FADE IN:

EXT. ROUTE 89 - DUSK

A interminably long and winding stretch of road, flanked on both sides by a dense forest of snow capped-pine trees. Mountain ranges in the distance. Flurries of sleet coast along a gentle breeze. In the dying light a taxi barrels down the road gaining speed, its fog-lights and head-lamps on high beam. The taxi’s seen better days, faded insignia, rusted door panels.

INT. TAXI

Leather gloves grip the steering wheel. The red glow of an LCD metre rolls the fare steadily over, as a portable CD player on low volume plays songs of holiday-cheer. Tinsel, a Santa Claus, and rosary beads pendulum back and forth from the car’s rear vision mirror.

EXT. ROUTE 89

The car continues its pace along the long and lonely road.

INT. TAXI

REG shifts in his seat to get comfortable, clears his throat. In his late 60s, he wears a five o’clock stubble and a beanie, his name hand-embroidered on the cuff.

REG
So, what you doin’ all the way out here, pretty lady?

He inclines his head slightly toward his passenger.

REG
Yeah, I know... That ain’t a politically correct thing to say -

In the back seat, a fragile beauty in her mid 20s, EDIE, sits tight up against the window looking out, eyes cast down, as the road speeds by. She attempts a smile -
EDIE
No offence taken.

REG
Me, I’m old school. I says what I sees, fuck that other shit –
Whoops, see I done it again.
(laughs.)
Mean no offence with the swearing.

Edie gives a short sharp little laugh in response. She stares out at the snow drifts coming in off the mountains.

REG
Some view, eh? Make you believe there really is a God, after all.

EDIE
Yeah.

REG
Lovely young lady like yourself, all the way out here, I hope you got a proper place to hole up in cause –

EDIE
We have a cabin down near Jacob’s lake. My fiance and me.

REG
Right. Right. Okeydoke.

EDIE
We’re to be married Christmas Eve, so... He’s staying in town, and me and some of the girls are...

Edie smooths the hair down over her forehead.

Reg sneaks another look in the rear vision mirror, at Edie’s hands. No engagement ring, finger-nails bitten to the quick.

REG
Say no more. Bit of a last hurrah, then is it? Forty years since me and the missus tied the knot.

EDIE
Wow.

Edie stretches the cuffs off her jumper tight over her hands to cover angry looking cuts and bruises.
Yep, as Paul Newman said, ‘I have steak at home. Why go out for hamburger?’

Edie continues to stare blankly out at the view.

Ha, you probably don’t even know who Paul Newman is.

A tear rolls down Edie’s cheek. She brushes it away roughly.

You sure you’re alright back there? None of my business I know, but for someone set to tie the knot you sure as hell don’t look happy.

I’m fine, really.

You know they say taxi drivers are like barkeeps and psychologists. Just as much help only you don’t have pay through the nose. Course like I said it’s none of my beeswax.

Just a cold.

The visibility is worsening. The sleet has turned to snow. Reg turns the heater up. Adjusts the de-mister, wipes condensation from the windscreen.

Offer’s there you want it. I’m told I’m a real good listener.

Edie begins crying in earnest, uncontrollable sobs.

Hey, hey, there, there. Can’t be as bad as all that -

Reg momentarily takes his eyes off the road.
EXT. ROUTE 89

Up ahead in the near distance a deer ambles out onto the middle of the highway, stands stock still.

INT. TAXI

Reg’s attention on Edie —

REG

Probably just a case a’ cold feet. Lot of it going around this time of year.

He grins into the back seat again.

Then back to the road.

A look of horror on his face.

He slams on the brakes.

Yanks the wheel hard to the left.

The taxi fishtails wildly, slipping and sliding over the icy terrain, but it’s too late.

The violent impact propels the animal onto the bonnet. Reg pulls the taxi hard the other way, but it’s too late.

The taxi smacks into a guard rail, becomes airborne, careens over a bank, slides down into a

EXT. RAVINE

The sickening crunch of metal and glass as it slams sideways into a felled log, then comes to a stop.

The deer slides off the front of the taxi onto the ground.

Steam billows from the bonnet. It spurts, hisses, then extinguishes.

EXT. ROUTE 89 - LATER

Snow falls cover the trail of tire marks left by the taxi.

Not another vehicle in sight. Silence.
INT. TAXI - RAVINE - SAME TIME

Equally quiet in the cabin of the taxi.

Except for the CD player which continues to spin over to the next song: Santa Claus Is Coming Town.

Reg is slumped in the driver’s seat, his hands still grip the steering wheel tightly. He wears the vacant stare of a dead man, eyes glazed, looking straight ahead.

A whimper from the back seat.

INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS

Edie comes to, tentatively raises a hand to her head.

The car door has caved in, her left leg wedged between the floor and the door panel, foot skewed at a sickening angle. Colour drains from her face. She gulps.

She searches frantically for the seat-belt release.

EDIE
Reg...? Reg?!

Edie tugs at the woollen scarf around her neck. A seemingly interminable silence, then...

REG
It’s alright. I’m here.

Relief floods her face.

REG
How’re you doing back there?

EDIE
Sorry, when you didn’t answer I...

Reg is pinned to his seat, steering wheel and steering column pressing into his abdomen.

REG
Nope, still with us.

He attempts a chuckle, gasps in pain.
REG
Can’t breathe so well I’m afraid, but once this thing is out of my way -

Edie looks out the window at the snow, heavier now. The wind has picked up.

EDIE
(faltering voice)
Reg...? What are we...?

REG
We’re not going to panic is what we’re going to do. Route’s been logged...

Edie glances at the deer outside, quickly averts her eyes.

REG
... I don’t check in shift-end, they’ll be sure and send the cavalry.

EXT. RAVINE
The deer sits upright in the snow, a pool of blood blossoming around it. It lifts its head now and again, appears to stare accusingly in through the taxi’s windscreen.

INT. TAXI
Edie scans the cabin, smashed dashboard and two-way radio a mangled mess. Contents of her handbag strewn everywhere.

Her cell phone lies on the cabin floor just out of reach.

She extends her good foot, tries to snag it, but the seatbelt tightens around her neck, puts her in a stranglehold.

EDIE
Ugh! If I could just -

REG
Someone’ll come. They always do. Best thing is to just sit tight.

Reg takes a deep breath, buckles over with the pain, tries to cover it.
EDIE
What is it?

REG
Bit of a squeeze is all. Nothing a warm blanket and a hot toddy wouldn’t cure. What we need to do is relax, pass the time...

He coughs.

REG
Hmm, I think the last thing we was talkin’ about before your dam busted and Bambi got in the way, was your cold feet, right? How ‘bout you continue on from there.

Reg gazes out the window at the deer.

EXT. RAVINE
The deer attempts to stand, its legs buckle like an ungainly foal. It falls back down into the snow.

INT. TAXI
Reg and the deer appear to lock eyes with one another.

INT. TAXI - LATER
Sweat’s broken out on Reg’s brow. He struggles for breath.
Edie blows her nose.

EDIE
So... that’s about it really.

She wipes a tear from her cheek.

REG
Oh dear, you poor poor thing. If you don’t mind me asking, how were you gonna -

EDIE
Do it? I dunno, I hadn’t decided exactly. I thought about doing a Sylvia Plath -
A shrill little laugh. Edie looks at Reg in the rear vision mirror, raises her eyebrows.

REG
S’alright. We’re not all dumb hicks out here you know.

EDIE
Sorry. I didn’t mean -

REG
No matter.

EDIE
Pills and vodka were my second choice.

REG
Ooh, that’s not a good idea. End up alive but with a bung liver.

EDIE
Yeah.

A pause. Both of them look out the window at the snow falling around them.

REG
This kind of puts things in perspective now, dunnit?

A whining sound emits from Reg’s lungs. He coughs again. A fit of coughing ensues.

EDIE
(quietly)
Yeah, we’re both going to freeze to death.

Edie bangs hard on the mangled door with her elbow -

Desperately tries again to snag the cell phone with her foot.

The seat-belt once again tightens around her neck. She groans in despair.

EDIE
If I could just get -

REG
Let it go, Edie. Talk to me... Tell me more about how you got yourself into such a state that you -
Edie gets her toe to the tip of cell phone, ends up pushing it further away. She yells with frustration.

EDIE
Aargh!

Stomps her foot.

A surreal calm suddenly falls over Edie’s face.

EDIE
(calmly)
He cheated on me. Is that what you want to hear?

Reg looks sorry he asked.

EDIE
With my best friend.

Edie looks down at the floor, lost in another world.

REG
I’m very sorry to hear that doll.

EDIE
He was my everything, you know...

REG
Ah. Well, you’re not the first, and you won’t be the last there.
(beat)
Bit more to it than that though, am I right?

EDIE
What? Why...? Why would you even say that?

REG
Do this job long enough you get a sense for people, you know. Like -

EDIE
Like what?

REG
- My guess is he hit you.
MEMORY FLASH

A BED. Underneath white sheets, EDIE’S FIANCE, and a WOMAN make love. Edie’s fiance tenderly traces his finger along the curve of his lover’s jawline, caresses and kisses her.

Edie watches from a doorway, concealed in the shadows.

END MEMORY FLASH

BACK TO SCENE

EDIE
What? No. You're wrong. He would never -

Edie shuts her eyes tightly.

MEMORY FLASH

Edie’s fiance strikes her hard across the face, she reels back across the room collides with A VASE on a mantle piece.

The vase falls in slow motion onto the floor, shatters into a thousand pieces.

END MEMORY FLASH

BACK TO SCENE

Edie eyes snap open, she looks out the window at the blinding white snow.

In the rear-vision mirror Reg clocks fear on Edie’s face, and something else... a haunted look, dazed, defeated.

   EDIE
   Where do you think we go when we die?

   REG
   Ain’t nothing going to happen to you, hear?

   EDIE
   Yeah, I know, but...
REG
No such thing as heaven or hell if
that’s what you’re asking.

EDIE
No?

REG
No. Just something people made up
to make themselves feel better.

Edie stares off into space.

EDIE
Maybe it’s life that is the hell.

REG
Hey, I’m a wise up to you, young
lady -

EDIE
What?

Edie startled out of her reverie, brushes the bangs forward
over her forehead.

REG
- You, changing the subject and
all. That’s all’s I meant.

EDIE
Oh.

REG
Seen you doing that thing with your
hair the whole way. Seen that nasty
gash on your forehead too -

Edie tucks her hands inside her jumper.

REG
Cheating is one thing. But the
other stuff. Can’t ignore that.
Better off without him, ask me.

EDIE
You don’t know what you’re talking
about.

REG
No matter. Tell me, don’t tell me.
Thing is you gotta get on don’tcha?
Plenty more fish, all that.

(MORE)
REG (CONT'D)
Beautiful young woman like yourself, whole life ahead of you -

Reg spasms, coughs.

EXT. RAVINE

It’s now blowing a gale, snow driving in diagonally, piling fast up around the wheels of the car.

LATER

The last of the dying light. A cold sweat’s broken out on Reg’s face. He looks down at the steering column.

Edie dozes in the back seat.

REG
Listen love... ?

Edie rouses, half asleep.

REG
I know what I said before but... I think I know the way this is going and -

EDIE
You said you were fine. You -

REG
Shush now. Listen. I was fine, but I ain’t now.

A look of pure terror on Edie’s face.

REG
Come on now love, you’re gonna’ have to be brave. Someone’s gonna’ come for you, I promise. But me... I seen enough to know they lift this thing off me, I’m a goner. At the moment it’s holding everything in place but -

Edie whimpers.

REG
At some point I’m gonna hafta’... give it a helping hand so to speak.
EDIE
Oh, Jesus.

Reg pauses for breath.

REG
Otherwise...

He looks out the window at the deer. It’s given up flailing, but its eyes still appear to stare straight ahead accusingly.

REG
I’ll be no different to him out there.

EDIE
Stupid deer.

REG
Not its fault. Got more right than us.

Reg coughs again.

REG
Need you to do something for me.

EDIE
(losing it)
I can’t... I can’t do this, I -

REG
Well you gotta. You’re all I’ve got. See, I’ve spent the best damn years of my life with my Rosie and I need you to tell her so. Clear?

EDIE
Clear.

REG
Make sure she gets my hat. The one on my noggin. Okay?

EDIE
O-kay, but...

REG
That’s all I’m askin’. Not much.

EDIE
(chuckles)
Tell her... I always hated it.

EDIE
What? No -

(chuckles)
Don’t fret. She’ll know.

The rest of this exchange is deliver MOS. Edie nods, listens intently, solemn. Tears in Reg’s eyes.

EXT. RAVINE - NIGHT
Blizzard conditions. A complete white-out.
The car is slowly but surely being buried in snow.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT
Both Reg and Edie appear to have dozed off.

EXT. RAVINE - CONTINUOUS
A Snowy Owl swoops down, perches on the felled log. It slowly pivots its head.

From the car the faint sound of the CD as it plays yet another song of holiday cheer.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN

EXT. RAVINE - DAWN
The snow and wind has eased.
The car is now completely submerged.

EXT. RAVINE CLEARING - CONTINUOUS
A lone head-lamp appears through the early morning mist.
A MAN hops off his snow-mobile, pulls a rifle from his backpack.
He strides purposefully towards the still breathing deer, shoots it in the head.

Walks back towards his snow-mobile, stops, hesitates, listens.

The faint sound of music -

The man turns around again, spots the taxi’s wing-mirror poking up through the snow.

MAN
Well, I’ll be...

He nears the taxi, scrapes ice from a window, peers in. Pulls a walkie-talkie from his backpack.

MAN (ON RADIO)
Need some help down here!

EXT. RAVINE - LATER

Snow-boots trudge through three to four foot of snow.

Two PARAMEDICS pull Reg’s body from the taxi, lay him on a stretcher, zip a body bag over his head.

EXT. ROUTE 89

Police vehicles line the side of the road, their red and blues flashing alongside an Ambulance and a Medical Examiner’s van, its back doors flung wide open.

Reg’s body is lifted into the ME’s van.

Edie follows, alive, on another stretcher, a thermo-blanket draped over her shoulders.

Her hands are cuffed.

Reg’s beanie tucked into her lap.

Two serious looking PLAIN CLOTHES DETECTIVES escort her, along with the Paramedics, to a waiting ambulance.

DOWNWIND

Two POLICE OFFICERS rub their hands together against the cold. They watch as Edie is loaded into the ambulance.
CONSTABLE
Damn shame about the driver.

SENIOR CONSTABLE
Yip. Always the good’uns.

CONSTABLE
Got to her just in time I reckon.

SENIOR CONSTABLE
Oh, she’ll be doing some time alright.

CONSTABLE
What’d she do?

SENIOR CONSTABLE
Took a knife to her husband-to-be, allegedly. Carved him up so bad when she was finished with him he looked like a smashed pumpkin. Couldn’t make out his nose from his elbow. One of the officers puked before he could make it outside.

CONSTABLE
Jeeesus!

SENIOR CONSTABLE
Yip. Never’d tell by looking at her, now would ya? Looks like butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth.

The policemen walk slowly back towards their patrol car.

SENIOR CONSTABLE
See some people just ain’t what they seem to be. Do this job long enough, you’ll get a sense. Soon enough...

Senior Constable slaps Constable hard on the back, chuckles.

SENIOR CONSTABLE
And, if you don’t, you’d better.

Constable laughs nervously along with him.

FINAL FADE OUT.