

WHITEOUT

an original motion picture script
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OPEN INT. ROADSIDE BAR, MAINE COASTLINE - NIGHT

The BAR MANAGER approaches the last customers of the night, a group of MEN and WOMEN seated at two adjacent tables.

BAR MANAGER

Okay, people, come on. I lose my license I don't close in 3 minutes.

At 38, Professor PAULO RAMIREZ is the oldest of the group, casually but well dressed, handsome, self-assured. Three of the others (ELI HANSON, male, age 28; DREW DANIELSON, male, age 24; and CYDNEY LENNOX, female, age 25) are all candidates for masters or doctoral degrees at the same school at which Ramirez is fully tenured. BENJAMIN LAMB (male, age 19) is an undergraduate wannabe from the same school. The last of the crew is an UNNAMED GIRL (age 25, 5'7", 115 lbs, brown, shoulder-length hair, brown eyes, medium bust).

UNNAMED GIRL

Can't you just turn the lights off? We won't make any noise.

BAR MANAGER

This is my last warning.

RAMIREZ

Come on, he's right. We've had enough.

UNNAMED GIRL

Enough?

LENNOX

You're already toasted.

UNNAMED GIRL

Am not.

RAMIREZ

Are too, and you're not driving home by yourself.

UNNAMED GIRL

(coy)

And who am I going home with?

RAMIREZ

Ben'll give you a ride. We can get your car in the morning.

UNNAMED GIRL

Ben..? What about you?

LAMB

(seated beside her)

What's wrong with me?

RAMIREZ

Ben. Gentle Ben.

LAMB

Oh great, from you too.

RAMIREZ

(bending low to whisper
in Ben's ear)

You're new to the team, Ben. This
isn't asking too much, is it?

UNNAMED GIRL

What did you say to him?

LAMB

I'm sorry.

Ramirez turns to the Manager, pays the tab and a generous
tip with several twenties as the crew packs up to go.

RAMIREZ

Thank you for bearing with us.

BAR MANAGER

You're welcome, sir. Thank you.

DANIELSON

(tottering)

Celebrating. Big breakthrough at
the lab.

UNNAMED GIRL

(to Ben)

What did he say to you?

BAR MANAGER

You are from University?

DANIELSON

What, you never heard of Dr. Paulo
Ramirez? Exiled son of Cuba and
Nobel Prize winner, physics, no more
than three years from today. Mark
my words. You should have been taking
pictures and asking for autographs.

RAMIREZ

Come on, Drew. You're coming with
me.

BAR MANAGER

Congratulations.

RAMIREZ

Thank you.

EXT. BAR PARKING LOT - NIGHT

UNNAMED GIRL
Why do I have to go with Ben?

RAMIREZ
I'll be right behind you.

UNNAMED GIRL
Oh really? How close..?

They get into their vehicles, Ramirez and the others in a panel van, Ben and the Unnamed Girl in Ben's pickup truck. Mounted in the bed, behind the cabin, is a 100-gallon heating oil tank. Ben pulls out of the lot first.

INT. BEN'S PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

The Unnamed Girl turns to make sure the van is following. It is.

LAMB
You better put on your seatbelt.

As the Unnamed Girl turns, her head goes woozy and she lets out a small groan.

LAMB (CONT'D)
You going to be okay?

UNNAMED GIRL
Can I roll down the window? I need some air.

LAMB
Of course.

She rolls down the window and breathes in deeply as they wind along a road on the cliffs above the shore.

UNNAMED GIRL
I think she was right.

LAMB
About what?

UNNAMED GIRL
About being drunk.

LAMB
You want me to pull over?

UNNAMED GIRL
(looking for the van's
headlights in her
side view mirror)
Hey, where are they?

Ben glances over to her mirror, then up to the rearview. A oddly slanting light silhouettes the gauges and hoses from the heating oil tank. He turns quickly to his left, blinded momentarily by the van's headlights as Ramirez accelerates past them on the twisting road.

LAMB

Whoa...!

The Unnamed Girl bolts upright as they both watch the van careen directly in front of them.

LAMB (CONT'D)

What the hell is he...

The van's break lights go on as the vehicle begins skidding to a halt.

LAMB (CONT'D)

...Oh, God!

Slamming on his own breaks, Ben swerves to the left. But so does the van. Fishtailing, Ben veers back to right.

EXT. CLIFFSIDE ROAD, MAINE - NIGHT

As Ben's truck rams through the roadside guardrail and plunges about 100 feet to the rocks below, about 10 meters in from the shoreline itself. On impact, the truck explodes into a ball of fire.

Above, Ramirez and the others get out of the van and race to the broken section of guardrail.

LENNOX

Holy shit...!

Hanson and Danielson exchange adrenaline-pumped glances.

LENNOX (CONT'D)

(ref to heat)

You can feel it from here.

RAMIREZ

(cool)

This is it, my friends. There is no going back.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, TARZHENKO RESIDENCE - NIGHT

As the nightstand alarm goes off beside HENRY TARZHENKO (age 58). Sleeping beside him is Lena (age 49), his wife. The alarm reads 2:45 a.m. With a groan, Henry hoists himself to a sitting position at the edge of the bed. Only half comprehending, Lena rolls over to watch as he pulls himself upright and groans a second time.

LENA
 (in Ukrainian)
 What are you doing?

HENRY
 (in English)
 What does it look like I'm doing?

LENA
 (in English, pulling
 herself up)
 Henry, no...

But he doesn't answer. With a limp, stiffness in his left thigh, he crosses to the bathroom and closes the door behind him. Lena collapses back to her pillow, staring at the ceiling.

LENA (CONT'D)
 (to herself, in
 Ukrainian)
 God...

INT. KITCHEN, TARZHENKO RESIDENCE - NIGHT

As Lena stands over the range, frying two eggs and several links of sausage. In a faded sort of way, wearing a faded robe over a faded housedress, she is still attractive. Blonde, blue eyed, medium build.

Beside an old thermos, the coffeepot is almost finished percolating. Two half-completed ham and cheese sandwiches sit beside a couple of apples and an empty paper lunch bag on the kitchen table. It is a modest but orderly and well-tended home in a modest but orderly and well-tended upper Midwestern town. The light from the lamp above the kitchen table is warm against the wintry darkness outside.

The clock above the mustard-colored frig reads 3:12 when Henry enters the room. He is showered and shaved and neatly attired in dress trousers, a tie and long-sleeved shirt. If anything, his limp seems more apparent in this attire. Even so, at 5'10", he has the build and steadfast mannerisms of a lightweight boxer who has always managed to get up before the count goes to 10.

HENRY
 (in Ukrainian)
 Lena, what are you doing?

LENA
 (in English)
 What does it look like I'm doing?

HENRY

(in English, moving
to his boots at the
front door)

I can't eat. I'm going to be late.

LENA

For what?

She removes the pan from the range, shutting off the burner, and deftly transfers its contents to a plate. Sitting at the bench beside the front door, he glances at her as he puts on a pair of winter boots. She puts the plate on the kitchen table and turns to finish up with his sandwiches. [in subtitled Ukrainian from here out, both characters].

LENA (CONT'D)

She has been gone four days, Henry. Four days. We just got back. Three hours. Three hours of sleep you got. And you know there will be people today. Our friends. What are they going to think if you're not here? Already back at work like nothing has happened.

HENRY

They are not my friends. They are your friends.

LENA

There is nothing in the house. I need yeast. And butter and eggs. I used the last of the eggs just now.

HENRY

You're going to bake for them? Our daughter is dead and you are going to bake for these so-called friends?

LENA

I'm asking you, please, Henry, don't do this.

HENRY

(standing to take his
coat from a hook)

There are not going to be any friends today. Only snow. Another hour and a half and no one will be going anywhere. It's going to be a total whiteout.

LENA

So you will leave me here?

HENRY

(turning to open the
door)

We have to get on with our lives.

A gust of wind enters the home as he closes the door behind him. Tugging at the neck of her robe, Lena turns to survey her tiny kitchen with the sausage and the last of the eggs growing cold on the table, and with his lunch still half assembled.

INT. HENRY'S MINT CONDITION 1966 IMPALA - NIGHT

As Henry maneuvers his car along a deserted street in town. Already the snow is beginning to accumulate despite the gusting winds. Up ahead on the right is an IGA grocery store. Henry passes it by but then, vexed with himself and then vexed at being vexed with himself, he does a U-turn.

EXT. UPPER MIDWESTERN TOWN - NIGHT

As Henry returns to the pull-off for the grocery store and pulls into a parking spot. There are three other cars in the lot. Tugging tight at the scarf around his neck, Henry leaves the warmth of his car and goes into the store.

INT. IGA GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

As Henry heads for the dairy isle. A lone STOCK BOY pays him no attention as he passes by. After a short search, Henry finds a three-pack of Fleishman's yeast. As he reaches for it...

EXT. MAINE COASTLINE - DAY

A bleak, windy funeral scene at the pinnacle of a cliff as a Greek Orthodox PRIEST releases the ashes of ANYA TARZHENKO into the void above the ocean. To one side stand her mother and father, Henry and Lena Tarzhenko. Professor Paulo Ramirez and his band of graduate students stand across from them.

FADE to end of ceremony as Ramirez approaches Henry, who is holding open the back door of an older limousine for Lena.

RAMIREZ

Mr. Tarzhenko...

(as Henry turns)

...I'm Paulo Ramirez. Your daughter worked....

HENRY

I know who you are.

RAMIREZ

She was a wonderful person, sir.
I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry.

Henry closes Lena's door, then turns back to Ramirez.

HENRY

To hell with you. To hell with you
all.

INT. TARZHENKO RESIDENCE - NIGHT

The LIVING ROOM as Lena removes the rubber bands from four day's worth of mail. Amongst the junk and a handful of bills is a medium-sized padded envelope. She is about to put on her reading glasses when she hears the front door open, then close. Standing, she moves to the kitchen as Henry sets a bag of groceries on the bench beside the door.

LENA

(in Ukrainian)
What are you doing?

Henry pulls himself upright, takes a breath.

HENRY

I'm sorry, Lena. I don't know what
else to do.
(ref to work)
This is all I know. Like for you.
To make makyivnichuk.

LENA

(beat)
I know.

After another long pause, unspoken understanding, she turns back toward the kitchen.

LENA (CONT'D)

Let me get your meals together.
It's going to be a long time before
they clear the roads.

EXT. RURAL UPPER MIDWESTERN ROAD - NIGHT

As Henry turns off the main road out of town and begins winding his way along a narrow forested drive.

INT. HENRY'S IMPALA - NIGHT

Henry's lights reflect off the snow, now falling heavily. Then the scene opens up and brightens as he arrives at the first of 2 chain link gates, each flanked by chain link fence lines to the right and left. Separated by 20 feet, the gates and fences stand 8' tall with concertina crowns.

Henry stops outside the 1st gate and rolls down his window, passing an ID card in front of a post-mounted radio scanner. The gate opens and he enters the no-man's land between the two fences. The 1st gate closes behind him.

At the 2nd gate he enters a 6-digit pass code on a post-mounted key pad. This gate opens as well and he continues down the road with the lights and the 2nd gate closing behind him.

Then another burst of light, now from the walls of a two story concrete rectangle building with no windows and only the shadow of a recessed entryway. Surveillance cameras are positioned at each corner. Beside the building is an extended carport, its back and sides protected from the elements.

EXT. HOMELAND SECURITY REGIONAL CONTROL CENTER - NIGHT

As Henry pulls backwards into an empty space in the carport. Forgetting his packaged breakfast and lunch on the seat beside him, he gets out of the car. Pulling back from the wind, he lights a cigarette, then steps forward and turns to look up at the building with the snow surreal in the floodlights. He takes a couple of puffs, glances at the other cars in the carport, then returns to the building, its 2nd story.

INT. HENRY'S OFFICE, CONTROL CENTER - DAY

Five days before, as Henry turns from another hectic shift to answer his ringing desk phone.

HENRY

Tarzhenko. Lena, listen, I'm...
What..? Lena, I can't, I don't
understand what you're...

(growing concerned,
softening)

Whe... Okay, listen, I... Alright,
I'm leaving now. Lena, did you hear
me..? Yes, I'll be right there.

He hangs up and begins to stand just as ALBERT CUNNINGHAM enters the office. At 62, Cunningham is of medium height, slightly overweight, slightly disheveled. He is competent, hardworking and loyal, tending more to the meek end of the spectrum. He is Henry's second in command.

CUNNINGHAM

Henry, come on, she's been waiting
20 minutes.

HENRY

Who?

CUNNINGHAM

The new hire. If you sign off on
her.

HENRY

(beat)
Anya's dead.

CUNNINGHAM

What?

RETURN TO EXT. REGIONAL FIRST RESPONDERS CENTER - NIGHT

As Henry finishes his cigarette, a pair of headlights come around the corner through the trees. Fishtailing slightly, the car maneuvers across the parking lot and into a spot down further in the carport. Out steps CARYN ERICSON (27, auburn hair, medium height and bust, attractive in a competent, unadorned way - as his own daughter had been). Locking her door, she approaches with a bag over her shoulder.

HENRY

Can I help you?

ERICSON

(extending a hand)

Caryn Ericson. You must be Henry.

HENRY

(w/o extending his)

How did you get in here? This is a government facility.

ERICSON

I began work here a couple of days ago.

INT. SECURITY CHAMBER, CONTROL CENTER - NIGHT

As Henry and Caryn enter a second no-man's land, this one between two sets of steel doors with an anteroom to the side. Seated in the anteroom, behind a concrete wall and bulletproof glass is a Guard, BETTY CAMBERS (age 32).

Without a word, Henry moves to the second set of steel doors to submit his card and passcode at yet another reader and keypad. He then submits his right eye to an iris scanner mounted to the wall. Above the doors is a light, which now goes from yellow to red.

HENRY

(turning to Betty)

What is going on here? This worked 10 minutes ago.

CAMBERS

(through speaker)

It says access denied, sir. It's not the right iris.

ERICSON

Maybe I should try.