATRINA (CONT'D)

Holy shit. You got blood all over you.

Joel helps Allison in the truck.

JOEL

It ain't mine. Let's just get outta here.

KATRINA

There's tremors in the city we need to be home.

JOEL

We're not staying home. We got five dead people in nearby houses.

KATRINA

The hell. Oh my God. Oh my God!

JOEL

Can we just please go?

Katrina hassles around the jeep into the passenger side.

KATRINA

It's those aftershocks. You gonna tell me what happened?

JOEL

Later.

Joel hops in the driver seat.

INT/EXT. JEEP/NEW ORLEANS CITY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

They pull out of the driveway.

KATRINA

I knew we should've never moved
near the fault line. Joel this your
fault!

JOEL

(nervous)

Not now not again Katrina.

KATRINA

You always ignore the danger signs!

JOEL

(to Katrina and agitated)

I said not now!

(to Allison and calm)

Baby girl, how you holdin' up,
honey?

ALLISON

I'm fine. Can we hear what's on the
radio?

KATRINA

Yeah, sure thing.

ALLISON

Thanks.

Katrina tries the stations. Nothing but static.

JOEL

No cellphone. No radio. Yeah, we're
doin' great.

ALLISON

Minute ago, newsman wouldn't shut
up.

JOEL

They say where to go?

ALLISON

He said, ah... Army's puttin' up
roadblocks on the highway.

KATRINA

That means we need to take the back
road. Take 85.

JOEL

That's where I'm headed.

Joel slams on the breaks. They wait for cops to speed pass and then start toward their journey.

ALLISON

Did they say how many are dead?

KATRINA

Probably a lot. They brought this one family into the hospital all mangled up.

JOEL

Katrina!

KATRINA

Right. Sorry. Sorry baby girl!

They past multiple homes caught in a blaze.

ALLISON

That's Sarah's house. My best friend!

KATRINA

I hope that son of a bitch made it out.

JOEL

I'm sure she did.

ALLISON

Are we next?

JOEL

No. No, of course not.

KATRINA

It's just ah, people in the city. We're good.

ALLISON

But we live in the city, mom.

KATRINA

Trust me we're fine. We're with dad and you got me!

ALLISON

Alright.

They see some people standing on the roadside. They look desperate for help.

KATRINA

Let's see what they need.

JOEL

No we keep movin'.

KATRINA

They got a kid, Joel.

They speed around the obstructing 18-wheeler truck with a trailer when they get t-boned by a high-speed vehicle.

Moments later Joel comes to first. He fights to free himself from the wreck. Katrina is pressed up against their overturned truck clutching her side.

JOEL

Katrina!

Katrina waves him off as she can handle this small pain.

KATRINA

Get. Allison!

He stumbles out, and pans over and spots Allison trapped in the vehicle. She's dazed and weak. Joel snatches the door open and cautiously grabs her out. She screams.

JOEL

Shit. It's okay, baby. We're safe.
We're safe. Hey! We need help.

A fire starts on top of the vehicle.

Allison continues to cry. In one quick move Joel snatches her out.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Allsion! Okay. Move your hands,
baby.

Joel moves her hand out the way. There's a large pole protruding through her.

JOEL (CONT'D)

I know, baby. I know...

He presses on her wound.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Listen to me, I know this hurts,
baby. You're gonna be okay, baby.
Stay with me. Alright, I'm gonna
pick you up. I know, baby.

(MORE)

JOEL (CONT'D)

I know it hurts. Come on, baby,
please. I know, baby. I know.

She dies in his arms.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Allsion... Baby... Don't do this to
me, baby. Don't do this to me, baby
girl. Come on... No, no... Oh no,
no, no... Please. Oh, God. Please,
please, don't do this. Please,
God...

INT. OFFICE - CONSTRUCTION AGENCY - MIDTOWN - EVENING

A small and very comfortable office over-looking the busy city streets. At the moment the office is filled to bursting with men in flannel shirts, dirty jeans and work boots, all of them very tense. Among the crowd of people we note: BRITTANY FISHER, a young, sexy and very ambitious junior executive and DAVID, Joel's good friend. He is in his middle fifties, nattily dressed with the slightly bleary look of a heavy drinker. He sits back in his chair with his feet propped on the desk and a drink in one hand.

At the moment, Joel, paces back and forth. His tie is loosened. He checks his watch every fifteen seconds. Clearly he is very distraught.

JOEL (CONT'D)

They're not gonna call... I tell
you they're not gonna call. I blew
it. I don't know what I did wrong,
but I--

DAVID

Joel, will you take it easy? The
cities not about to drop us when
we're the nearest contractors. So
just relax, okay? Everything's
gonna be fine. They're just making
us sweat.

JOEL

I don't think so, Jim. Maybe I
shouldn't have--

Sound-effect: The phone rings. Everyone freezes. As David reaches for the phone.

INT. CHILD'S ROOM, KRAMER HOUSE. - EVENING

The room is dark, the only light coming from a small night light. We see a beautiful three year old boy (BILLY KRAMER). He lies in bed, half asleep. HOLD FOR A BEAT as a beautiful woman, Katrina, leans over, kisses the child and hugs him tightly to her.

KATRINA

I love you.

BILLY

(drowsy)

I love you too, mommy... Good-night...

Katrina gets up from the bed and starts toward the door of the child's room.

KATRINA

Sleep tight...

BILLY

Don't let the bedbugs bite...

Katrina stops in the doorway, silhouetted against the light. She turns, takes a last look at her son, and then steps outside.

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Now that the light is brighter, we can SEE her more clearly. In her mid-thirties, she is a lot less beautiful. Tired and stressed while dressed in a style that can best be described as Macy's. HOLD FOR A BEAT as she leans against the door. It is clear from her expression that she is terribly upset. Then, making up her mind, she crosses to a closet and takes out a suitcase.

THE CAMERA TRACKS WITH HER as she carries it into the bedroom, lays it out on the bed and opens it.

PAN WITH HER as she crosses to a closet, grabs an arm load of clothes and dumps them helter-skelter into the suitcase.

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - EVENING

It is a few minutes later, the news has obviously been good because there is a general celebration in progress. David, now standing, raises one hand for silence, then making a toast.

DAVID

He went out there and sold the crap out of this company and that's why we got the contract. Here's to Joel Kramer.

Cheers and good-natured jokes. David puts an arm around Joel squeezing him tight. More hoots and cheers. People start to yell "Speech."

INT. BATHROOM - KRAMER HOUSE - EVENING

Katrina stands at the medicine cabinet, going through it, packing things in a travel kit: Pristiq, deodorant, makeup, birth control pills. She starts to take a small bottle of vodka that has only an eighth of an inch of fluid left inside, hesitates, then puts it back. Visible slicing scars are on her wrist. She's a cutter.

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - EVENING

Now some time has passed, most of the crowd has gone and only the regulars are left.

JOEL

So anyway I want to thank you all for your support. At first I was nervous about this. I had been jobless for a while and I didn't know where my next payment for my mortgage was coming from. But this is a big break. A really needed break for my family and I. So thank you, thank you.

Brittany Fisher leans over, shakes Joel's hand.

BRITTANY

Congratulations, Joel. That was a hell of a job.

JOEL

(surprised)
Where are you going?

BRITTANY

Got to get home.

JOEL

(glancing at his watch)
Oh, Christ, I'm late... I gotta get out of here.

Joel snatches up his jacket from behind the chair and heads toward the exit.

INT. KITCHEN - KRAMER HOME - EVENING

Katrina puts the finishing touches on the list and carefully arranges it on top of the kitchen counter next to a box of unsweetened, whole grain cereal and a jar of honey.

It is a long and meticulous list that consists of the phone numbers and addresses of doctors and hospitals, of what the various medicines are for, and of the foods that Billy is and isn't permitted to eat.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - MIDTOWN - NIGHT

As the doors to the outer lobby open Joel and Brittany appear. Joel hails a cab. Brittany stops him.

BRITTANY

Hey, what's the rush? C'mon, walk me a couple of blocks.

JOEL

I've got to go. I'm already late-

BRITTANY

(gushing)

Well I just want to tell you that they were impressed that you served in the military for years. That's why they liked you.

JOEL

Please I installed satellite towers in the field. Not exactly rocket science.

BRITTANY

But it is science, listen, Joel... I just want to tell you, when old man Schmidt retires next year, I've got a pretty good feeling they'll kick me upstairs...

JOEL

(catching her drift)

Yeah you always liked being on top.

Brittany dives into Joel's arms for a tight passionate, but quick kiss. Joel enters the cab. The cab pulls off.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Katrina carries in the suitcase, sets it by the front door, then she crosses to the living room and sits down at the dining table.

She takes out a list made on the back of an old envelope. As she begins to review it, checking off some items:

OFF SCREEN Sound: A key turning in the lock.

As Katrina looks up...

As the door swings open to reveal Joel, an enormous grin on his face, a bottle of wine in his hand. He is so full of himself that he doesn't notice there is anything wrong.

JOEL

Honey I just thought I'd let you know I got the job. I closed the contract with the government. I'll start up again Monday.

KATRINA

(takes a deep breath)
Joel, I'm leavin' you.

JOEL

That represents a gross billing in excess of two million
(hearing her)
What?

Katrina opens her purse, takes out her keys and wallet.

KATRINA

I won't be needing these anymore.

Joel does not for a moment believe that she will really leave. All he can think of right now is that he will have to spend the rest of the evening coping with one of her moods.

JOEL

(sardonic)
I'm sorry I'm late, all right? I'm sorry I didn't call - I was busy making a living.

Katrina doesn't even bother to look up at him. She opens her purse, takes out her wallet and begins removing credit cards.

JOEL (CONT'D)
(the martyr)
Okay, okay... What is it this time?
What the hell is it now?

KATRINA
I borrowed a few hundred out of the
savings account. That was what I
had in the bank when we got
married.

JOEL
Wait you took what?

KATRINA
I've paid the rent, the cable bill
and the phone bill, so you don't
have to worry about them.

JOEL
Okay, okay, okay Katrina stop this,
whatever it is, believe me, I'm
sorry. Okay.

KATRINA
(still not looking up)
There, I'm done.

She checks off the last item on her list as her husband
watches, dumbfounded. She gets to her feet and starts toward
the front door. In an instant Joel is after her.

JOEL
(panic)
For God's sake, Katrina, would you
at least tell me what I did! Would
you do me that favor?

Katrina is at the door, when Joel grabs her by the wrist. He
stares at them as he's introduced for the first time to the
scars on her forearm.

KATRINA
(gently taking her arm
away)
Look, it's not your fault, okay?
It's me. It's my fault - you just
married the wrong person.

JOEL
(calmly)
What is this?

KATRINA
What is what?

JOEL
(shaking her wrist)
What is this?

KATRINA
(snatching away)
It's nothing they're six months
old.

JOEL
So we've got problems. Everybody's
got problems. That's normal--

Katrina opens the door. They step outside.

EXT. KRAMER FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Katrina walks out to the driveway as Joel stands in the
doorway.

KATRINA
Joel, you're not listening to me.
It's over, finished.

JOEL
I'm listening, believe me, I'm
listening. My wife is walking out
on me after twelve years of--

KATRINA
(bitter)
You really just don't get it do you
(as to a child)
I - am - clearly - leaving you!

JOEL
I heard you. I promise I heard
you.

KATRINA
No you didn't. You didn't even ask
about Billy.

JOEL
(stiffening)
What about'em?

KATRINA
I'm not taking him with me.

Joel is stunned speechless. He's in disbelief. Katrina starts to cry.

KATRINA (CONT'D)

I can't... I tried... I really tried but... I just can't hack it anymore...

JOEL

(whispering to himself)
C'mon not this shit again.
(stern and loud)
Look you don't mean that!

KATRINA

I do! I yell at him all the time. I have no patience. No... No. He's better off without me. Joel I have to go.

JOEL

Okay, I understand, I promise I won't try and stop you, but you can't just go... Look, come inside and talk... Just for a few minutes.

KATRINA

NO!... Please... Please don't make me stay... I swear... If you do, sooner or later... maybe tomorrow, maybe next week... maybe a year from now... You'll find us in the bottom of a river somewhere.

A black newer model Lexus pulls up to the curb. There is a handsome driver in the driver seat named MICHAEL.

Katrina turns, walking away.

JOEL

(desperate and charging)
Wait, wait who is that, who is that?

Katrina stops and holds him at bay.

KATRINA

Stop. I already know about her.

He stands for a moment, stunned, unable to move. We SEE Katrina step off the curb and open the passenger side of the car. She gets into the car, closes the door behind her and it drives away.

INT. LIVING ROOM OF FAMILY HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Joel is sitting in a chair thinking hard.

GRANDMA, is an older woman in her mid-seventies. She dresses in her nightgown. She is generous with her advice, sharing the wealth so to speak. With all of this she is kind, loyal and a loving friend. At the moment, however, she is all business.

GRANDMA

Oh, God... Oh my God...What are you going to do?

JOEL

I don't know, ma... This whole thing has happened so... Pow, like that.

GRANDMA

I mean, what are you going to do about Billy?

JOEL

(stiff)

I'm gonna keep him, why?

GRANDMA

Look, this is nothing personal, but I don't think you can do it.

JOEL

I've lost my wife, I'm not losing my son. Thanks for the support by the way.

GRANDMA

(backing off)

All right... Okay... But let's get something straight, right now. I mean, I'm sorry about what happened between you and Katrina, but it's not my problem, understand?

Joel looks to her and then looks away. It's not the answer he wanted to hear.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

I'm not going to have you calling every fifteen minutes just because you can't find a hot water bottle, understand?

Joel is silent.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Got it?

JOEL

(reluctantly)

Got it.

A long pause, she looks at him with all the warmth of a top sergeant facing a raw recruit. Then:

GRANDMA

All right. Who's Billy's pediatrician?

Joel doesn't have the slightest idea.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Walline Davies. 230 East 76th Street. 555-8227. Fifty bucks a house call, thirty for an office visit. Write this down, I'm not telling you twice. What's the nearest hospital?

He grabs a piece of paper and starts writing frantically.

JOEL

Charity.

GRANDMA

No. Riverside.

Joel stops writing. He thinks staring off in deep space.

JOEL

I just got a new contract and I don't have a clew about finding a baby sitter.

GRANDMA

You really know how to rule me in don't you.

JOEL

I wasn't trying to.

GRANDMA

And I don't blame you for asking. Your father left me alone with you. Welp here's the plan. Let him come stay with me for three weeks in New Orleans until you think this through. Is that okay?

Joel can't speak. He buries his head into his palms quietly crying.

INT. OFFICE - CONSTRUCTION AGENCY - MIDTOWN - DAY

Men in flannel plaid shirts, blue jeans and tan work boots stand around room and lean against the cubicles and chairs as they watch Mayor RAY NAGIN delivering a speech on television.

RAY NAGIN

I wish I had better news, but we're facing the storm most of us feared. This is very serious, an unprecedented event. I want to emphasize, the first choice of every citizen should be to leave the city. If you can't, make your way to the Superdome.

David seems annoyed by Ragin's words

DAVID

Why is he telling folks that the Superdome is a shelter for last resort instead of shipping them out the city?

JOEL

I don't know, I don't follow politics like that. I'm more of a beer and football kinda guy.

DAVID

It's because Nagin doesn't have a disaster plan. He is the disaster.
(noticing Joel is not paying attention)
Hey buddy what's on ya mind you look worried?

JOEL

I'm am. I only knew my dad only for a short. He left my mom alone to raise me as a single parent and I saw her struggle to be there for me. And now that I'm a single parent I'm afraid that I won't be able to be the dad that I can be, because I'm carrying the weight of two parents.

DAVID

Jesus Christ. That's a real blockbuster.

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)
(shakes his head)
I always figured you guys had it made.

JOEL
So did I. That's why I got out of the military because I got tired of the deployments and being a part time dad missing out on the big moments in my child's life. Now it looks like I need two jobs to raise him and I'm going to be a part-time dad anyways. I want to give him the life I never had as a child.

David nods sympathetically. Actually he is praying that Joel won't start to cry.

DAVID
Listen, don't let it get you down.
(doesn't believe it for a second)
I'm the oldest whore on the beat, okay? Three marriages, two divorces... You're gonna be okay.

JOEL
I'm going to be okay. The way I see it, Katrina'll come home. Just a matter of time.

DAVID
It's been one week since she left and there's a hurricane that's about to strike and she hasn't called...

David looks away in thought. He knows she's gone forever.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Yeah, she'll be back. But in the meantime take this.

David holds out a card. Joel take it. Looks at it.

Joel's POV:

The law office of Shoemaker and Nelson.

THE BOSS enters the room causing everyone to sit-up and stand up straight at his entrance. He stands in front of the room.

THE BOSS

I just received call from the city of New Orleans. They need a cell phone tower repaired near city hall in case the phone lines go down due to the hurricane.

DAVID

It's last minute. We'll be there all night.

THE BOSS

That's why you'll be leaving now. It's quadruple pay.

JOEL

I'll go. My mother is baby-sitting my son in New Orleans as we speak, I can pick them up when we're done.

THE BOSS

You may not have time to do that. But if you do, then do as you must.

DAVID

Why don't you just go get your son now and go back home where it's safe.

JOEL

Cause I need the money. And besides the storm won't be that bad, we'll be in and out.

DAVID

You just don't see the signs do you?

David shakes his head as Joel departs.

INT/EXT. COMPANY TRUCK/I-10 INTERSTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Joel is sitting in the passenger seat, gazing out the window while he's in deep thought about his wife and divorce. David is driving attentive to the near empty roads.

There's a long silence between the two.

DAVID

You want to know something weird.

Joel doesn't answer. He's so deep in thought he doesn't notice David talking to him.

DAVID (CONT'D)

When I was in Vietnam I found solace in the green parrots the jungle used to have. Every day on our trails, I would always be on the lookout for them, blending in the trees and singing their songs. They were the only peace I had. But one day something strange happened. They disappeared. I didn't know why but all the animals instinctively disappeared, particularly the birds. Then war broke out and man I tell ya, this pattern went on for months. It was a good way to get your ass ready for hell on Earth you know what I mean?

JOEL

I don't know what to make of it.

DAVID

I'm a veteran of numerous hurricanes and this is the first time pre-storm silence has unnerved me.

JOEL

Silence is golden.

DAVID

Not when the birds are gone. I think we should panic. I really think we should panic.

Joel looks over to David with fear and skepticism. He looks away hoping to make nothing of it.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I don't see any relief trucks heading to New Orleans. That doesn't bother you?

JOEL

I didn't know that it was supposed to. I'm not usually bothered by petty things.

DAVID

Petty things? You don't see the signs? No wonder she left.

JOEL

Katrina got a goddamn good life. She's had a great husband that loves her. She's had a great kid and a wonderful home.

DAVID

What'd you know about how Katrina felt?

JOEL

I'm her husband.

DAVID

Doesn't mean you were good at it.

JOEL

Did it ever occur to you that Katrina's not the easiest person in the world to deal with?! Did it?! She's been cutting herself recluse or whatever it is you call it.

DAVID

Oh for shit's sake, you are the most selfish human being I have ever met. No wonder she said you came first, then the baby, then, if there was anything left over, she got the scraps. She's been cutting herself, battling postpartum depression and still mourning the death of your daughter.

JOEL

She said that?

DAVID

She didn't have to.

Joel settles at this revelation.

BOOM! The sound of thunder. An eerie darkness forms over the interstate. The angry dark gray clouds move in as if they are being played at fast-forward speed on a DVD.

There's a flash of light. Followed by an over-the-top thunder. BOOM!

The rain showers down like pins and daggers, a deafening spectacle. The windshield wipers are of little use-the downpour is blinding.

From inside the car, Joel looks over the bridge into the city below: Traffic lights swing back and forth like pendulums. Fast food signs spin around and crash t the pavement. Palms trees shake like pom-poms.

A green metal sign suddenly blows in front of David's car—a close call.

DAVID (CONT'D)

This is bad. See what I'm saying.

Joel is already on the phone. The phone rings.

JOEL

(his listens to the phone
ring)

Mom!

INT/EXT. CITY BUS/NEW ORLEANS - DAY (INTERCUT SCENES)

The day is sunny in New Orleans

Grandma, along with Billy, DEWAYNE and MARQUIS (both in their mid-twenties), ALLIE and ALLIE'S HUSBAND (mid-seventies) are on a bus. Grandma is on the phone.

GRANDMA

Yes.

JOEL

Do you and Billy have a friend you
can stay with?

GRANDMA

For what? The hurricane?

JOEL

Yeah, I'm a bit worried about the
storm coming through.

GRANDMA

Well we're on the way to the
Superdome now on a bus, but I don't
think it's that serious.

JOEL

I don't know what to make of it
either but we just hit a bad patch
of the storm.

GRANDMA

Well you're three hours away dear.
We just heard reports that the
storm is weakening and moving east.

JOEL

(stunned)

It is? Where'd you here that?

GRANDMA

I made it up. Where do you think I
heard it from, the news reporter
silly.

JOEL

Well either way just be at the
Superdome. I'll come pick you and
Billy up tonight.

GRANDMA

Okay, but I don't think it's that
serious. I rode out Betsy years
before and came out alright.

JOEL

I know mom, but--

GRANDMA

Joel I can handle myself. I got
Allie and her husband with me and
her grandkids, Marquis and Dewayne
remember them?

JOEL

Yeah, yeah I do.
(a bit relieved)
So do you feel safe?

The bus pulls up to the Superdome. A two-mile line of people
is in front of it.

GRANDMA

We'll be safe. Just do your work
okay.

JOEL

(a beat)

Okay. I trust you.

The two hang up. But Grandma looks worried. So does Joel.

DAVID

If you loose your son in the Superdome. You've officially lost everything.

JOEL

Thanks for he reminder. I'll make sure to commit suicide if that happens. But I won't loose him.

David isn't so sure of it.

EXT. METAIRIE CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Violent pouring rain pounds a section of the Metairie Central Business District as we edge closer between the buildings. The city is damn near deserted with the exception a telecommunications truck and two police cars parked in front of a building.

A few men, on a rooftop building, work on a small tower.

POLICE HQ

(over radio)

Um, please verify that you all are done installing the telecommunications antenna.

JOEL

(over radio)

Diagnostics are green. Link to communications card is ready for data reception. If this works, you guys owe me a round.

David stands in the background watching as Joel does his work.

JOEL (CONT'D)

(over radio)

...Booting com-link card now. Confirm link.

POLICE HQ

(over radio)

We're not seeing any data.

DAVID

(over radio)

It's the weather. I got a bad feeling about this.

JOEL
 (over radio)
 Hold on. I'm going to reboot the
 system, stand by.

POLICE HQ
 (over radio)
 Please expand on why this is a bad
 idea again.

DAVID
 (over radio)
 The storms picking up....

JOEL
 Dave, you're making me nervous
 about my family.

David looks to the far reach of the city to the tall levees.
 Water splashes over them like rough surf.

DAVID
 (over radio)
 Shouldn't we be evacuating like the
 rest that did?

JOEL
 (over radio)
 Com-link is uploading.

POLICE HQ
 (over radio)
 You're the only two who have prior
 military experience with
 communications and satellites.
 We're only using this as a backup
 just in case this gets worse.

DAVID
 (over radio)
 Well I hate be the one to break it
 to you but...

The water continues to jump in bounds over the levees.

POLICE HQ
 (over the radio)
 But...

DAVID
 (over radio)
 I just hate to be the one who
 breaks it to you. Where's the
 city's drainage operators?

POLICE HQ
(over radio)
They evacuated yesterday.

DAVID
(over radio)
Sure they did.

JOEL
(over radio)
Relax the storm isn't even a direct
hit. Damage will be small. Link is
up, you got a connection?

POLICE HQ
(over radio)
That's a negative. We're receiving
nothing on this end.

Joel fidgets with the controls.

DAVID
(over radio)
That's God telling us to get the
hell out.

JOEL
(over radio)
What about now?

'BRABOOM!' A loud explosion is heard some miles away.

DAVID
(over radio)
The hell was that?

POLICE HQ
(over radio)
Hold on...we got something.

Static is heard over the radio.

JOEL
(over radio)
HQ? HQ do you copy?

The static is up and out.

DAVID
(over radio)
We may've crossed frequencies
during the upload. Give it time.

JOEL
 (over radio)
 HQ? HQ do you copy?

POLICE HQ
 (over radio)
 Mission abort. Repeat. Mission
 abort. Initiate emergency
 disconnect from antenna. Begin
 emergency evacuation.

Confused, he slides down the ladder. David packs up their
 equipment in a mass hurry.

TRUCK DRIVER (V.O.)
 (over radio)
 Copy all, HQ and Overwatch.
 (to Joel)
 Joel, immediate return to
 communications truck.

JOEL
 (over radio)
 HQ help me understand.

POLICE HQ
 (over radio)
 A levee has completely broken.
 Water has demolished local
 neighborhoods and caused a chain
 reaction heading to your direction.
 Copy.

Mac and Kyle exit the rooftop and into...

INT. STAIRWELL OF BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

David and Joel rush down the flight of steps as if the
 building was on fire.

JOEL
 (over radio)
 Copy!

DAVID
 (over radio)
 Was that what the explosion was all
 about?

POLICE HQ
 (over radio)
 We're not sure.

JOEL
(over radio)
How far away from the breakdown of
the levee are we?

POLICE HQ
(over radio)
Approximately a half of mile.

JOEL
(over radio)
What's the blowback HQ?

POLICE HQ
(over radio)
It's not good. Most of our systems
are gone. Debris chain reaction is
out of control and antennas and
homes are collapsing.

DAVID
(over radio)
Define multiple homes and antennas
collapsing.

POLICE HQ
(over radio)
Telecommunication systems are
dead. Expect a communication
blackout at any moment.

KYLE
(over radio)
And what about houses?

Mac and Kyle exit into...

EXT. METAIRIE CITY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

...Where a five foot wave of water, carrying the demolished
face of a home and other debris, rushes toward them. Both
simply stare. Transfixed.

JOEL
Shit!

DAVID
Get in the van, get in the van!

Joel and David hasten into the driver and passenger seats
respectively as the water rapidly approaches.

David presses the ignition switch on the truck. The engine turns over but does not start.

Joel observes the tidal wave edging closer to them in the rear view passenger mirror.

JOEL

Hurry!

David continues try to start the engine.

Up at the rooftop, the antenna that the two recently abandoned is shaken from its foundation and topples slowly onto the street below.

The truck starts. David smashes the pedal to the floor.

Then WHAAAAAAAAAAM!!! The wave strikes the back of the police car with the force of a hydrogen bomb pushing it into the rear of the truck just as the truck pulls off.

DAVID

(over radio)

HQ! HQ! Do you copy?

As the truck takes off, the antenna crashes down on the passenger side of the truck, thrusting Joel outside into the wave.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Joel!

The truck jackknives as David fights for the wheel. Horrified he looks as the devastation as the wave sweeps everything in its path. Bodies bobbing helplessly in water. People screaming. Buildings crumble.

Joel is swarmed by the wave, sucked underwater, along with bits of market stalls, street signs, cars and other PEOPLE.

DAVID (CONT'D)

(over the radio)

You gotta grab onto something.
You're going to get carried too far.

JOEL

(crying out)

No I ca-

Joel thrashed underwater, his eyes bulging, desperate for air. His mouth open, his thrashing becoming more frantic.

"HURRRRGH!" he sticks his head above water gasping for air.

DAVID
(over radio)
Listen to my voice, listen to me.
Focus! I need you to focus.

Joel, reaches out, tries to hold onto a passing street pole. He misses and is pulled underwater again.

'Hurrnggh!' He sticks his head above water again, gasping desperately, but it's critical now...

As David fights for the wheel, a sudden rush of water and debris from the west smashes into the truck. The truck over-corrects and tips over.

Joel's POV:

Joel, pushed into glass double doors of a lobby, observes a MYSTERIOUS WOMAN fleeing just before he smashes his head on the wall. Knocked unconscious.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY

As the sunlight bathes his face, Joel sleeps on a couch.

He sits upright in the chair, confused as he studies the pictures of organized gang members decorating the walls.

The chirping of seagulls causes his eyes to lift halfway from sleep.

'SWOOSH' the sound of water causes him to sit up right as if he awoke from a nightmare.

Confused, he looks around the room at the broken furniture bobbing back in forth on the water that floods the room. Slowly, like a man stepping on hot coals his places he legs into the water. It's thigh deep. He rushes to the balcony door, opens it and exits into...

EXT. NEW ORLEANS CITY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Joel is bewildered and shocked.

Homes and cars are submerged mostly underwater with only the rooftops showing.

Street signs, telephone poles lean and are bent and twisted in water.

Cars and debris float down the water at ease.

Hundreds of New Orleans citizens are stranded on rooftops screaming for help by waving sheets, homemade placards, towels and pickaxes. There's a deep disturbing resonance of crying amongst all the destruction so much that Joel is speechless.

He spots the communications truck turned over in the water some yards away. He jumps from the balcony into the water and swims to the truck.

The water is shallower. He sloths to the truck in waist deep water.

David's decomposing body floats by. His skin is blistered and greenish blue. His abdomen is swollen, his tongue protrudes and blood from his lungs flushes out of his mouth, nostrils and eyes. Joel covers his nose the rotten-egg stench that permeates David's dead skin.

Joel grabs the body, grabs a rope from the attached to the side of truck and ties it around David's wrist.

'SWOSH, SWOSH, SWOSH!' The shuffling sound of water on the other side of the truck sparks Joel's attention.

He walks over to the other side as TERRY (the mysterious woman), a brunette lady, with an athletic build shuffles through the truck for food.

Frightened he spends around alarmed. Pulls out and points a knife at her.

TERRY

Woah! Woah! Take it easy. You're
awoke I see.

JOEL

Awoke?

TERRY

Who do you think put you in the
couch last night. Just, slowly, put
down the--

Joel steadies the knife, unsure of what to do.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Lady, c'mon now. I'm not going to
hurt you.

JOEL
 (agitated)
 I'm trying to find my cell phone to see if I can get to my son. He's at the Superdome.

TERRY
 We're headed there, I know where that's at. I think.

JOEL
 (calmly)
 I'm not exactly master of the seas 'round here, but its either you do or you don't.

TERRY
 A man who thinks he still thinks he knows he has a sense of direction. Way to get left behind on the evolutionary train.

JOEL
 (agitated)
 I got no time for smart-ass comments. I gotta find my son, now do you know where it's at or not.

Terry studies him. She's not sure if he can be trusted but she's almost sure he can be.

TERRY
 Sorry just trying to lighten the mood, with all things considering. I'm former military.

Shuffling sounds in the cabin of the trunk.

APRIL
 (exiting the truck)
 Mama what's...
 (surprised at Joel)
 Oh.

TERRY
 And that's my daughter. We're trying to--

JOEL
 Find food?

TERRY
 Yeah.

JOEL

There's more in the back seat if
your daughter hasn't found it
already.

Terry nods at April. April dives back into the truck to on a
scavenger hunt.

JOEL (CONT'D)

(calm but awkward)

Yeah. My name is Joel. I'm a
communications tech.

TERRY

My name is Terry. Unemployed.
Recently that is.

JOEL

Yeah.

There's an awkward silence.

TERRY

But only a more serious tip take a
look around, the roads are rivers
and landmarks are gone. I can get
you there but it will be hard.

Joel looks around.

JOEL

I can help protect you and your
daughter.

Terry shows him her holstered gun. He's a bit calmer now.

Joel sees a turned over canoe near the entrance of a fast-
food restaurant.

JOEL (CONT'D)

...So, there's a turned over boat a
few feet away. Beats traveling by
foot ya ask me.

TERRY

(whistles to April)

C'mon plum we gotta go. Toss over
the food.

A backpack is tossed from inside the truck into the arms of
Terry. April sprouts from the door. Terry moves over to help
her. April leaps from the truck.

JOEL
Just follow me.

Joel leads them away. Terry and April follow.

APRIL
Mom, I think I saw an alligator
nearby.

Unbeknownst to the three, TWO ALLIGATORS lurk QUIETLY a few feet behind them.

TERRY
There you go seeing things you
shouldn't see again.

APRIL
Then what am I supposed to see.

TERRY
Things that aren't drawn up in your
dreams, now hush before you scare
yourself.

Joel reaches the canoe. He struggles to turn it over.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Here let me help.

Both struggle to turn the canoe over.

APRIL
Can I help?

JOEL
It's a bit...
(seeing the alligators)
Shit!

Joel snatches April away from the wide open mouth the gator just as it is about to chomp. Terry screams.

JOEL (CONT'D)
In the building.

The three burst into the restaurant. Joel leads Terry and April down an aisle and they hide at the end, behind a counter, breathing hard.

The gator can see a part of April that is not entirely hidden by the counter.

The three remain frozen in fear as a gator burst through the glass of the doors at the bottom of the door.

Now, a second gator joins it in the doorway. They move into the room, brushing against each other. The first gator SNAPS as the second, as if to say "keep your distance."

The gators split, taking different aisles. Joel and Terry crawl away, Terry weak now, down a third aisle, around the other side of the counter from the gators, moves in the opposite direction.

As Joel and Terry pass the gators, one of the gators tails SMACK into a table, knocking over chairs and debris. They fall onto Terry, who manages to keep quiet.

They keep moving as one of the gators dips down, looking through an open cabinet to inspect the racket. Joel, Terry and April reach the end of the aisle and round a corner - -

- - But Terry falling behind now, and accidentally brushes against some furniture.

They move, in Terry's direction, heading right for her. The gator on the floor is just about to turn the corner to where Terry sits, exposed and exhausted, but both the gators suddenly stop, hearing a CLICKING sound from the other end of the aisle.

It's Joel, TAPPING a spoon on a table to distract them. The gator starts cautiously towards Joel's noise, leaving Terry and April.

The gators make the turn towards Joel, SMASHING more stuff around with their tails. Terry spots a back-door open on the far wall, with a pin-locking handle.

She takes a few deep breathes, summons what little strength she has left - -

- - and makes a break for the walk-in freezer. She's limping, dragging herself and April, really moving like a wounded prey now, and - -

- - the other gator spots her. And charges.

Joel takes out his gun as a gator charges - - Terry's And April's gator charges after them, just open floor space between them.

Joel stands from behind the corner and opens fire multiple shots just as the gator charges with an open mouth. It stops dead in the water.

At the other end of the aisle, April SCREAMS as the other gator bears down on her. Terry reaches the back-door, rips the door open, and falls outside.

Terry pulls April to her feet--

The gator makes one last lunge, right on April's heels, its mouth wide open--

--but Terry SLAMS the door shut just as April is clear outside. The gator's head is caught for a second, until--

--BANG! BANG! BANG! The gator's goes limp. DEAD!

Terry backs away from the door as April rises to her feet. Joel pushes the door open and steps over the head of the dead gator.

JOEL (CONT'D)
(tired)
You trust me now.

April rushes to Joel's side, hugging him tightly.

CLICK! CLICK! CLICK! The sound of bullets entering the chamber alarms them. Six men surround them with guns drawn. An old elderly lady in the wheelchair is with them.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Shit!

INT. NEW ORLEANS SUPERDOME - STANDS - DAY

Muffled screams are heard from one end of the center to the next. Billy, hearing the noise, slowly awakens from his sleep.

Half a sleep, he looks up, seeing Ninety-Three year old ALLIE sitting beside him, slowly eating crackers unaware of the tragedy around her. Her dead husband sits next to her with his eyes wide open and fixed.

BILLY
AHHHH!

He falls out of his chair and stumbles backwards.

ALLIE
Stay here young man, ya grad-mammy
be back soon.

Billy shakes his head no, gets up and runs away.

ALLIE (CONT'D)
Billy! Billy! Billy!!!

Billy runs up the steps past a bunch of sleeping and dead folks who are in the stands. He enters into...

INT. NEW ORLEANS SUPERDOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...Where he is instantly met with the smell of vomit, cigarette smoke and urine.

Bathrooms overflow with feces. Blood stained stairs and muddy, wet clothes are everywhere on the ground. Flies buzz around babies. Dogs eat dirty diapers. Dead cats were kicked into a pile of debris by kids trying to play.

Billy is so overwhelmed that he throws up. He begins to cry.

BILLY
(crying)
Mom...Dad...Memaw!!!

Some feet away HARRY CONNICK JR is standing in the chair addressing a crowd of thirty people.

HARRY CONNICK JR
I'm here to witness what you're going through. I'm here to help.

RANDOM BLACK MAN
Man, get yo ass outta here!

RANDOM BLACK MAN #2
Where's the government?

RANDOM WHITE WOMAN
Look at mother, can't you see she needs insulin.

The crowd drowns out, Connick's calm speech. He can't take it anymore, steps down from the chair and departs.

Billy continues to cry. It's all too overwhelming for the three year old.

Staggering in front of him, a DRUG FIEND stumbles in front of him.

DRUG FIEND
Ey, gotta jab man!

The Fiend is suddenly slapped in the face with a purse. Grandma, stands behind Billy with her arm cocked back ready to throw he purse again.

GRANDMA

Get the fuck outta here! Focusing
on ya fix at time like this...

The Fiend departs.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

....Gone now. Git! Ol snagga tooth
bitch!

Two young black men no older than twenty-five, named Dewayne
and Marquise stand come up beside Grandma as if they know
her.

DEWAYNE

Ma'am we found the truck.

Grandma hugs Billy as he cries.

MARQUIS

But there's a problem.

GRANDMA

What's the problem?

MARQUIS

The truck's broke down, but its an
easy fix.

GRANDMA

That doesn't sound like a problem.

DEWAYNE

That isn't. We have to break into
Joe's Hardware store to get it.

GRANDMA

They've evacuated the entire city.
What's left is all in here.

The two boys don't say anything. Their silence is a no.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

We're like seed in the winter time,
just stuck and ain't goin' no
where.

MARQUIS

We can sneak it. But we need help.

GRANDMA

Help like how?

DEWAYNE

We need your son. We need him to sneak in while we distract.

GRANDMA

No yo got to be kiddin' me. Aint there anotha way? To get in.

MARQUIS

We tried. He's got the placed held up by gun point.

GRANDMA

Oh hell naw. No, don't even--

MARQUIS

--Ma'am if we don't get outta here. You're going to die.

Grandma is caught off guard. Stunned.

MARQUIS (CONT'D)

You need your insulin don't you. Medication and oxygen.

GRANDMA

I'd rather die than risk him.

DEWAYNE

Then who will take care of him when you go. Where's his parents?

Grandma can't answer.

A very long beat.

GRANDMA

(grabbing Sean by the shoulders)

Billy sweetie. I'm going to need to you go with these two young men okay.

BILLY

I don't know them meemaw.

GRANDMA

I've baby-sat them since they were babies themselves. You're dad knows them.

BILLY

Grandma I don't wanna go!

GRANDMA
I'm not asking you.

Tears come in Billy's eyes again.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)
Toughen up. You gotta be a man now.
least until your father come.

MARQUIS
We gotchu little man. Just follow
us.

Billy stiffens his upper lip and walks up to the two guys.
The three depart.

Grandma hurries over to a pay phone. She places it to her ear
and dials.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY (INTERCUT SCENE)

Katrina is sitting in the bed watching the horrors of
Hurricane Katrina unfold of the television. The very handsome
Michael sits next to her eating fruit, when her cell phone
rings.

KATRINA
Hello?

GRANDMA
Katrina.

KATRINA
(excited and relieved)
Mrs. Krammer. I'm glad to hear your
voice how are you?

GRANDMA
I'm well--

KATRINA
I've been trying to get in contact
with your son and he's not picking
up the phone.

GRANDMA
I know. He's here in New Orleans.

KATRINA
Why is he in New Orleans?
(correcting herself)
Wait to recuse you, I'm sorry.

GRANDMA

No, it wasn't to rescue me. He was here on the job.

KATRINA

A job? You have my son?

GRANDMA

Yes I have your son?

KATRINA

Is he safe?

GRANDMA

Yeah.

KATRINA

You don't sound good. Where are you two?

GRANDMA

In the Superdome.

Instant panic covers Katrina. She drops the phone, jumps up from her bed and gets dressed immediately.

KATRINA

(to Michael)

Get dressed. My son's in the Superdome!

Michael drops his food, leaps from the bed and in a hurry puts on his shirt.

Katrina picks up the phone.

KATRINA (CONT'D)

We're on the way to get you. Stay there on and on the phone with me!

GRANDMA

I'll try.

A line of angry people stand behind Grandma waiting to use the phone.

EXT. SUPERDOME - DAY

Thousands of people huddle outside, afraid to go into the building, a formless, irresolute mob. Many were fanning themselves from the sweating heat.

People sleep in the street. People lie dead in the gutter. People chanting 'Help! Help! Help!' Kids crying. Dogs running around and trash all over the place.

There were about forty seniors and special needs individuals on the side of the sidewalk in wheelchairs. They had empty canisters of air, plastic tubes hooked into their noses. They haven't gotten out of their wheelchair for days, sitting in their own shit.

The three men take all the sights in. They walk past a man dead in a lawn chair left in the sun.

EXT. OAK AVENUE - MOMENTS LATER

The three walk down a trashed and gutted street. Vandalized beyond recognition. About five blocks of it looked like a chicken bone picked clean.

Up ahead of them, at an Ace Hardware store the doors and windows are smashed out with glass on the sidewalk and street.

In front of the store is FORET, a white man in his mid-fifties who scares off twenty looters off with a baseball bat. They scatter, with goods in their hands, in equal directions laughing and taunting Foret as they leave.

Two pickup trucks with young men drive past taunting Foret.

FORET

Fuck you asshole!

MARQUIS

I can tell you now. We not just walkin' into dat place and gettin' what we want. Ain't gonna happen.

DEWAYNE

You two just sneak around back and get in. I'll distract him.

MARQUIS

How?

DEWAYNE

Don't worry bout it nigga. I'll come out alive hopefully.

Marquis looks down at Dewayne's leg. It either looks as if he's happy to see someone or there's an extremely long weapon in his pants. Either way Marquis is assured Dewayne has it.

MARQUIS
C'mon lil dude. We out.

Marquis picks up Billy and makes a mad dash behind a row of buildings on the same side as Ace Hardware.

Foret stands in front of his store in disbelief. The sound of feet stepping against broken glass. Forest turns quickly.

FORET
Ey, the hell you want? You came to steal too?

DEWAYNE
No, Mr. Ace but I do need help.

FORET
(pointing at the store)
Does it look like I'm in any mood to help anybody?

DEWAYNE
Sir, it was just worth asking.

FORET
What are you? You trying to distract me so the rest of your 'homeboys' can come and loot shit! Huh! Huh!

DEWAYNE
That's not my plan mister.

ON THE SIDE OF THE BUILDING

Meanwhile Marquis and Billy arrive to the side of the hardware store, well within view of Foret and Dewayne. Marquis hoist Billy up in the window.

MARQUIS
See that small book-bag right there. Grab, and bring it back here okay. It's not too heavy.

BILLY
Kay.

Marquis helps Billy into the window.

BACK IN FRONT OF THE BUILDING

FORET
Then what is it you want.

DEWAYNE

I just need to get my tools.

FORET

Your tools? Ha. I like the cut of your jib. Why are you doing this?

DEWAYNE

It's our city. It's our time now.

FORET

Everywhere but this store.

DEWAYNE

(taking a step forward)

Everywhere including this store.

The two standoff. Foret grows concerned. He throws a quick right, knocking Dewayne backward three or four feet, cutting his lip.

Dewayne takes out a crowd bar, waving it frantically in the air like a tomahawk.

Foret ducks, the crowbar coming inches of his skull. He puts a wrestling move on Dewayne laying his body on Dewayne's Torso, absorbing a blow to his arm. He gets Dewayne in a headlock, choking him breathless.

A car screeches to a stop in front of the battle. Lopez, dressed in Ace Hardware uniform, hops out the driver seat.

LOPEZ

Don't kill'em, you'll go to jail.

Foret lets up on Dewayne and rises to his feet.

FORET

Sorry boss.

LOPEZ

No you're fine. Is there anybody else in the store?

FORET

Haven't been inside to check.

LOPEZ

I'll check it out.

Marquis' POV:

He observes Lopez pulling out a pistol, and then walking into the store.

MARQUIS

Oh snap!

INT. ACE HARDWARE STORE - CONTINUOUS

With a few steady long paces, Lopez enters the store with his gun drawn. Panic has swept over him.

LOPEZ

Whoever is in here better get the hell out.

He fires his .38 automatic into the ceiling. Everything is dark inside the store. He hears the shuffling of metal. He keeps aiming his pistol down the aisles just in the case the intruder was hiding.

Cash registers are flipped over. Computers smashed. Shelves damn near empty with most supplies on the floor.

The sound of a child crying.

Lopez runs to it. He arrives standing over a crying Billy.

A very terrified Marquis and Dewayne arrive with a very agitated Foret behind a Lopez.

MARQUIS

Don't kill'em. He's with us.

Lopez stares at the two young me as if he's ready to strike them.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS CITY STREETS - DAY

JP, a Chicano clothes horse in Italian silk. And FETTY, a steely-eyed, heavysset black guy. PETEY and NEIL are rough-cut black guys. They form a circle with guns aiming, around Terry, April and Joel.

JP

Hands up! You need to not move, breathe, think or blink.

The three slowly raise their hands in the air.

TERRY

What do you clowns want with us?

PETEY

Shut up! -- New guy! His hands move, blast him.

Neil aims his shotgun at Joel's head.

NEIL

I gottem!

TERRY

You know what you're doing, kid?

Neil nods: yes. The truth is; he doesn't.

TERRY (CONT'D)

What's going down, Alonzo?

FETTY

Woah she knows ya government JP.

The men giggle amongst one another. JP takes the duffle bag from around his back and pulls out two boat oars.

Terry sees the tools and knows exactly what they are for.

TERRY

You goddamn vampires want my boat.

JP

No, man, it's not like that. You're just getting taxed from your husband's shit.

TERRY

Ex-husband.

JP

Doesn't matter. He owe us for the missing kilo. You gotta render unto Caesar, to take care of those in the hood.

(to Fetty and Petey)

Loads grams up.

Fetty and Petey lift up Grandma from her wheelchair and put her in the boat.

TERRY

Bullshit. You're their bitch. What happens with us?

JP

Don't worry, sis. I promised you it'd be quick. For a couple of hours I got your back. You won't even miss what I'm gonna take. I hate doing this.

TERRY

No you don't. Damn crook! What have I done to those guys? Are you nuts? Am I supposed to stand still and let them horsefuck me? What bout my daughter.

JP

He can take care of you, like he did those gators. Or we can put you out of your misery.

JP tosses the shotgun to Neil.

JP (CONT'D)

(to Neil)

Lemme tell you a secret. If you kill a former cop, they have to be your slave in the afterlife.

(points to Terry)

There you go. Start an entourage.

NEIL

You want me to kill her? She gotta child.

Petey, Fetty, JP snicker, crack smiles.

JP

Part of the initiation kid.

Neil lowers the gun.

JP (CONT'D)

Not gonna do it.

NEIL

This isn't funny. My mom died in front of me.

JP smiles. Whips a pistol out his pocket.

JP

And ya never knew your dad. Can't get shit done unless you do it yourself.

Terry covers April. BANG! Terry is punched in the leg with bullet, falls into the water taking April with her. Joel springs into action, helping them up.

Contagious giggles from the JP, Fetty, Grandma and Petey. Joel stares wide-eyed at JP.

JP approaches the three.

JP (CONT'D)
 (to Joel)
 Step aside bro. Time to collect my
 fee for shots fired.

Joel strikes -- twists back JP's gun sharply -- sweeps away his legs with a kick. JP finds himself on his back, Joel's knee on his neck, staring down the maw of his own pistol.

JOEL
 It ends here.

JP
 That's what I'm talking about.
 You guys see this? That's it, man.

Fetty presses his gun against Joel's temple.

JP (CONT'D)
 (laughing)
 You thought you were doing
 something. You even used your
 Batman voice on me. Man was a I
 scared.

Joel's free hand inches to his gun tucked into his pants --

JOEL
 (super-calm)
 Hey, sorry, man. Relax, okay?

-- and snatches it -- He swings on Petey -- who swings his .45 on Joel. A three-way standoff.

JOEL (CONT'D)
 Wanna shoot, go ahead. You'll be
 wiping my ass in hell.

PETEY
 JP. This is bad.

JP
 I hear you. I know you're angry!--
 Both yall niggas put down your
 guns.

FETTY
 Hell no. Ain't doing shit.

JP
 Ey, let me engineer this shit my
 nigga. Both of you: guns down. Now.

Fetty and Petey reluctantly lower their weapons. Joel lifts his knee off JP's neck, stands and backs away, aiming both pistols at JP, who climbs to his feet. He laughs.

JP (CONT'D)

(lighting a cigarette)

I'll give you two options, no one option. My grandma needs this boat to get to the hospital. Your girlfriend here bleeding on the ground. Now you're gonna let me take this boat, cause if you don't my grandma dies, your girl here bleeds out, and then, you die. You let me take the boat, and you save your girlfriend.

Joel and JP trade a look.

JP (CONT'D)

You're going to die. Just die later.

JP walks backwards to the canoe. Fetty and Petey and Neil walk to the boat aiming their guns back at Joel. With eyes glued to the three they step in the boat and paddle away.

They wait until they're far off in the distance before they speak.

TERRY

(coughing and weak)

Joel. Look a few blocks down.

Joel looks a few blocks down and spots an unoccupied police car.

JOEL

I can start it. I can drive it.

Joel helps her to her feet.

INT. POLICE CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Joel drives the police car down the road while Terry sits passenger side. April is in the passenger seat.

TERRY

Who taught you how to hot-wire a car?

JOEL

Blame that on my teenage years. I used to hang with the wrong crowd stealing cars and whatnot.

TERRY

I see it came in handy.

JOEL

Yeah for now. At the time it didn't. I almost went to jail cause of it. I got off with community service and went into the military to set me straight.

TERRY

Good for you. Your up bring sounds similar to mine.

JOEL

Does that have anything to do with what happened by there?

TERRY

Used to be a cop after the military. Ex-husband used to sell drugs under my nose. Got me when he used my car to push weight.

JOEL

Explains the unemployment.

APRIL

Mom can we listen to the radio.

JOEL

No jazz music.

TERRY

(in pain)

Hush. That's the least of my worries right now.

JOEL

Keep your eyes out for supermarkets, stores that are open. We'll have hit everyone if they haven't already been picked apart. We'll need candles, food, first aid and medicine for your mom.

APRIL

Why not the hospital?

JOEL

A minor flesh wound is the least of their problems.

APRIL

Can we get some ice cream when I get there?

TERRY

(in pain)

We're not worried about those things right now April, get it together.

APRIL

It's because we're broke. Why can't we just move someplace where we aren't poor?

TERRY

Because that place doesn't exist.

Joel pulls the car up to a grocery store.

Joel's POV:

The parking lot is packed with cars, trash and people running into the store and others running out of the store with supplies.

APRIL

I don't feel safe going in.

TERRY

(grabbing a police rifle)

I don't feel safe staying out here.

In unison all three exit the car at once. Together they head to the store.

INT. WALMART - MOMENTS LATER

The store is gushing with people as if it was Black Friday. Every man for themselves. Yet the store looks like a bomb went off within it. Clothing racks are empty. Shampoo bottles, footballs, toys and paper and mud streaks litter the floor. Some fluorescent lights flicker.

A white woman carts out with fifty-inch flat screen and a middle aged man runs out with a \$600 power washer.

Joel pushes April in a cart while Terry, limping ahead of them, leads the way with a rifle in hand.

As they move down the picked-over aisles, Joel and April swipe items off the shelves into the basket -- toilet paper, can food, a bag of chips.

APRIL

These people are stealing stuff
they don't need. There's still ice
cream.

A white kid rides past them on a bike. A few kids in front of them throw a football back and forth between them.

JOEL

(swiping items in the
cart)

Don't get your hopes up yet.
Something tells me these people are
still hungry.

TERRY

(weak and frustrated)

Where's the first aid?

Terry is leaving a blood trail on the floor.

JOEL

You don't need first aid you need a
miracle, a doctor and a kiss on the
cheek.

Terry looks back at Joel annoyed as if there's no time for games.

Joel smirks to lighten the mood.

APRIL

There's the pharmacy.

PHARMACY AREA

Looters shuffle through the medications as a PHARMACIST pushes and pulls people away. A few others make it past her and run out with bags of medicine.

Terry falls to the floor. Joel rushes to her side. Clutching her leg in pain is too much to endure.

TERRY

Don't worry bout me, just go get
what we need.

JOEL

I can't do that.

TERRY

I told you I was in the military
once and used to have an abusive
husband. Go!

A beat.

Joel rises and navigates his way through the crowd of people who walk past with clothes, car tires, more televisions and household items. He rushes into the pharmacy where there are at least a dozen people going bananas looting medicine. THREE PHARMACIST sit together bunched up side-by-side, terrified, not sure what to do.

Joel searches through the medicine shelves. Nothing there. Looks behind him in another shelf. Bandages. He takes it.

Meanwhile Terry lies on the floor, covering her leg, in deep pain. A Police Officer rushing past backtracks to the aisle she's on. He spots something.

APRIL

Sir, help my mom. She used to be a
cop.

The cop rushes down the aisle towards Terry and April. He reaches on the shelf above her, grabs some baby food and departs.

TERRY

(to the cop)
Hey! Hey! Hey!

Joel continues searching through the cabinets. He's grabbed a crap load of things. He grabs a pair of syringes and jogs out with eight items in his arms.

Joel sprints to Terry upon seeing her on the floor. He slides to her. She's no good. She has blue lips, blue fingernails, sweating profusely.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Where am I?

JOEL

(shock in his eyes)
Shit, not now.

APRIL

What's wrong with my mom?

JOEL
 She's going into shock.
 (to Terry)
 Lie down.

Joel takes Terry by the legs and pulls her closer to him, putting her wounded leg on his shoulder. He wraps it with a towel. Tightly.

Terry is calm. Breathing heavy though.

JOEL (CONT'D)
 (pointing to bag)
 Grab that. Unwrap it. Put it over
 your mom's mouth. Squeeze every
 three seconds.

April grabs a bag. Tears it open. It's an AMBU bag. April places it over Terry's mouth and squeezes.

With the leg still on his shoulder, Joel finds a syringe and a vial of dopamine. Places the needle in the bottle, pulls liquid into the syringe and sticks it a vein in her arm. Terry is slowly coming to.

EXT. WALMART PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

A NEWS ANCHOR and CAMERAMAN, report and film respectively, people running from the store with blenders and blow dryers in hand.

NEWS ANCHOR
 The truth is people aren't
 frustrated here. People are dying
 here. Walking through the rubble, it
 feels like Sri Lanka, Sarajevo,
 somewhere else, not here, not home,
 not America. You get chills every
 time you see those poor
 individuals, so many of these
 people, almost all of them are so
 poor, so black.

Meanwhile behind them a white man urinates in the background on live TV.

URINATING MAN
 I can take a piss in the middle of
 the parking lot and not get clubbed
 or arrested.

Joel speeds past the camera crew with Terry in the shopping cart with her leg elevated. April runs alongside the basket.

JOEL
Find the cop car.

APRIL
I see it. Over there.

Joel's POV:

The cop car they drove in is alone. Nothing but tube socks are around the car.

Together they rush to the card until...

TWO COPS, rush them from the side. Joel stops on the dime.

COP#1
We need this car.

JOEL
I can't let you take that.

COP#1
Why? You're a cop?

A very long beat. Joel breathes heavy thinking of an answer. COP#2 steps forward suspicious.

JOEL
I am. Started last week.

COP#2
Where's ya badge?

APRIL
Where's yours?

TERRY
(to April)
Shhh!

The cops observe stolen goods in the cart. Amongst food, medicine, and clothes, there are toys and a CD player.

COP#2
You stole the car.

JOEL
We gotta get her to the hospital.
She's been shot!

COP#2
You didn't answer my question.

JOEL

What's more important, saving a
life or getting arrested?

COP#2 steps forward with handcuffs to arrest Joel.

COP#2

Cowboy it's time to round you up.

JOEL

How about you round this up!

Joel punches the cop in the face, knocking him to the ground. The other cop jumps on at Joel. Joel handles him quickly with a few punches and kicks. The other cop, on the ground whips out his gun. Pulls the trigger! CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

The gun is wet. It won't fire.

Joel walks to the cop, snatches the gun from his hand and clobbers the cop in the head with it.

INT. SUPERDOME - DAY

Katrina takes slow methodical steps in the hallway of terror. Michael walks beside her. Kids huddle up and dirty next to concession stand. A man defecates right beside them.

She looks into the bathroom. Her POV:

Toilets literally boil with brown water spilling onto the floor.

Katrina covers her mouth from the foul odor.

More atrocities occur. A two-year-old girl sleeps in a pool of urine. Crack vials litter a rest room. Blood stains the walls next to vending machines smashed by teenagers.

MICHAEL

There's feces on the wall. There is
feces all over the place.

A TAFFANY, 25, cradling her three-week-old runs up to Katrina.

TAFFANY

(panicky and crying)
You got diapers? You got diapers.
We pee on the floor. We like
animals. They gaven me two diapers
and told to scrape them off when
they got dirty and use them again.

Katrina can't take it anymore, shrugs the woman off and runs down the hallway. Michael follows.

KATRINA
(screaming and searching)
Billy! Billy! Joel! Mrs. Kramer!

She stops. And panics.

KATRINA (CONT'D)
Oh gosh! Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God! What am I going to do?

MICHAEL
(hands on her shoulder)
We're going to find them okay.
Okay, I got you.

KATRINA
You don't need you to get me, I need you to get my son...

Katrina, nudges him away. She's slightly angry.

KATRINA (CONT'D)
(screaming)
...Billy! Joel! Joel!

EXT. DOWN THE STREET FROM THE SUPERDOME - MOMENTS LATER

Joel drives the car. Terry is in the passenger seat and again April is in the back. The two passengers look out the window at the destruction.

JOEL
So what's next for you after this is all over.

TERRY
I don't know. It's finding a place and waiting for her father to get out of jail. I want to rebuild what the storm took away between him and I but I feel like that may be too late.
(looking at Joel with attraction)
I think it's time to let go and start anew.

JOEL

I think I understand. Secretly, ya know, I wanted to rebuild with my wife.

TERRY

You say wanted as if in past tense?

JOEL

Yeah. I know. Just not sure. I want to give my son a two parent household and I want him in the home with me.

TERRY

But...

JOEL

There is no but.

TERRY

Oh. Well what if he's not, there? What if you don't get him back and raise him in the home you want?

JOEL

Then the next thing I lose is my life, because I'm nothing without him.

Joel pulls the car up to a dry, trashy and gutted corner.

Joel's POV:

Thousands and Thousands upon thousands of people are outside the Superdome. Chanting. Yelling.

TERRY

That's madness. We're not going in there?

JOEL

(frustrated)
My son is in there, have you forgot?

A very long beat as Terry and Joel trade a look. Terry realizes there's no reasoning with him.

TERRY

(calmly)
Okay. I understand. You can go.

JOEL
It wasn't up for debate about
whether I'm going in or not.

TERRY
But I have a daughter.

Joel looks to beautiful bugged-eyed April.

JOEL
Shit! Shit, shit, shit, shit
(yelling and banging on
steering wheel)
Shit!

TERRY
We can wait. We can stay here and
wait.

JOEL
They'll swarm this car and kill
you.

BUMP! BUMP! The sound of knocking on the backseat window
startles them. It's a NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIER.

NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIER
You're leg is bleeding badly. You
need help?

A beat.

JOEL
(steadfast)
You go inside. Get help. I'm going
in for my son.

Terry looks to the Guard. She nods yes.

NATIONAL GUARD SOLDIER
Okay. Follow me.

INT. SUPERDOME - MOMENTS LATER

Joel is running through the crowd of people. The odors and
sights haven't slowed him down.

JOEL
Mom! Billy! Kramer! Billy!

He's captured the attention of those he passes by.

SEAN (O.S.)
(screaming)
Dad! Dad! Daddy!

He stops seeing the light from inside the football arena. That's where he thinks the voice of Billy is coming from. He runs into the...

INT. SUPERDOME STANDS - CONTINUOUS

... Overlooking the football field, Joel stands at the top section.

JOEL
(searching)
Billy! Mom! Billy!

BILLY (O.S.)
Over here dad!

JOEL
(searching and yelling)
Sean where are you?

BILLY
(waving)
Over here!

Joel spots Billy waving a few feet down. Joel sprints down the steps to Billy who wears a big smile.

Little Billy crawls up the steps to him as he is too short to take adult steps.

Like a sailor home from deployment Joel reaches him, picks him up and gives him the biggest hug a father could give a son. Victory at last. Joel cries.

JOEL
(crying)
Oh son, I missed you. I'm glad
you're safe. I love you, I love
you, I love you!

BILLY
I miss you too dad. Mom is here. I
found her.

Joel stops hugging him.

JOEL
(concerned)
Where's your mom?

Billy points a few rows down. Katrina, his mother, Grandma and Michael are sitting down, all stare at Joel.

Joel picks up his son and jogs down the stairs. They watch as he makes his way.

Katrina stands to greet him. She is dressed simply and no longer has a tan. Nevertheless, she is still stunningly beautiful.

Joel stands watching her, his knees weak. It is impossible not to fall in love with her all over again.

GRANDMA

Hi son.

JOEL

Hi mom. I'm sorry. You okay?

GRANDMA

I'm making it. But I don't have my insulin.

Joel puts Billy down. Rushes to his mother's side.

JOEL

We gotta get you to some help. I just dropped a friend off at the medical tent in the convention center.

GRANDMA

(coughing)

How come I didn't know bout this.

JOEL

(confused)

I don't know mama, I just got here...

Joel whistles for help.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Hey! We need some help over here.

The guards, attending to someone else, notice his call. One guard holds up his finger, letting him know to wait and they'll be there.

GRANDMA

Well if that's true. I hope they do it soon, but look your wife is here. She needs to talk to you.

Joel snaps back around to Katrina, who stands watching him. He takes a step forward. He waves hello to Michael, not realizing he's the same guy who drove off with Katrina the last time they saw another.

Katrina holds out her hand, for a handshake. Taken back from this unloving gesture, Joel now realizes something isn't right.

KATRINA
Joel can we talk.

The two walk away towards some empty seats some yards away. They sit.

KATRINA (CONT'D)
Hello, Joel. You look, well. All things considering.

JOEL
So do you.

There is a self-conscious pause. Neither know what to say.

JOEL (CONT'D)
(still can't believe it)
So...you're here?

KATRINA
Yeah. I saw it on the news how bad it got. I came down from Shreveport, after spending a week in New York.

JOEL
Shreveport? New York?

Joel looks back to Michael. He's placed two and two together. Flabbergasted.

KATRINA
Yeah. Those places. I woulda thought that you would be back at our home, outta the way. Not running to danger, let alone dragging our son with you.

JOEL
Whoa wait. You couldn't possibly think--

KATRINA
--Joel I don't know what to think.

JOEL

I didn't run to danger and drag my
son here on pur--
(correcting and changing
his tone)
Do you really thought I would think
it would get this bad?

KATRINA

Joel I don't know.

JOEL

Really Katrina? Short memory must
have your brains tongue. You left
my son with me because you felt he
wouldn't be safe around you!

KATRINA

(apologetic)
I know, what I said.

JOEL

You got some nerve.

KATRINA

Just! Okay. We lived a hundred
miles away. Just why is our son
here?

JOEL

You want to do this now? No, no, no
no, we're not. Our first priority
is to get the hell outta here, then
we'll talk.

KATRINA

You know what. You're right. You're
right. I want my son back.

JOEL

(as if he heard wrongly)
You want what?!

KATRINA

I want my son. I want my son.
Looking at him with all of this. I
think he's safer with me, I make
safer decisions.

JOEL

You must left you're brain on the
operating table because you are out
of your mind.

KATRINA

Cut the theatrics. Acting was never your thing.

(trying to explain)

Listen to me... You and I, had a horse shit of a marriage

(hastily)

Look, don't get so defensive, okay? It was probably as much my fault as it was yours... Anyway when I left I was really screwed up--

JOEL

--Katrina, I don't give a--

KATRINA

(she will be heard)

All my life I'd either been somebody's daughter or somebody's wife, or somebody else's mother. Then all of a sudden, I was a thirty-two-year-old, highly neurotic woman who had just walked out on her husband and child. I went to New York because that was about as far away as I could get. Only... I guess it wasn't far enough. So I started going to a shrink.

(leaning forward, very sincere)

I've had time to think. I've been through some changes. I've learned a lot about myself.

JOEL

Such as?

Silence.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Come on, Katrina, what did you learn? I'd really like to know.

Silence.

JOEL (CONT'D)

(restless)

One thing, okay? Just tell me one goddamn thing you've learned.

There is a beat of silence, then:

KATRINA
 (quiet, determined)
 I learned that I want my son.

He reacts as though he has been slapped.

JOEL
 Katrina, go be a mother. Get
 married, have kids. Don't get
 married, have kids. Do whatever you
 want. I don't give a damn. Just
 leave me out of it - and leave my
 baby out of it.

KATRINA
 If you can't discuss this
 rationally--

JOEL
 (getting to his feet)
 Go screw yourself you dumb selfish
 bitch.

And with that he turns to the coughing and gagging of his
 mother.

JOEL (CONT'D)
 Awe shit!

Joel rushes over to Grandma just as she's being loaded onto
 the stretcher by the guards.

JOEL (CONT'D)
 What's happening? What's happening?

GRANDMA
 I've got a headache. Where am I?

JOEL
 No, not you too.

Grandma's eyes roll to the back her head. She seizes. The
 tremors are violent.

JOEL (CONT'D)
 (shocked)
 No! No!

GUARD
 We gotta get her outta here now!
 Let's move.

The five guards each grab a side of the stretcher and
 together they carry it up the steps. Joel goes with them.

Joel looks back to Katrina. She's picking up Billy's belongings.

JOEL
(screaming)
Come with me. Come with me don't do
this.

Katrina ignores him. With Billy and Michael in hand, they run up the steps. Far away from Joel.

GUARD
And we're up let's move.

The men keep moving. Joel has a choice. Go after his dying mother or go after his son and soon to be ex-wife.

JOEL
Katrina don't do this to me!

Joel follows the guards with the stretcher into....

INT. SUPERDOME HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Guards rush down the hallways. Joel is right behind them.

Joel looks behind. Katrina runs the opposite direction.

The crowd grows angry as Grandma is being carried away.

RANDOM WOMAN
What about my son, he's bleeding
from the mouth.

RANDOM WOMAN#2 (O.S.)
It's because we're black isn't it.
Fuck you!

The guardsmen ignore the cries for help as they exit into...

EXT. SUPERDOME TO CONVENTION CENTER BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

...the bright sunny humid day where cries for help loiter the air. The screams and pleas are deafening.

Joel begins to feel tightness in his shoulder blades, arm, chest, jaw, left arm, and upper abdomen.

Joel's POV:

He can hear himself breathing heavy over the heavy screams as if he's fatigued. His vision spins like a drunken man.

For some odd reason he's very sweaty, however he continues to tag along as they enter...

INT. CONVENTION CENTER FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Guardsmen steadily rush through the hallways until they find an open spot in the room filled with hundreds of sick and elderly. Joel trails behind them dragging along. He vomits stomach acid.

Some distance away Terry and April, now patched up, spot Joel struggling to stand on his two feet.

Terry rises from the bed. She stands on her two feet but the pressure on her shot leg is unbearable. She hops to Joel, as he is damn near crawling to the stretcher where doctors have come to work on Grandma.

JOEL
(weak but determined)
Mom. I'm coming. Don't die.

TERRY
Joel, I'm coming.

Joel reaches his mother's side just as Terry reaches his.

TERRY (CONT'D)
I think he's having a heart attack.

GUARD
Hold on lady.

DOCTOR
She had no pulse. We're losing her.
Get the defibrillator.

Terry cradles Joel in her arms.

JOEL
Save my mom.

TERRY
We gotta save you first. Someone
please for the life of God help us.

Doctors rush over to Joel's side as the sound of the heart monitor goes flat.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A new day. Joel lies in the bed quietly and peacefully asleep as the sun rays shine through the window. The birds are chirping outside.

Hold for a beat as we take in the serenity, hearing the fountain splash outside.

TERRY (O.S.)

Joel. Joel.

Terry knocks on the already opened door.

Joel wakes. With a shaven beard, he's very handsome and regal.

JOEL

Come in babe.

Terry walks over, kisses him on the lips and sits down. The two stare into each other eyes. Instant chemistry.

JOEL (CONT'D)

I'm so glad to see you.

TERRY

Don't get all mushy on me now.
Especially with all you been
through.

JOEL

Yeah, I've been through hell and
back before, but never with
someone. Always alone.

TERRY

Not even with your wife.

JOEL

I'm not talking about my wife.

Terry blushes, pushing her hair behind her head.

JOEL (CONT'D)

You know they say you know you've
found a good person when you two
can fight well and survive with one
another.

TERRY

(smiling)

Yeah. Makes me look forward to both
the bad times--

JOEL
(interrupting)
--And the good times. We still have
those to make ya know.

TERRY
If it's just as exciting and
dangerous as before--

JOEL
--then it'll be well worth it.

The two lean in slowly for a kiss. When their lips meet.
BOOM! The sound of a loud explosion. No literally.

Joel wakes up from this dream with shifty eyes, yet he's
still in the same hospital, except this one is a bit dark and
gloomy. The sunlight from outside illuminates the room.

TERRY
You're okay.

Terry looks a hot ass mess. So does April. Joel is breathing
hard.

JOEL
Where the hell am I?

TERRY
You're at Charity hospital. You had
a heart attack and they brought you
here.

Waving flash lights fill the hallway. Nurses and doctors run
down the hall to the next emergency.

JOEL
Why here?

TERRY
Well it was the safest place, until
the generator just went out.

A beat.

Joel takes some time to gather his thoughts.

JOEL
Where's my mom and son?

TERRY
I don't know where you son is, but
your mother...

Terry sees the anxiousness in Joel's eyes. She looks away as she can't answer him.

JOEL
She didn't.

TERRY
They put her in the freezer at the Superdome. Their focus is preserving the living. The dead can wait.

Joel looks away in disbelief. Tears flood his eyes and his throat tightens.

JOEL
(with a cracking voice)
But my son?

TERRY
Did you find him?

JOEL
Yeah, his mom took him away from me.

TERRY
Then he's safe.

JOEL
She's suicidal.

Terry is taken back by the revelation.

Joel gets out of bed, but he clutches his chest hunched over. He's still weak.

TERRY
You're weak. Get back in bed.

JOEL
(pain and angry)
For what? You want me to wait to die or you want me to wait to live?

TERRY
I want you to wait until you're not crazy enough to think.

JOEL
(in pain)
I'm not crazy. I'm just relentless.

TERRY

Then you need to relent yourself
back in this bed. Where ya gonna
go? You don't know where she or he
is.

JOEL

With any luck, they returned home.
I doubt the hurricane messed up my
hometown like it did this city.

TERRY

How certain are you?

JOEL

I'm positive like Aids.

Joel puts on his clothes. Terry covers April's eyes.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Now are you coming with or not.

A very long beat.

TERRY

The police car is downstairs.

Joel hastens to fasten his shirt. Terry is still sitting. She
knows something that is stopping them.

JOEL

Why aren't you moving?

TERRY

The car is four miles away. Have
you seen what's outside still?

Joel runs over to the window.

Joel's POV:

Outside of Charity hospital is flooded with five feet of
water. In the parking garage, a few blocks down, hundreds of
people, doctors, patients on gurneys wait. A helicopter lifts
away.

JOEL

Fuck me in the asshole you have got
to be kidding me.

TERRY

The National Guard is only taking
people who can't walk.

(MORE)

TERRY (CONT'D)

They're disregarding if a person could die in twenty-four hours if they're not airlifted out.

JOEL

If it doesn't make dollars it doesn't make cents.

TERRY

If you're healthy enough to get up and go, then you'll healthy enough to muscle it on your own.

JOEL

I'm not. We'll have to steal a boat.

TERRY

Don't you think you're too tall to stoop to that level?

JOEL

I've been short all my life, so no.

A beat.

JOEL (CONT'D)

You can walk to find our car, or you can come with me and get your daughter to safer ground.

Terry thinks on it. She doesn't want to do it, but she must.

TERRY

(reluctantly)

Okay. Let's do it.

Joel exits the room in a hurry. Terry follows with April in hand.

INT. CHARITY HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Terry and Joel run through the dark hallways. It's filled with sweaty and overworked nurses and doctors who run past.

Flashlights move across the walls. The wail of suffering and voice of anxious doctors echo in the halls.

The three find the front entrance exits into...

EXT. CHARITY HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

...the entrance of the hospital that is surrounded by three feet water. Armed police men and guards are aiming guns at people who demand to get in.

People in wheel chairs wait in boats. Sick children vomit into water. Dead bodies and dead animal float past as if their just common drift wood in the ocean.

TERRY

How are we going to steal anything
with these people needing them?

BANG! BANG! BANG! Three loud shots are heard. The people scream and duck for cover.

RANDOM MAN (O.S.)

Sniper! Sniper!

Over near the parking garage the helicopter lift to fly away. BANG! BANG! The helicopters windows shatter. The helicopter tips and plunges to the crowd of people. Loud screams fill the air before the chopper crashes into a ball of flames on top of the doctors and the injured.

People on fire, leap into the flooded streets. Dozens of them.

JOEL

Let's go!

Taking advantage of the chaos, Joel runs to and pushes a man off a motor boat into the water. Terry and April hop in.

MAN IN WATER

Hey! Hey he stole my boat! He stole
my boat!

The motor boat speeds off. A guardsman shoots and misses. But it's too late. Joel has sped off down the street.

EXT. DANZIGER BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Joel, driving the boat, speeds through the flooded streets. The buildings have been gutted. Furniture and more bloated dead bodies are draped upon fences and cars.

Joel looks behind to see if no one is chasing him. No one is.

He looks in front him and there's a bridge coming up. It's the Danziger Bridge and it's not flooded.

JOEL

That's where we're headed. My home
should be dry on the other side.
It's safer there

Abandoned cars crowd the bridge.

TERRY

I don't think it looks safe. Why
haven't the cars moved?

JOEL

We'll know once we get there.

They arrive to the bottom of the bridge, hop out and run to
the top of the bridge where it moves out. The climb is
arduous. As the move between the cars they hear shouts ahead.

APRIL

Mom, this doesn't sound good.

JOEL

It hasn't sounded good for a couple
of days, keep up.

As they move closer they see a group of black people standing
bunched at the bridge. There are a few feet of space between
them and a group of four white men who hold assault rifles in
hand as if they're holding down the fort. A Budget truck is
behind them.

ERIC, a black man, shouts at them.

ERIC

Let us across man. We got families
to feed.

The four white men, ROB, BOBBY, JOHN and KEN stand straight
faced.

ROB

Hell no, take ya ass back to the
other side boy.

ERIC

Who da hell ya callin boy, bitch?
We got a special needs kid ova'er.

BOBBY

Ya not coming. Ya niggas ova dere
looting stores'n'shit and you ain't
coming over here. Go home!

KEN

Take ya ass back to Africa on a
slave trade boat while you at.

ERIC

Not before I send ya ass back to
maker.

TERRY

(whispering to Joel)
Joel, we need to turn around and
head back.

JOEL

Head back to where? We don't have
another way out!

TERRY

I just don't trust--

JOEL

--Just let me handle it. Where's ya
gun?

Terry looks into Joel's eyes hesitant. By the look on his
face he's dead serious about using it. Terry hands him the
gun. Joel takes it and moves forward. Terry, with April, hide
behind a car. Terry peeks around to watch Joel in action.

JOEL (CONT'D)

(screaming)
Hey! Hey! Excuse me...

From behind the black people, Joel steps in front of them.

CLICK! CLICK! All four white men aim their rifles at him.
Joel stops in his tracks.

JOHN

I hope you repented for your sins
cause you're about to meet your
maker.

JOEL

(apprehensive)
I don't want to meet anybody except
my family across this bridge.

KEN

Make another step and I'll send
your family my condolences myself.

JOEL
That's not called for. Please don't
let me die out here in the streets
like I'm some thug.

KEN
You are!

JOEL
(passionate)
I'm not. Please! Let me die an old
man in my bed. Peaceful and asleep.
Let me live, Let me die in peace.
I'm not an animal.

ROB
Ha, you're a filthy animal. Your
grave is back there with the rest
the dogs.

JOEL
Look! Look in your heart. That's
where all standoffs begin and end.

A very long beat.

The men trade looks. They don't budge.

ERIC
(to Joel)
Looks like they made their
decision. Thanks, whoever you are.

Joel, Eric and the rest of the blacks turn away in silence.

Terry is a bit relieved until...

BANG! BANG! A hail of gun fire fills the air. The sound of
windows breaking, screams, crying, pleading.

Joel dodges bullets and takes cover behind the car. The white
men have gunned down all the unarmed blacks. And they
continue to shoot at the blacks in the back as they flee.

Terry and April hold one another tight.

Glass breaks and falls on Joel's head. Joel takes aim and
returns fire. BANG! BANG! BANG!

Two white men, Rob and Ken fall, both shot in the head in
chest respectively.

John continues to shoot. Bobby reloads out in the open. Joel sees in chance. BANG! Joel shoots Bobby in the leg. Bobby falls in pain.

Joel looks in front him. Terry and April are cowering in fear. Behind them, a few yards away and old enemy returns.

The Man in Water, JP, Fetty, Petey, Neil and few other men rush towards Joel.

MAN IN WATER
(pointing at Joel)
That's the guy that stole my boat.

Joel takes aim and shoots. The few blacks, who rush Joel, take cover. They too return fire. Joel dodges and roles away for the oncoming fire.

An injured Bobby and John continue to shoot. It's chaos. Joel, Terry and April are pinned down surrounded by fire on all sides. Amongst the screams, blood and gunshots it all looks over until...

...the humming of helicopter fills the sky. It's the National Guard with Armed soldiers. One is on a turret.

GUNNER ON TURET
I've got aim. I'm ready to shoot!

PILOT
Unleash the pain.

The gunner fires gas canisters at the bridge. The cans bounce in between cars instantly filling the bridge with gray smoke--tear gas.

JOEL
(to Terry)
C'mon let's move.

Joel opens a car door. Terry, with April in hand, rush towards him. Terry hands April off to Joel, where he places her in one quick move. Terry goes around to the driver side, enters and hot-wires the car.

Joel enters in the passenger seat. Slams the door. The car starts.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Drive!

Terry steps on the gas. The car plows past the Budget truck into the city streets leading to a dry side of New Orleans.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Tree leaves and branches flood the suburban neighborhood street. Most of the houses are damaged, but not beyond repair. A few are gone forever. Homeowners are outside cleaning up their yards.

JOEL

Shit! Katrina hit this far?

TERRY

At least it's not as bad as New Orleans.

JOEL

I second that.

APRIL

Mom we've been driving for two hours are we there yet I have to use the restroom?

JOEL

We're almost there sweetie.

Terry trades a look with Joel.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Sorry, I'm used to being a mom as well.

Terry clearly understands. She smiles.

TERRY

So she should be here right?

JOEL

I'm certain. She's cheap and smart. She'll spare anything she can.

(to April)

You can use the bathroom when we arrive.

APRIL

How long will that be?

JOEL

Right about...

EXT. KRAMER FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

...Joel pulls up to the Kramer family home. The second floor has a tree that crashed on top of it. The windows are blown out.

JOEL
(astounded)
Dear God.

Joel pulls up in the drive way. He steps out the car and surveys the damage to the home. Terry and April step out of the car. They are astounded by the damage too.

Joel approaches the steps. Walks up them. The door is slightly ajar. He's curious to someone being inside. Taking a step further he nudges the door open...

INT. KRAMER - CONTINUOUS

...the foyer. Joel and Katrina's things are strewn across the floor, a mess from the storm.

Joel rights Katrina's chair, sets a lamp upright, and slides the table into position. He pushes the two chairs back into place and then looks around.

JOEL
She got his chair.

APRIL
Mom I have to go to the rest room.

JOEL
(defeated)
It's down the hall straight ahead.

April walks away.

APRIL
(concerned)
What did they take again?

JOEL
They, I mean she took my son's chair. We used to always sit together to watch TV. She was here. They took his chair.

Joel takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and sits.

Quiet.

Nothing save for the toilet flushing and creaking of the bathroom door. The patter of footsteps running comes to Terry.

TERRY

Sweetie. Let's go outside and wait in the car okay.

APRIL

Okay.

Terry and April exit. The sound of the door closes shut.

Joel surveys the room.

A photo album rests near him. He opens it.

He looks through the photos, remembering Katrina's pregnancy, the old house, and memories of Allison, their deceased daughter.

Joel sighs. He fought so hard to have it off and now, nothing.

He closes the book but as he does he notices something that he hasn't before.

There's a picture of a picnic with a very pregnant Katrina and Joel. Katrina isn't smiling, but Joel smiles.

Then there's a birthday picture, a theme park picture. Another and another, each with Katrina looking more and more sad.

Joel looks as if this is all new to him.

On the last page there is a note. A note addressed to him.

Joel reads to himself.

KATRINA (V.O.)

We think of the storms in our life as something that just happened, when in reality it's been brewing with warning for a while. And when it takes us by surprise it's usually too late to run, too late to fix. At those times, you have to start over and rebuild. I'm sorry. But your new life awaits. Run to it without reserve.

Joel looks up.

He stares outside the front window where Terry and April put leaves and trash into the garbage can.

JOEL

Yeah you're right. It doesn't stop me fighting for what's rightfully mine.

Joel reaches into his wallet and pulls out the card that David gave him. He uses the house phone and dials.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Yes is the law office of Shoemaker and Nelson...
(listening)
...Good. I need a lawyer.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

It is a bleak January morning; the streets around the courthouse are mobbed with people on their way to work. We see Joel Kramer, a tiny figure among hundreds, walking down the street. He crosses the street and starts up the steps of the large and forbidding courthouse.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Joel gets off the elevator and starts down the corridor, toward the courtroom. In the f.g., - standing by the door of the courtroom itself is SHAUNESSY, he greets Joel, they shake hands and talk together for a moment. They enter the courtroom.

INT. COURTROOM ON THE DOOR

As Joel enters, looks around. Joel moves on to a table at the front of the room where Shaunessy waits.

ON THE DOORS AT THE BACK OF THE COURTROOM

As they swing open and Katrina, along with her lawyer, a MR. GRESSEN. THE CAMERA PANS WITH THEM as they walk to the front of the room and take their seats at the table opposite Joel and his lawyer.

CLERK

Oyez, oyez... The third Circuit Court of the State of New York, Judge Atkins presiding is now in session. All rise...

The judge enters, takes his seat. Opening business of the court as Gressen (Katrina's lawyer) gets to his feet.

GRESSEN

Your honor. As our first witness I would like to call Katrina Kramer.

TWO SHOT - JOEL AND SHAUNESSY

The lawyer leans across to Joel.

SHAUNESSY

(stage whisper)

Real direct. Motherhood... They're going right for the throat.

As Katrina gets to her feet, crosses to the witness stand and is sworn in.

Note: Throughout the following, we continually CROSS-CUT to Joel, leaning forward, listening intently. It becomes evident that, in spite of himself, there are moments he feels great compassion for Katrina.

GRESSEN

Now then, Mrs. Kramer, would you tell the court how long you were married

KATRINA

Twelve years.

GRESSEN

And would you describe those years as happy?

KATRINA

The first couple, yes, but after that it became increasingly difficult.

GRESSEN

Mrs. Kramer, did you have a child that died while in your marriage to Joel?

KATRINA

Yes.

GRESSEN

Did you ever try to talk to him about it?

KATRINA

Yes. I tried to talk to Joel - my ex-husband - about it, but he wouldn't listen. He refuses to discuss it in any serious way.

GRESSEN

Tell me, Mrs. Kramer, are you employed at the present time?

KATRINA

Yes, I work for Sentara Hospital as a registered nurse.

GRESSEN

And what is your present salary?

KATRINA

I make seventy-five thousand dollars a year.

REACTION - Joel stunned.

GRESSEN

(switching tactics)

Mrs. Kramer, do you love your child?

KATRINA

(emphatically)

Yes. Very much.

GRESSEN

And yet you chose to leave him?

There is a long pause, then:

KATRINA

(speaking carefully, with great thought)

Yes... Look, during the last five years we were married, I had... I was getting more and more... unhappy, more and more frustrated. I needed to talk to somebody. With the death of our daughter, the loss of our house, having to move in a area I hate, I needed to find out if it was me, if I was going crazy or what. But every time I turned to Joel - my ex-husband, he couldn't handle it. He became very... I don't know, very threatened.

(MORE)

KATRINA (CONT'D)

I mean, whenever I would bring up anything he would act like it was some kind of personal attack. Anyway, we became more and more separate... more and more isolated from one another. Finally, I had no other choice, I had to leave. And because of my ex-husband's attitude - his unwillingness to deal with my desires, his unfaithfulness I had come to have almost no identity, no self-esteem...

(with feeling)

At the time I left, I sincerely believed that there was something wrong with me - that my son would be better off without me. It was only when I got to Virginia and started into therapy I began to realize I wasn't a terrible person. I was just a woman who married too young. A woman who hadn't taken her time to live life, make mistakes and come into the fullness of who I am. I just I needed some creative and emotional outlet other than my child and husband. That doesn't make me unfit to be a mother.

GRESSEN

(to the judge)

Your honor, I would like to place in evidence a report on Mrs. Kramer's therapy by her therapist, Dr. Nakia Spivey of Richmond, Virginia.

And with that he hands both the judge and Shaunessy a thick sheaf of papers. Then, turning his attention back to Katrina:

GRESSEN (CONT'D)

Mr. Kramer, why did you set up residence in Shreveport, Louisiana?

KATRINA

Because my son is here. And his father is here, well, a few miles away. As a mother, I don't want my child to be separated from his father.

GRESSEN

Mrs. Kramer, can you tell the court why you are asking for custody?

There is a pause, then:

KATRINA

Because he's my child... Because I love him. I know I left my son. That's a terrible thing to do. But just because I'm a woman, can I not have the same hopes and dreams as a man? Don't I have a right to a life of my own? Is that so awful to have the same freedoms as a man? I left my child - I know there is no excuse for that. But since then, I have gotten help. I have worked hard to become the woman I've meant to be. I don't think I should be punished for that. I don't think my son should be punished for that. Billy's only three. He needs me. I'm not saying he doesn't need his father, but he needs me more as I've had more time with him since birth. Not by the fault of his father, Joel, but he worked. I know my son more. I'm his mother.

There is a beat of silence, then:

GRESSEN

Thank you, Mrs. Kramer. I have no further questions.

ON SHAUNESSY

As he stands, collects his papers from the table and, taking his own sweet time, crosses to Joanna.

SHAUNESSY

Now then, Mrs. Kramer, you said you were married twelve years. Is that correct?

KATRINA

Yes.

SHAUNESSY

In all that time did your husband ever strike you or abuse you physically in any way.

KATRINA

No.

SHAUNESSY

Did your husband strike or physically abuse his child in any way?

KATRINA

No.

SHAUNESSY

Would you describe your husband as an alcoholic?

KATRINA

No.

SHAUNESSY

A heavy drinker?

KATRINA

No.

SHAUNESSY

Did he ever fail to provide for you?

KATRINA

No.

SHAUNESSY

(wry smile)

Well, I can certainly understand why you left him.

GRESSEN

Objection.

SHAUNESSY

(switching his line of questioning)

How long do you plan to live in Shreveport, Mrs. Kramer?

KATRINA

Permanently.

During the early part of Shaunessy's cross-examination, Katrina has been very forthright, very sure of herself. Now, as he starts getting tougher, she begins to falter.

SHAUNESSY

Permanently?

(smiles, like a shark smiles)

Mrs. Kramer, how do you feel now?

(MORE)

SHAUNESSY (CONT'D)
Happy, frustrated, suicidal -
permanently?

ON KATRINA

Her head snaps back as though she's been hit.

KATRINA
I don't recall.

SHAUNESSY
(boring in)
Did you not cut yourself when you
were in your marriage?

KATRINA
(looks toward Gressen for
help)
I don't recall.

SHAUNESSY
How many times did you cut
yourself? Less than three, more
than thirty-three?

ON GRESSEN

He is again on his feet, outraged.

GRESSEN
Objection!

JUDGE
Overruled. The witness will answer,
please.

KATRINA
(almost a whisper)
Somewhere in between.

SHAUNESSY
So you admit you don't value your
own life?

GRESSEN
(furious)
Objection!

SHAUNESSY
(to the judge)
Your honor, I would request a
direct answer to a direct question.
Does she value her own life?

JUDGE

I'll allow that. The witness will answer please.

KATRINA

(in a whisper)

Yes.

SHAUNESSY

Is that... permanent?

KATRINA

(by now she is becoming
thoroughly rattled)

I... I don't know...Yes.

SHAUNESSY

Then just like your marriage vows, we don't really know, do we, when you say "you do" if you're planning to stay in Louisiana, or even to keep the child for that matter, or protect your own life since you've never really done anything in your life that was continuing, stable, or sane that could be regarded as safe and permanent.

ON THE PETITIONER'S TABLE

Gressen jumps to his feet.

GRESSEN

Objection! I must ask that the counsel be prevented from harassing the witness.

JUDGE

Sustained.

SHAUNESSY

(a new attack)

Mrs. Kramer, how can you consider yourself a fit mother when you tried to kill yourself?

GRESSEN

(red in the face)

Objection!

JUDGE

Sustained.

SHAUNESSY

I'll ask it another way. What was the longest personal relationship you have had in your life - other than parents and girlfriends?

KATRINA

(rattled)

Ah... I guess I'd have to say... with my child.

SHAUNESSY

(wonder, irony)

Whom you walked out on and then took him without your husband's consent.

GRESSEN

Objection your honor. My client was gone for two weeks. There is and was no judgement order to say who had full custody of the child.

JUDGE

Sustained.

SHAUNESSY

Mrs. Kramer, your ex-husband, wasn't he the longest personal relationship in your life?

KATRINA

(reluctantly)

I suppose...

SHAUNESSY

Would you speak up, Mrs. Kramer? I couldn't hear you.

KATRINA

(louder)

Yes.

SHAUNESSY

How long was that?

KATRINA

We were married nine years before Billy. And then four very difficult years.

SHAUNESSY

So, you were a failure at the longest, most important relationship in your life.

GRESSEN

Objection!

JUDGE

Overruled.

KATRINA

I was not a failure.

SHAUNESSY

(sarcastic)

Oh? What do you call it then - a success? The marriage ended in divorce. You tried to commit suicide.

KATRINA

(so angry she forgets her cool)

I consider it less my failure than his.

SHAUNESSY

(seizes on this)

Congratulations, Mrs. Kramer. You have just rewritten matrimonial law.

GRESSEN

(on his feet)

Objection!

SHAUNESSY

(to the judge)

Your honor, I'd like to ask what this model of stability and respectability has ever succeeded at?

(to Joanna)

Mrs. Kramer, were you a failure at the longest, most important personal relationship in your life so much that you tried to kill yourself?

Katrina sits silently.

JUDGE

Please answer the question, Mrs. Kramer.

KATRINA

(whisper)

It did not succeed.

SHAUNESSY

(suddenly fierce)

Not it... Not it, Mrs. Kramer - you. Were you a failure at the most important personal relationship of your life?

Silence.

SHAUNESSY (CONT'D)

Were you?

KATRINA

(barely audible)

Yes.

Shaunessy smiles, turns his back on Katrina and walks back toward the respondent's table.

SHAUNESSY

No further questions.

KATRINA

(fierce)

I didn't succeed at killing myself. I succeeded in living I'm here now.

JUDGE

(to Katrina)

You will refrain from speaking until addressed.

Shaunessy sits down next to Joel.

JOEL

(leaning over, in a whisper)

Jesus Christ. Did you have to be so rough on her?

SHAUNESSY

(tough)

Do you want the kid or don't you?

Shaken, Katrina gets down from the witness stand, crosses to the petitioner's table without looking at Joel.

She sits, leans across to her lawyer and whispers something in his ear. As he nods...

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Joel sitting in the witness stand.

SHAUNESSY

Mr. Kramer, would you tell the court exactly why you want to retain custody of your child.

JOEL

(speaking quietly)

When Katrina -

(to the judge, correcting himself)

- my ex-wife - when she was talking before about how unhappy she was during our marriage... Well, I guess most of what she said was probably true. There were a lot of things I didn't understand - a lot of things I would do different if I could. Some things, once they are done, can't be undone. Katrina says she loves our son. I believe she does. So do I. But the way it was explained to me, that's not the issue. The only thing that's supposed to matter here is what's best for Billy... When Katrina said why shouldn't a woman have the same ambitions as a man, I suppose she's right. But by the same token what law is it that says a woman is a better parent simply by virtue of her sex? I guess I've had to think a lot about whatever it is that makes somebody a good parent: constancy, patience, understanding... love. Where is it written that a man has any less of those qualities than a woman? Billy did have a home with me, I've tried to make it the best I could. It's not perfect. I'm not a perfect parent. But I love him... More than anything in this world I love him.

SHAUNESSY

Thank you, Mr. Kramer. No further questions.

Gressen he gets up from the petitioner's table and crosses to the witness stand.

GRESSEN
(hard-lining it)
Mr. Kramer, by any chance do you
have a job now.

JOEL
No.

GRESSEN
(pointedly)
Where do you live?

JOEL
In Louisiana. In a FEMA trailer.

GRESSEN
(switching to another line
of attack)
Mr. Kramer, isn't it true that you
asked your son to stay with your
sickly mother when you knew the
hurricane was about to strike.

GRESSEN (CONT'D)
Objection. He's leading the
witness.

JUDGE
Sustained.

JOEL
(not losing his cool)
I knew about my mother's sickness.
She was diabetic and had it under
control for thirty years. I did not
know about the serious of the
hurricane until it was... too late.

GRESSEN
(snotty)
Did you try to rescue him?

JOEL
Yes, when I realized how bad the
storm was.

GRESSEN
(snide)
Why didn't you check the weather
report before you dropped him off?
(MORE)

GRESSEN (CONT'D)

They've been blaring how dangerous it was for a while before it hit.

SHAUNESSY

Objection, your honor! Counsel is harassing the witness.

GRESSEN

(to the judge, pettish)

Your honor, I'm only examining the man's sense of danger and disaster. He pretends to fitness when he does not heed warnings.

JUDGE

Sustained.

Gressen is thoughtful for a moment, like a man trying to decide whether or not to drop the bomb. Then, turning back to Joel:

GRESSEN

(very tough)

Mr. Kramer, did your child nearly die in the Superdome.

Joel is stunned. He looks across at Katrina.

QUICK CUT - HIS POV:

Katrina looks away.

GRESSEN (CONT'D)

(boring in)

Mr. Kramer, are you not responsible for the mentally scarring of your child?

Shaunessy is on his feet racing toward the bench.

SHAUNESSY

(vehement)

Objection! Your honor, counsel is raising a question that is not germane to these proceedings.

GRESSEN

(to the judge)

While the child was placed in care of a woman who couldn't take care of her own health. He saw the horrors of the Superdome and is now scarred.

JUDGE
(to Gressen)
Are you introducing the question of
negligence here, counselor?

GRESSEN
Yes, your honor.

JUDGE
I see. Well, you'll have to do
better than that. Do you have any
affidavits to support negligence?

GRESSEN
I do not, your honor, however -

JUDGE
This is an isolated incident,
counselor, unless you can prove
otherwise.

GRESSEN
(back to Joel)
Does the witness deny any injury
took place?

JUDGE
(before Joel can say
anything)
No, counselor, I'm going to over-
rule you on this line of
questioning.

GRESSEN
Then I have concluded my questions.

Katrina sits, still not looking at Joel. She holds her face,
one hand shielding her eyes.

Moments later the judge makes a closing statement.

INT. MAIN LOBBY, COURTHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Shaunessy and Joel stand talking, reviewing the case. Then
the two men shake hands, the lawyer waves goodbye, turns and
starts back into the building. THE CAMERA PANS WITH TED as he
walks toward the main exit.

EXT. MAIN ENTRANCE - COURTHOUSE

As he comes out of the building, starts down the steps.

KATRINA (O.S.)

Joel.

Joel stops, turn. There, standing waiting for him is Katrina. His face is a mask of cold anger. She crosses to him.

KATRINA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry... I just mentioned it in passing. I never thought he'd use it.

JOEL

(sarcastic)

Yeah, well he did, didn't he?

KATRINA

Please, Joel. I never would have brought it up if I thought--

JOEL

I'm not interested, Katrina.
Goodbye.

As he turns and walks away from her, leaving her standing, watching him as he disappears.

INT. FEMA TRAILER - DAY

Joel sits in the recliner poring over law books, writing copious notes on a legal pad. April sits across from him drawing in a pad with magic markers.

Terry cooks dinner on the stove while, April plays with toys in the middle of the floor.

TERRY

You're going to study your brains out. Give you mind a rest.

JOEL

(deeply reading his notes)

Can't. There's no power while you're on your back while someone screws you over. There's only power at top and I'm going to get back on.

TERRY

You really love your son. I can't fault you.

JOEL
Tell me. What did you do to get
custody of your daughter?

TERRY
Easy. He went to jail.

JOEL
For drugs right?

April looks up confused. Terry catches it.

APRIL
(to Terry)
I thought you just said he went
away.

TERRY
(realizing she's caught in
a lie)
Ah, he, he did, sweetie. He just
had to get help before he caused
harm to himself and us.

APRIL
He didn't seem that dangerous to
me.

A light bulb goes off in Joel's mind.

JOEL
I got it!

TERRY
Got what.

JOEL
When my Katrina left she said and I
quote, maybe tomorrow, maybe next
week... maybe a year from now...
You'll find us in the bottom of a
river somewhere.

TERRY
Dear God.

Joel rises from the chair, heading to the phone.

JOEL
Yeah, I'm going to call the lawyer
and us that against her.

TERRY
Wait hold up. You can't do that.

JOEL
 (his hand on the phone)
 Why not?

TERRY
 Because she was going through hell
 Joel, haven't you learned anything?

JOEL
 (picking up the phone)
 Yeah she's a threat to my son.

TERRY
 (agitated)
 Joel God damnit. Listen! I went
 through postpartum too.

Joel sets the phone back down on the receiver slowly.

TERRY (CONT'D)
 Trust me. It's a terrible thing to
 go through. And she was dealing
 with the death of your daughter.
 Find another way to get son back
 but don't destroy her.

JOEL
 She tried to destroy me.

TERRY
 Joel don't. Please.

The phone rings to the surprise of both of them.

Joel answers.

INT. LAWYERS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS - INTERCUT BETWEEN SCENES

Shaunessy sits alone at a desk cluttered with papers

SHAUNESSY
 Joel.

JOEL
 (anxious)
 Yes.

There's a long silence. Shaunessy exhales a sigh of
 disappointment.

He realizes that they have lost.

JOEL (CONT'D)

Oh, Christ!

SHAUNESSY

They went for motherhood straight down the line.

JOEL

Wait, how? How?

SHAUNESSY

Well for starters you're living in a FEMA trailer with a part time job. Your estranged spouse is living in a house in a well to do neighborhood with steady income.

JOEL

(stuttering at a loss of words)

I, I mean, Shit! Look I fought cops, battled gangs, saved lives, had a heart attack, lost friends and my mother and you're telling me
(tearing up)

You're telling me, I lost him. I lost him.

SHAUNESSY

I can't tell you how sorry I am.

JOEL

(tearing more)

Oh, no...

SHAUNESSY

(reading from a piece of paper)

Ordered, adjudged and decreed that the petitioner be awarded custody of the minor child, effective Monday the 23rd of January. That the respondent pay for the maintenance and support of said child, four hundred dollars each month. That the father shall have the following rights of visitation: every other weekend, one night each week to be mutually agreed upon and one half of the child's vacation period.

JOEL

Shit. Shit, shit, shit!

SHAUNESSY

You can pick your child up today
for the weekend if you want at 211
Mercy Place. That's it.

JOEL

What if I fight it?

SHAUNESSY

We can appeal, but I can't
guarantee anything.

JOEL

(determined)

I'll take my chances.

SHAUNESSY

It's going to cost you.

JOEL

I don't care. I'll get the money.
You just get ready to regroup and
recoup.

SHAUNESSY

(like calming a raging
bull)

Joel. This time it'll be Billy that
pays. This time I'll have to put
him on the stand.

As his last hope goes to the ground.

JOEL

Oh, Christ no... I can't do that. I
just... can't... Just...text me her
address.

Joel slams down the phone. That is all Joel can manage to
say. He gets to his feet and rushes for the door.

Terry's eyes are red from crying.

TERRY

(calling out)

Joel....Joel.

JOEL

(putting on his jacket in
a hurry)

I just have to be by myself for a
little while.

TERRY
Joel I know...

JOEL
(exiting the door)
Please just let it go.

Terry runs to the door and stands there as Joel makes his way down the rocky road between trailer homes.

TERRY
(sobbing)
I'm so... sorry... Oh, Ted, I'm so
sorry...

EXT. KATRINA'S HOME - DAY

Joel walks down the sidewalk. He's dressed in the same clothes as the scene before. He looks tired, agitated and dirty. His hair is uncombed and sweaty.

He stops in front a very elegant modern home. Katrina's home. He observes as he can't believe it's her house. He walks up to the door and rings the doorbell.

Ding! Dong!

The bell echoes over the sound of birds chirping.

The sound of footsteps and the crack of the door.

Billy opens the door. He's a healthy little smiling boy.

BILLY
Hi dad!

It's the first time Joel has seen his son since the Superdome. Joel's smiles a very tired smile.

The door opens wider. Katrina stands dressed in the latest clothes from Bloomingdales. Joel's smile damn near disappears.

KATRINA
(surprised by how he
looks)
Joel, uh hi. How are you?

JOEL
I'm fine. All things considering.

KATRINA
(thinking what to say
next)
I see. Um. Where's your car?

JOEL
I didn't drive one. I walked.

KATRINA
(concerned)
That's ten miles away.

JOEL
I don't know. Didn't feel like it.
Had a lot on my mind.

Katrina knows the judgement has hurt him dearly.

There's a long awkward pause. Billy looks up between to
parents before finally resting on Joel.

BILLY
Will you and mommy get remarried?

Joel and Katrina trade a look, not sure what to say. Joel
kneels down to Billy's level.

JOEL
No, son. Daddy and mommy will never
get remarried.

Katrina feels hurt to hear this.

BILLY
Why?

JOEL
Billy, sometimes when a mother and
a father are divorced, there's a
discussion about who the child
should live with, the mother or the
father. Now there is a person who
is very smart. They're called a
judge and they have a lot of
experience with divorces and he
decides who it would be best for
the child to live with.

BILLY
Why does she decide?

Katrina kneels down to be eye level to Billy.

KATRINA

Because... Well, that's what he does. He's a very powerful person.

BILLY

Like a principal?

JOEL

Bigger than a principal. The judge sits in robes in a big chair... The judge has thought about you and me and your mom, and he has decided...

(a deep breath)

... he has decided that it would be best for you to live with your mom in her, house.

(fake cheerful)

And I'm very lucky. Because even though you'll live with your mom I'll get to see you once a week for dinner and a couple of weekends a month.

BILLY

I don't understand, daddy.

JOEL

(trying very hard not to cry)

What don't you understand, pal?

BILLY

Where will my bed be, where will I sleep?

KATRINA

At your mom's. She'll have a bed for you in your own room.

BILLY

Where will my Wii be?

KATRINA

I'll send your toys there and I'm sure you'll get some new ones.

BILLY

Who will read me my stories?

KATRINA

(looking to Joel)

We both will. Just on different nights. When he has you. And when I have you.

BILLY

(to Joel)

Will you come and say good-night to me every night?

Suddenly Joel can't stand it any longer.

KATRINA

Look, it's getting cold. Why don't you go inside where it's warm. I'll be along in a minute.

Billy hangs back, watching Joel.

JOEL

Go on, scoot.

Billy runs back into the house. Then, he stops, turns back to look once more at his father. Joel nods. Billy closes the door.

KATRINA

Ted, when we got married it was because I was twenty-seven years old and I thought I--

JOEL

Katrina, please what the hell is--

KATRINA

(urgent)

Please... Please don't stop me. This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do.

There is a long pause as she looks at Joel, unable to speak. He nods.

KATRINA (CONT'D)

I was twenty-seven years old and I thought I should get married and... when I had Billy it was because I thought I should have a baby... and I guess all I did was mess up my life and your life and after I left... when I was in New York, I began to think, I couldn't tell anybody about Billy - I couldn't stand that look in their faces when I said he wasn't living with me. It seemed like the most important thing in the world to come back here and prove to the world how much I loved him... And I did...

(MORE)

KATRINA (CONT'D)

And I won. Only... it was just...
 (she begins to breakdown)
 ... Sitting in that courtroom.
 Hearing everything you did,
 everything you went through...
 Something happened. I guess it
 doesn't matter how much I love him,
 or how much you love him. I guess
 it's like you said, the only thing
 that counts is what's best for
 him.... Joel, I think he should
 stay with you...

Joel snaps up.

JOEL

(stunned)
 What?

KATRINA

We can do joint custody, ya know.
 He's already got one mother, he
 doesn't need two...
 (her last ounce of reserve
 crumbles)
 I don't want to fight you anymore.
 He's ours...

Katrina's last ounce of reserve crumbles, she begins to sob.
 Joel throws his arms around her and holds her. They do not
 kiss. Then, after a few moments she steps back.

KATRINA (CONT'D)

(chin high)
 I'm sorry Joel, I really am,
 okay...
 (wiping her eyes)
 How do I look?

JOEL

Gorgeous.

She giggles wiping tears.

KATRINA

(looking Joel up and down)
 And you don't look so, so--

JOEL

--I look like shit I know.

The two share a small laugh. Like old times.

KATRINA

I think I'll go get my son, excuse
me, our son now.

Katrina enters into the house.

Joel stands at the door, overwhelmed with the sheer joy of
being alive, of being together.

TRACKING JUST BEHIND JOEL THE CAMERA PULLS BACK AND UP AND WE
SEE the whole house in full. It's in a beautiful upscale
neighbor much larger than we suspected. THE CAMERA CONTINUES
TO PULL BACK until they are lost from view and it is...

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END