

The Suicide Diary
an original screenplay by
Joseph C. Keller

Registered WGA-W
Joseph C. Keller
10530 Alvarado Way
Charlotte NC, 28277
Joe@groundedpictures.com

ON COMPUTER MONITOR

A pixilated webcam image of PAIGE MILBAUGH (16). Tears stream down her face. She addresses the camera.

PAIGE
This life is over. I'm sorry I can't
be what you want.
(beat)
No. Fuck that! Fuck you. This is all
because of you.

PAIGE leans in close. Whispers an intimate condemnation.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
I hope you burn in hell for what you
did to me. I loved you.

Paige reaches around the camera, sobbing. The picture goes to BLACK.

INSERT TITLE: THE SUICIDE DIARY

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Bird's eye view of a queen-sized bed dimly lit by blue pre-dawn hues. LORNA BAXTER (35) sleeps close to the mattress edge, an empty space beside her. We hear a SHOWER O.S.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON a razor shaving a stubbled neck.

LIAM BAXTER (38) shaves. He rinses his face, all the while avoiding the foggy reflection of his own tired eyes.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Shaved and showered, Liam enters the bedroom dressed in shirt and tie. He hovers over Lorna, studying her sleeping form. He leans down, kissing her tenderly on the head. Lorna pulls the covers up over her face.

LIAM
(pleading)
Lorna...

No response. Her eyes move beneath their lids: she feigns sleep. Liam's tenderness gives way to disappointment and frustration with the act. He leaves.

Lorna emerges from the covers, cranes her neck, the blue dawn-light exposing the outline of her face. A door closes O.S. She listens as a car engine turns over in the distance, then slumps back into her pillow.

INT. 2000 HONDA CRV/MOVING - DAY

We watch Liam's reflection in the rear view. His eyes are drawn to snippets of passing suburbia:

An attractive woman in a pink velour jump suit walking her dog.

Sprinklers watering the lush green lawn of an expensive home.

Migrant workers blowing freshly cut blades of grass from a sidewalk.

A businessman getting into his shiny clean Lexus.

EXT. INTERSECTION - DAY

The scratched and scuffed CRV SQUEAKS to a halt next to a pristine black AUDI. The CRV has a temporary tag sticker. A decal pasted to the back hatch says: *Fred's Used Car Bonanza*.

INT. 2000 HONDA CRV - CONTINUOUS

Liam studies the Audi driver: a neatly polished man clearly Liam's junior. Someone HONKS.

LIAM'S POV

The light is green.

He quickly drives off.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The CRV turns into a suburban high school. The building's modern design and complex of sports fields are a testament to its upper class tax base. Buses and expensive cars inch around a drop off area. Students make their way into the school. But there is something out of place: a police cruiser squeezed to the curb.

Liam turns the CRV into a reserved parking spot.

INT. 2000 HONDA CRV - DAY

As he collects his things Liam glances at the cruiser, suspicious. He grabs a back pack and steps out of the car.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Liam navigates the pandemonium of criss-crossing adolescent foot traffic. His eyes snap to a fishbowl of glass windows surrounding the main office.

LIAM'S POV

Two POLICE OFFICERS dressed in navy blues stand at the office counter. WYATT FARR (16) sits on an office couch, the subject of questioning. He notices Liam and gestures toward him.

CINDY (O.S.)

Liam!

Liam flinches. Spins around. CINDY ASH (24) hurries toward him. A bounce in her step and a smile on her pixie face, Cindy could be mistaken for a high school heart throb save for the business suit and rolling briefcase. She wears glasses in a vain attempt to mask her youthful countenance.

Liam slows his pace, waiting for Cindy to catch up. She beams as she speaks to him. Pats his shoulder.

CINDY (CONT'D)

Happy Monday.

LIAM

Happy Monday, Cindy.

Liam smiles at Cindy, masking concern. He lets Cindy lead the way, glancing back at the officers.

LIAM'S POV

OFFICER BAKER (28), a ruddy-faced sandy haired man, continues to question Wyatt while OFFICER JOHNSON (38), a tall African-American man, throws a suspicious look after Liam.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL/CLASSROOM - DAY

Students filter into the room as Liam and Cindy empty their bags.

LIAM

I thought maybe you'd like to lead the lesson today. You're going to need to actually teach to step up from student teacher status, right?

Cindy smiles.

CINDY

Or so my professor would profess.

Liam attempts a smile. He seems distracted.

CINDY (CONT'D)

You alright?

LIAM
 Little headache. Why don't you take
 roll while I try some caffeine on
 this skull splitter.

CINDY
 Yeah. Sure.

He leans in.

LIAM
 (sotto)
 Feel free to slap 'em around a little.

Liam winks. Cindy smiles.

CINDY
 I'll be okay.

The bell RINGS. Liam starts toward the door.

CINDY (CONT'D)
 Okay everybody. Settle down.
 (reading from clip
 board)
 Lancey Ross?

LANCEY
 Here.

Liam's eyes catch sight of an empty desk at the back of the
 room.

CINDY
 Lemonjello Johnson?

LEMONJELLO
 Yo.

The class laughs.

CINDY
 Paige Milbaugh?

No answer.

CINDY (CONT'D)
 Paige?

Cindy looks up.

Liam steps into the hallway, looking back into the classroom.
 He stares at the empty desk for a moment then shuts the door
 behind him. Concern worries his brow.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Liam walks down the hall, counting loose change in his palm. Officer Johnson rounds the corner with RICK HANDLEY (45), the principal. Rick looks serious.

RICK

Liam. We need to speak with you.

Liam tries to shrug off concern.

LIAM

Sure, Rick. What's up?

CUT TO:

COMPUTER MONITOR

PAIGE

No. No, fuck that! Fuck you. This is all because of you.

PAIGE leans in close. Whispers her condemnation.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

I hope you burn in hell for what you did to me. I loved you.

Paige reaches around the camera, sobbing. BLACK.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Liam stares at the screen. Rick yanks blinds open. The room explodes in a wash of bright light. Liam squints, shields his eyes.

RICK

Her parents called the police this morning. She's been gone since Friday. Same day the school, her parents, and her boyfriend received email with this YouTube link.

LIAM

Jesus.

OFFICER JOHNSON

Rumor has it you two had some kind of relationship.

LIAM

She was my student.

OFFICER JOHNSON
That's not the kind of relationship
we're talking about here, Mr. Baxter.

Rick steps toward Johnson.

RICK
Whoa. You're out of line here. Liam's
been voted teacher of the year three
years running. He's a guy the kid's
trust. He wouldn't do anything that
would jeopardize that trust or mine.

Johnson doesn't take his eyes off Liam.

OFFICER JOHNSON
She allegedly broke off with her ex
because of you.

LIAM
She was my student.

A KNOCK on the door. Officer Baker steps in. Shares a
whispered exchange with Johnson. Liam laughs nervously.

LIAM (CONT'D)
This is ridiculous, Rick. They think
what? That she killed herself on my
account?

OFFICER BAKER
Her friends say she spent a lot of
time in your office after hours.

LIAM
She came to me from time to time to
talk about things.

OFFICER JOHNSON
What kind of things?

LIAM
Problems with her parents. Her
boyfriend. Her friends. The typical
teen angst stuff. I listened. I gave
her a shoulder to cry on. That's it.
That's-As-Far-As-It-Went.

Johnson and Baker exchange looks. Johnson turns to Rick.

OFFICER JOHNSON
We're going to need to get into her
locker.

Rick nods. The officers leave. Rick shifts uncomfortably, unsure of what to say.

RICK

Take a minute.
(uncertain)
We'll clear this up, Liam.

Liam nods. Rick leaves. Liam slumps forward, cradling his head in his hand. We PUSH IN on his face. CLOSER and CLOSER until the image BLURS on his lips. Snaps to SLOW MOTION.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

A MOUTH

We PULL OUT. The image comes into focus. Smoke dances like a charmed snake from lips. A girl's lips, slightly chapped and whimpering through the wisps of smoke.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL/FLASHBACK - DAY

A teenage girl sits, knees pulled to her chest, whimpering. A cigarette burns in her hand. She hides her face beneath a hooded black sweat shirt.

Liam steps out of the building. Clicks on a remote fob. A shiny new Honda Accord BEEPS. He sniffs, smelling the cigarette smoke.

LIAM

Hey. No smoking out here.

The girl doesn't respond.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hey! Did you hear me?

Liam marches toward the girl.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Miss. There's no smoking on school -

The girl looks up at Liam. The sweat shirt's hood falls back revealing her face, red and chapped from tears. PAIGE. Hair dyed in red streaks. Faux tattoos stenciled in blue pen pattern her arms.

PAIGE

So fucking what?

LIAM

Paige. What are you doing?

PAIGE

What does it look like I'm doing?

Paige gets up and starts to march off, taking a long drag from her cigarette.

LIAM

What's going on? Are you hurt?

PAIGE

We all hurt, Mr. B. Everybody hurts.

LIAM

Come on, Paige. Put out the cigarette and talk to me.

Paige stops in her tracks. She looks at the cigarette for a moment. Tears well. She turns to Liam and walks into him, embracing him and sobbing into his chest.

PAIGE

Life is so fucking cruel.

Liam is taken aback. He holds his arms up awkwardly so as not to touch Paige. But then melts, patting her on the back like a brother comforting his younger sibling. We move past a brick wall obscuring our view and...

MATCH PAN TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL/ PHOTOGRAPHY LAB - DAY

We emerge from brick and shadow in the photo lab. Stark red dusk-light peeks through blinds at the far end of the room. Black and white photographs hang from dry lines.

Paige sits on a stool next to a wash station. She hangs her head in her hands. Liam crosses from a sink, offering a damp towel.

LIAM

Here.

Paige takes the towel. Presses it to her face.

LIAM (CONT'D)

You want to talk about it?

PAIGE

What is there to talk about? It's my life, man. It sucks and it doesn't swallow.

LIAM

Paige. Come on.

PAIGE

I'm serious.

LIAM

Well. What are you going to do about it?

PAIGE

No lectures. Please.

LIAM

No lectures. I'm just saying, you can't bottle all that stuff up and expect it to work itself out. You need to work it out. You need to get it out of your system.

Paige considers this. She suddenly SCREAMS.

PAIGE

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

Liam recoils, surprised. Paige breathes heavy.

LIAM

Orrrrrr you could try something a little less intense.

Liam opens a cabinet. Pulls out a camera.

PAIGE

What, like taking pictures or something?

Liam hands it to Paige.

LIAM

Take it. Experiment. Express yourself. Get it out. And if you ever need to talk about it: I'm here.

Paige smiles. She turns the camera over in her hands.

PAIGE

Thanks Mr. B. Thanks alot.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY/PRESENT - DAY

A key sinks into a locked combination dial. A locker swings open. Officer Johnson rifles through belongings. Jacket, cigarettes, school books covered in brown paper bag. He sets the objects on the linoleum forming a patch work of Paige's life.

Liam observes from across the hall as Johnson absently sets down the camera. It topples to its side.

Liam's mobile VIBRATES. He jumps, startled. Johnson and Baker glance at him. He turns away, answering.

LIAM

Hello?

No answer.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hello?

Liam checks the phone. The LCD reads DISCONNECTED. The caller ID reads UNAVAILABLE.

The school bell RINGS. Students emerge from classrooms submerging the hallways in CHAOS. Liam crosses to the high school foyer, stepping into the breezeway. He dials a number. The ear piece RINGS.

INT. LIAM'S HOME - DAY

Lorna sits on the couch watching a game show, back to us. The phone RINGS. An answering machine picks up.

RECORDING OF LIAM

You've reached the Baxter residence.
Please leave a message.

BEEP.

LIAM

(on machine)

Lorna. Lorna, pick up the phone.

Lorna mutes the television. Turns to look over her shoulder. Her hair is a mess. She is still in her robe.

LIAM (CONT'D)

(on machine)

I thought maybe you called...but -

(beat)

Lorna. I - I don't know what to say.

We have to talk about this. People make mistakes. I -

(beat)

Damn it. I'm trying to save this marriage, Lorna. I've taken care of it.

(sighs)

I have to go. Just...call me.

ON ANSWERING MACHINE

DIAL TONE. The answering machine CLICKS. REWINDS. A cold mechanical sound in the otherwise quiet room.

Lorna stares over her shoulder at the machine. Her eyes flutter back and forth. She finally turns back to the television. Sinks into the couch and unmutes the game show.

The sounds of DINGING. Happy people CHEERING. Lorna's shoulders heave as she breaks into tears.

ON TELEVISION

Someone jumps up and down. They've won. Lorna's muffled moans are barely discernible through the celebration.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Liam returns from the breezeway, navigating the herd of students on a beeline for the photo lab. He looks up the hallway, checking on Johnson and Baker's progress. Both are occupied at the locker.

Liam unlocks the photo lab. Slinks into the room.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL/ PHOTOGRAPHY LAB - DAY

The room is dark. Liam crosses to a large metal desk and sits. He unlocks a drawer.

He roots through the drawer, pulling out papers, a calendar. He removes a manila envelope buried deep. Places the envelope on the desk and opens it. He spreads out a stack of photographs from the envelope, studying them with an unspecified reverence. His face turns sick.

He suddenly vomits into a garbage can. Wipes his mouth. Looks at his shaking hands.

Liam places the photos back into the manila envelope. Tucks it into his pants beneath his sport coat. He crosses to the door. Checks the room behind him and steps into the noisy hallway.

RED LIGHT fades up illuminating a photo of a trampled flower posted next to the door....

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL/ PHOTOGRAPHY LAB/PAST - DAY

Paige shimmies the same photo in the liquid beneath eerie red photo safe light.

PAIGE
The smell! I'm going to asphyxiate!

WYATT
That's what she said.

Paige punches Wyatt in the shoulder. Lemonjello laughs.

PAIGE
Gross!

LIAM
Come on guys. No horsing around.
(beat)
Everyone just about done?

A mixed response of yeahs, uh-huhs, and I think so's.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Okay. Lights on.

Liam flips a switch. Bright white light washes out the red. The students hang dripping photos on dry-wire lines. The school bell RINGS.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Alright folks. Let 'em dry. We'll pick things up on Monday. Have a good weekend.

The students collect their things. Liam walks the line, examining the students' photos: dripping black and white photographs of kids playing basketball, a proud grandmother, a Labrador retriever, a car engine.

Liam approaches Paige. She doesn't move, chewing on a thumb nail, engrossed in her photos. Wyatt hangs back at the door for her.

ON PHOTOS

A grotesque road kill spattering of intestines and fur.

A gruesome bundle of feather, beak, and pulp.

A trampled dandelion pushing from a crack in sidewalk.

BACK TO SCENE

Wyatt bobs from foot to foot, agitated.

WYATT
You comin'?

PAIGE
Gimme a minute.

Wyatt hoists his backpack and steps into the hallway. Paige looks to Liam.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
So?

LIAM
Some pretty gruesome stuff.

PAIGE
Well. That's how I feel sometimes.
Gruesome.

Liam steps closer to the picture of the trampled flower.

LIAM
I like this one.

PAIGE
Yeah. I know. It kinda - it kinda
has hope. Doesn't it?

LIAM
Yes. Yes it does.

Liam smiles at Paige. Paige looks into his eyes. A connection made.

WYATT (O.S.)
Paige!

They pull back from one another. Wyatt stands in the doorway.

WYATT (CONT'D)
You coming or what?

PAIGE
Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

Paige starts toward the door then suddenly turns back to Liam's desk. An afterthought.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
Oh. I almost forgot.

She opens her backpack and sets down a manila envelope.

PAIGE (CONT'D)
I did a little extra credit. Something
I think you'll like.

Paige winks.

LIAM

Great. Good. You - uh - you kids
have a good weekend.

Paige smiles knowingly. Bites her lower lip. Hurries off.
Wyatt glares at Liam.

Liam crosses to his desk. Picks up the manila envelope. He
opens it. Pulls out a stack of pictures. His jaw goes slack.
He looks around to ensure no one is watching. Pours over the
pictures' every detail.

Concern suddenly grips his face. He swallows hard and holds
the photos over the trash. Then reconsiders.

He looks around for a hiding place. Settles on his desk
drawer, burying the shots deep beneath papers, a calendar.
He quickly locks the drawer, gets up, and leaves.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL/PREP ROOM/PRESENT - DAY

Liam sits in a small cubicle plastered with black and white
photos. He stares at a half-eaten lunch. Teachers pass by,
casting fleeting glances, rumors of the adulterous conspiracy
plot spreading. Cindy steps up to the cube. KNOCKS.

CINDY

Knock. Knock.

Liam snaps out of it. Looks at her. She forces a smile.

CINDY (CONT'D)

Want to take a walk?

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Cindy and Liam walk the parking lot.

CINDY

I don't understand. What would you
have to do with her disappearance?

LIAM

They're saying we were having an
affair.

They take a few steps in silence.

CINDY

Were you? Sleeping with her?

Liam shoots an incredulous look.

CINDY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Liam. I had to ask. Didn't I?

LIAM

You don't know me better than that?

CINDY

You're an attractive guy. Funny. Caring. It's understandable that she would have a crush on you.

LIAM

Yeah, well. Thanks, I think. But the feelings weren't reciprocal.

They take a few more steps in silence.

CINDY

These kids, you know, they're so much different than when we were kids.

LIAM

Cindy, you're what, twenty-three?

CINDY

Twenty-four.

LIAM

It wasn't that long ago for you.

CINDY

Yeah but, things have really changed, Liam. I mean even since I was in school.

LIAM

Five years ago.

CINDY

Five years is a long time.

LIAM

Depends on your perspective.

Officer Baker, Johnson, and Rick hurry from the building toward the police cruiser. Liam and Cindy exchange glances. They dash toward the trio.

LIAM (CONT'D)

What is it? Did they find her?

Officer Baker and Johnson get into the cruiser. Rick waves them off, turning to Liam and Cindy.

RICK

Couple of campers saw a girl fitting Paige's description hiking Chandler's Woods on Saturday. The police are pulling together a search party.

(beat)

Liam, you're welcome to come, but with all the talk I'd understand if you didn't want to.

LIAM

I'm not going to let some rumors keep me from finding her.

RICK

Good.

EXT. FOREST PRESERVE - DAY

The CRV pulls down a gravel road, passing a sign for the forest preserve. Pulls to a stop in a gravel lot. Police cruisers, mini-vans, and sedans line the lot.

A topographical map of the forest preserve is spread out on a folding table. A police officer in mountain boots and hiking gear barks out orders. OFFICER NUGENT (39).

Liam and Cindy cross to a group surrounding the table. Officer Nugent hoists himself up onto the bumper of a Jeep, addressing the rag tag assembly of parents, teachers, students, and concerned citizens gathered to search.

OFFICER NUGENT

Alright people. Alright. We'll break into groups of two, covering as much ground as possible before sun down. Groups will spread out from this starting point in opposite directions...

Cindy leans close to Liam, whispering.

CINDY

Are those the parents?

Liam follows Cindy's nod to a Lincoln Navigator parked across the gravel lot. JACOB MILBAUGH (54) bearded and barrel chested does his best to console MAUREEN MILBAUGH (48) as she sits in the passenger seat weeping.

LIAM

Don't know. Never met.

OFFICER NUGENT

...one walkie talkie per pair. We've got boats trawling the lake. Search copters running a pass over the area. Anybody finds anything - anything at all - call it in.

Alright folks, pick up your walkies and let's head out.

Cindy grabs a walkie talkie. Liam eyes Jacob and Maureen, following Cindy into the wilderness.

EXT. FOREST PRESERVE - DAY

Majestic limbs CREAK and sway in the wind. Liam hikes a steep incline through mud and leaves. Cindy follows. They stop to catch their breath.

CINDY

This kid - I mean she was a KID - with all of these opportunities ahead of her. She could be anything, do anything, and she decides to end it all because of what? Some boy?

LIAM

Maybe the message was meant for her parents.

CINDY

You think?

LIAM

I don't know. Some of the talks we had - she had a pretty rough home life.

CINDY

Like what?

LIAM

Just...lonely. Really lonely.

CINDY

She talked to you about it?

Liam's phone RINGS. He pulls the phone from his pocket.

LIAM

Once or twice.

Liam checks the caller ID. RESTRICTED.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hold on for a second, okay?

CINDY

Yeah.

Liam answers the phone.

LIAM

Hello?

Cindy's walkie talkie CHATTERS to life.

RESCUER #1

Team three..anything? Over.

Cindy depresses a button.

CINDY

Neg...

A piercing SCREECH. She tries again.

CINDY (CONT'D)

Negative. Nothing here.

(an afterthought)

O- Over...

RESCUER #1

Okay. Nothing here either. Continue up the ridge to the South. We'll circle round and meet up on the shoreline. Over.

CINDY

Okay.

Cindy turns back to Liam. He is nowhere to be found.

CINDY (CONT'D)

Liam?

Cindy follows his foot prints, a trail in the mud rising over a ridge. Cindy crests the ridge, surveying the depression below.

Liam squats behind the rotted trunk of a fallen tree, speaking into his phone in hushed angry tones.

LIAM

You told me there wouldn't be any trouble. You told me you'd take care of it. I told my wife this was behind us.

Cindy steps on a twig. It SNAPS. Liam turns, startled.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I've gotta go. We'll discuss this
later.

Liam hangs up. Pockets the phone.

CINDY
Everything alright?

LIAM
Yeah.

Cindy doesn't look so sure.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Come on. It'll be getting dark soon.
We've got to make some good time.

Liam starts up an embankment. Cindy follows, stepping behind
a tree.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST PRESERVE/FLASHBACK - DAY

Paige steps out from behind the tree in Cindy's place. Several
students walk through nature snapping photos. Liam surveys
the group from the top of the embankment.

Paige and Wyatt argue in hushed tones. Liam watches, concern
mounting. Paige turns to walk away. Wyatt grabs her.

PAIGE
No! No, damn it! Get your fucking
hands off me!

Paige pushes Wyatt away and runs off down the trail. Liam
hurries down the hill to Wyatt.

LIAM
What happened?

WYATT
She's mental, man. The bitch is
mental.

LIAM
Stay here.
(to all the students)
Everybody stay put!

Liam dashes off after Paige. Paige runs up the muddy hillside
sobbing.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Paige! Paige, wait!

Paige slips in the mud. She tries to catch her footing but slips again. Liam catches up. She turns, flailing at him.

PAIGE

Get away!

Liam takes her by the arms.

LIAM

Paige!

Paige goes dead weight in his arms, sobbing. Liam kneels down beside her. He peers into her eyes.

LIAM (CONT'D)

What is it?

PAIGE

Everything I touch turns to shit.

LIAM

Come on. Come on, get up. Walk it off.

Liam pulls Paige to her feet. She leans her head against his shoulder. Liam sets her down on a rotted log.

LIAM (CONT'D)

What happened?

PAIGE

I sent him pictures. Pictures of me. On his phone. He asked me to do it. And I did.

Liam puts his hand on her back.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

He showed them to his friends. They're all over the school. I fucking trusted him.

Paige SCREAMS.

LIAM

Come on. It's going to be okay.

PAIGE

How is it going to be okay, Mr. Baxter? How is it going to be okay?

Paige pulls away from Liam.

LIAM

Paige! Come on! Calm down!

Liam grabs ahold of her. She slumps to a seat. Stares with resignation at a lake below beyond a nearby bluff.

PAIGE

Why did I do that? Why?

Liam places his hand on hers. She chokes back the tears.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

My dad always wanted a boy. You know?
And my mom, she just wants to make
my Dad happy. Something like ten
years ago she got pregnant and they
got so excited because this test
showed I was due a kid brother.

(beat)

They were happy.

Liam listens. Piecing together a puzzle.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

But a couple months into the pregnancy
the doctor tells them that the kid
is going to come out all deformed -
something Frankenstein. So she. So
my mom. She kills it. She has an
abortion. But the operation - it
tore up her insides. Any chance at
ever having a little boy were over.
So everyday, everyday of my fucking
life, they look at me and I'm the
one they're stuck with...

(beat/breaking up)

...and I'm the one who's stuck with
them...

Paige sobs wildly. Liam embraces her.

LIAM

It's alright. Let it out.

Paige puts her head into Liam's shoulder. He holds her tight.

CLOSE ON Paige's mouth. The image DISSOLVES, her and Liam
seeming to speak in unison...

PAIGE

Everything I love hurts me.

LIAM (V.O.)

Everything I love hurts me.

EXT. FOREST PRESERVE/PRESENT - DAY

Liam considers his words.

CINDY

What?

LIAM

Nothing. Just talking to myself.

CINDY

Liam.

Liam keeps walking. Cindy grabs him by the arm.

CINDY (CONT'D)

Liam. That call. What's going on?

LIAM

Nothing. It was nothing.

CINDY

I heard you say you wanted it taken care of. That you promised your wife it was all behind you. What it? What's going on?

LIAM

It's nothing, Cindy.

CINDY

Is this about Paige?

LIAM

I said it's nothing!

Cindy slips to the ground. Startled. Frightened.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I - Jesus. Everything's just so messed up.

CINDY

What did you do, Liam? What did you do to Paige?

LIAM

To Paige? You think I had something to do with her disappearance?

CINDY

You've been slinking around in the shadows all day. People say you're sleeping together.

(MORE)

CINDY (CONT'D)

And now this call about taking care of something? What's going on?

LIAM

Jesus Christ, Cindy. If I murdered the girl this wouldn't be the time to bring it up. Alone. In the middle of the woods.

Cindy shrinks back.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Fuck. I'm joking.

Liam reaches for Cindy to help her up. She shrinks back. Liam slumps to the mud.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Lorna and me are in trouble. Some serious financial trouble. She's been racking up debt. Buying shit that is way out of our league and hiding it from me.

Cindy repositions herself.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I had to trade in the Accord for a piece of shit used car. Liquidate her assets. It's a blessing we never got a joint bank account.

(beat)

The call was an attorney. An old friend of my Dad who is trying to help us dig out of this mess. I mean it's just - Jesus - so much of her life has been a compromise, Cindy.

CINDY

I didn't know.

LIAM

She talks about this hole in her life that she's been trying to fill.

(beat)

Who hasn't felt that way? I mean, I was supposed to be a photojournalist. But here I am husband to a debtor and love interest to a dead girl.

Liam flashes a look of recognition.

LIAM (CONT'D)

'It makes you wish there was a reset button.'

(beat)

That damn messed up kid. Why did she do this?

EXT. FOREST PRESERVE/BLUFF/FLASHBACK - DAY

We sweep down from the trees gently swaying against a stark crimson sky. Liam cradles Paige in her arms. Her head rests on his chest.

PAIGE

I read this book once. Some crime novel, by some guy - I don't remember who- but it wasn't the main story that I remember. It was this little section, maybe two paragraphs, where the narrator talks about this guy who is fed up with his life. His wife, his kids, his job. One day this guy gets up, kisses his wife and kids goodbye, heads to work, and that's it. He's gone. He vanishes into thin air. The police, detectives, friends, family look for him everywhere: bars, hotels, hospitals, morgues. But finally they all just give up. They have a funeral for him. Something like ten years go by and this private eye, the main character in the story, finds him. He's living in some little suburban town in a brand new life. Thing is everything has changed but nothing has: he has a wife that looks like his old wife, similar kids, same old job in a different place. Everything in his new life is almost exactly the same as the life he left behind.

Paige looks at Liam.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

What do you think that means?

LIAM

I don't know. That maybe - maybe we're doomed to repeat our mistakes.

PAIGE

Yeah but - I don't believe that.

(MORE)

PAIGE (CONT'D)

I think if I got a second chance I'd get it right. I've learned enough lessons in this life.

Paige springs up. She walks to the edge of the bluff.

LIAM

Paige.

PAIGE

What if death is like a reset button? Like you die and it starts over again, but next time around you have memory of all the mistakes you made in the last life to guide you.

LIAM

Paige. Step away from the edge. You're making me nervous.

PAIGE

You just keep coming back until you get it right.

Paige holds out her hand to Liam.

PAIGE (CONT'D)

Come on, Lee. Take a leap with me.

A horrific realization washes over Liam. She's going to jump. He leaps to his feet. Hurries toward Paige. He stops short as she kicks stones off the edge.

LIAM

Paige. Come on. This is no joke.

Paige's face grows serious. She faces the precipice and spreads her arms wide.

PAIGE

All this...it makes you wish there was a reset button.

Paige takes a step off the bluff. Liam lunges for her grabbing her arm but it's too late. She topples over the side of the bluff, Liam in tow. The camera snaps to SLOW MOTION as they plummet through the air.

SLAM. The camera snaps to NORMAL SPEED. They smack down into the Earth. Liam writhes, trying to get his bearings.

REVEAL Liam and Paige on a terrace jutting from the bluff, only a few feet from the bluff's edge above. It's clear Paige was never in any danger.

Liam crawls to Paige, winces as pain shoots through his shoulder. He pulls mud caked hair away from Paige's face.

LIAM

Paige...

Her hair draws aside revealing deep set serious eyes. She looks at him, tears welling.

PAIGE

You would have risked your life...

A smile twitches across Paige's face then fades as her eyes widen and tears roll down her cheeks. She cradles Liam's face in her hands and kisses him. Liam pulls back but then resigns. He kisses her back, reliving glory days, days gone by, second chances. He suddenly breaks it off, slumping back against the embankment.

LIAM

Paige....I -

Paige laughs nervously. Smiles.

PAIGE

Did you like my extra credit?

Liam wipes mud from his face. Guilt ridden, he turns to climb the embankment.

LIAM

Come on. We should be getting back.

PAIGE

Did you?

LIAM

I threw them out, Paige. They were inappropriate.

Liam crawls over the bluff. Lowers his hand to Paige and hoists her up. She looks at him blankly.

PAIGE

I'm sorry. Mr. B. If things were different I could love you. Maybe we could love each other.

Paige hugs Liam. Liam doesn't hug her back. She turns and walks off. Liam looks out over the expanse of wood and lake below.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOREST PRESERVE/BLUFF/PRESENT - DUSK

Liam stands at the edge of the bluff, a silhouette against a pink sky. He kicks a few stones over the edge.

LIAM'S POV

We follow the stones as they tumble down the precipice, landing near the shoreline below where a boat trawls for any signs of the dead girl's body.

BACK TO SCENE

Cindy steps up beside Liam. Places a hand on his shoulder.

CINDY

What are you doing? Get away from there.

LIAM

Cindy. There's something else.

A RED FLARE shoots up from the lake, bathing the bluff in RED SHIMMERING LIGHT. The WALKIE TALKIES CRACKLE to life.

RESCUER #1

All teams! All teams! We've found a body in the lake! A body in the lake!

Liam and Cindy exchange looks. Liam dashes off down the hill. Cindy follows. Flashes of RED SHIMMER in his face. Interspersed with Liam's descent we see:

1: A black and white still shot of Paige lying dead on a floor, bruises ringing her neck as if strangled.

Liam stumbles, gasping for air.

2: A closer black and white still of Paige. Upon closer inspection the bruises take the shape of handprints.

Liam smashes through the woods, vines and limbs tearing at his flesh and clothes.

3: A black and white still shot of Paige's dead form submerged beneath water.

Liam and Cindy hurry along the shoreline. The boat pulls up to shore, a trawling net dragging heavy. Liam stops dead in his tracks. Watches as the men throw hand-over-hand hauling in something big.

4: A close up color still shot of Paige with vacant eyes and blue lips. Wet hair clings to her forehead.

The men roll the body onto the shoreline, pulling at the net to free it for a look. Liam steps forward, hand covering his mouth.

We see snippets of HAIR. FLESH. One of the men frees the body and it rolls over with a THUMP. A flashlight cuts through the twilight drawing shape from shadow.

Brown hair. White pale bloated flesh. HOOVES. A DEAD DOE lies bloated and decomposing on the shoreline.

The men turn away from the stench. Liam shrinks back.

OFFICER NUGENT

It's a deer. It's just a deer.

FADE TO:

INT. 2000 HONDA CRV - NIGHT

Liam sits alone in the car. Cindy gets in. Looks at Liam.

CINDY

They're going to pick up the search again in the morning.

After a moment:

CINDY (CONT'D)

Liam? You okay?

Liam keeps staring straight ahead.

LIAM

She kissed me Cindy. She kissed me and I kissed her back. And for that moment...for that moment I was alive again. I was sixteen full of piss and vinegar.

(he looks at Cindy)

But that's all that happened.

He reaches to the floor board and hands Cindy the manila envelope. Cindy opens it. Her face goes slack with horror.

CINDY

What - what?

ON PICTURES

An assortment of black and white stills: Paige in death poses.

PHOTO 1: A black and white still shot of Paige lying dead on a floor, bruises ringing her neck as if strangled.

PHOTO 2: A black and white still shot of Paige's dead form submerged beneath water.

PHOTO 3: A color still shot of Paige crucified on a cross wearing angel wings and little else.

PHOTO 4: Paige standing with slit wrists bleeding down her legs, a halo on her head.

It is clear upon closer inspection that the photographs depict simulated death poses: makeup and lighting effects rendering a gruesome simulation of Paige's demise.

LIAM

She gave these to me last week. I think they are a kind of good bye.

CINDY

I don't understand.

LIAM

She's not dead, Cindy. She's just gone and if she has her way no one will ever find her...

Liam starts the engine. Cindy tries to understand.

LIAM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There's this story about a girl who's fed up with her life...

INT. 2000 HONDA CRV/MOVING - NIGHT

Street lights play over Liam's face in the rearview. His eyes illuminated as he passes snippets of suburbia glazed in full moon light:

Sidewalks quiet and neatly trimmed.

Lush lawns of expensive homes. Windows asleep.

Quiet intersections with flashing yellow lights.

LIAM (V.O.)

...with her family, her friends. So one morning she gets up. Leaves the house. And that's it. She just disappears into thin air. She's gone. The police, her family, friends and teachers, they look for this girl everywhere. Hospitals. Morgues. Woods. She's gone...

EXT. LIAM'S HOME - DAY

Liam pulls into the garage. The garage door descends.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Liam slips into the room. He carefully eases himself into bed, staring at the ceiling. Lorna sleeps on her side facing away from him. His bedside lamp is illuminated.

LIAM (V.O.)
...but she's not dead. She has reset.
Found a way to start over again. A
second chance to get it right.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DUSK/DAWN

Paige walks down the shoulder of a highway. She wears a backpack, her hooded sweatshirt concealing her face. The sun illuminates the sky in warm red hues. But it's difficult to tell if it is sunrise or sunset.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

LIAM (V.O.)
All I can do is wish her luck.

Liam turns out the lamp.

THE END