

*What if Richard Linklater made a horror-mystery film?*

***ES***  
***TRANGE***  
***MENT***

[estrangement]

original screenplay  
by Benjamin J. Gohs

Begun mid-August 2024  
benjamingohs@gmail.com

OPENING CREDITS FLICKER OVER BLACK—LIKE WARPED VHS TAPE:

Audio cassette rewinds.

Stop button clicks.

Play button clicks.

Distorted tape plays indistinguishable voices ...

pained shrieks,

an old man's grunts,

struggle.

It's the sound of someone being stabbed to death.

A final agonized scream gives way to heavy breathing, slow heavy footsteps, three numbers dialed on a rotary phone.

Heavy breathing into the receiver as the line rings.

911 OPERATOR (V.O.)  
9-1-1. What's the address of your  
emergency? Hello? Hello?

The operator is answered by a badly distorted voice.

It's an older man struggling to catch his breath.

AGGRESSOR (V.O.)  
Black River Killer ...  
... murdered again ...  
... send police ...

Sirens.

Police radio chatter swells and fades.

Sound of the audio cassette recorder rewinding.

It lingers five seconds, ten.

Faint PING and CLICK of it stopping gives way to ...

O.S. sound of different footsteps shuffling on blacktop.

As the opening credits end.

And blackness gives way ...

As O.S. footsteps shuffling on blacktop continue.

FADE IN:

EXT. MIDDLE-CLASS CUL-DE-SAC - NIGHT

Cars and clothes say 1990s.

Shuffling continues as a boy of 10 staggers down the road.

Face pale, eyes sunk, blood trickles from mouth and nose.

He zombie-walks to a house

and yells ...

ZOMBIE BOY

Trick or treat!

Door opens to ...

The boy with his mom and carrying a candy bucket.

MARINA VARGAS (30s), the woman in the house—face  
unseen—drops Tootsie Rolls into the pail.

MARINA (O.C.)

I like your costume.

ZOMBIE BOY

Yours, too.

Recoiling at her son's comment, mother ushers the boy away.

ZOMBIE BOY'S MOM

Sorry. He doesn't know any better.

MARINA (O.C.)

Oh, it's alright.

Several parents bring their little vampires, witches, and  
ghosts up to the unseen woman's house for a dose of candy.

Each reacts with varying levels of unease at unseen Marina.

Finally, a woman familiar with Marina arrives with her son.

CONCERNED MOTHER

Marina? Are you OK?

MARINA (O.C.)

I'm fine.

CONCERNED MOTHER  
Sorry to hear about your mom. Go wait  
with daddy. Mommy'll be right there.

The kid scampers off and concerned mother peeks around  
Marina—face still unseen—into the house.

CONCERNED MOTHER (cont'd)  
If you're in trouble ...

Finally revealed ...

Marina's bandaged head,

bruised cheeks and black eyes,

split lip and swollen nose.

MARINA  
We got rear-ended.

CONCERNED MOTHER  
Is John alright?

MARINA  
He's away on business.

Concerned mother looks skeptical but lets it go.

MARINA (cont'd)  
Happy Halloween.

Concerned mother's attention is drawn by her kid.

During which, Marina slams the door.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - DAY

Marina's unscathed car stops at a heavily wooded crossroads.

INT. MARINA'S CAR - CROSSROADS - DAY

Marina traces her finger along a road map.

She puts the map down and hesitates before driving on.

She's not sure where she's going ...

or whether she should.

EXT. MARINA'S CAR - DAY

Left blinker flashes and the car pulls onto the new road.

INT. MARINA'S CAR - COUNTRY HIGHWAY - DAY

Marina drives in silence, nervously checking her mirrors.  
No one else on the road until a car speeds up from behind.

Marina's breath quickens. She strangles the wheel.

Watches her rear-view as the car races after her. She looks  
around frantically: no place to go, no one to help.

Just when she can't take anymore, the strange car races  
around her and keeps going. Marina's relieved.

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - COUNTRY HIGHWAY - DAY

Marina drives this lonely stretch of road.

Parks to consult an old postcard and the road map.

She drives on.

EXT. REST AREA - DAY

Marina nervously gets out of her car and goes into the  
restroom. When she exits, there's a man in a pickup parked  
next to her car. She freezes.

After a long moment, he opens his door, pours old coffee out  
of a travel mug, and heads for the restroom.

Relieved, Marina heads for her car.

But, seeing her battered face as they pass each other, the  
man stops and turns. Marina glances back at him.

TRUCK GUY

You alright, ma'am?

Marina hurries to her car.

INT. MARINA'S CAR - REST AREA - DAY

She jumps in and fumbles the keys.  
Each time she looks up, she sees him staring back at her.

Finally, she starts the car and drives away.

EXT. MARINA'S CAR - COUNTRY HIGHWAY - DAY

Marina's car snakes through an endless sea of trees.

Seeing a rustic picnic area ahead, she puts on her blinker.

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - PICNIC AREA - DAY

Marina shuts off the car and gets out.

Stretches.

Pops the trunk and looks in at something O.C. with concern.

Snapping out of her trance, Marina pulls out a grocery sack and shuts the trunk, testing the lid to be sure it's closed.

EXT. PICNIC AREA - DAY

Marina eats at a picnic table. Studies the map.

Traces a finger to a star scribbled in pen.

So deep in thought she doesn't notice a car pull in.

Slamming door startles her.

Just an old man toileting his dog.

He waves. Polite.

She waves. Uneasy.

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - COUNTRY HIGHWAY - DAY

Marina drives on through the afternoon.

Breaking the long silence, she talks to herself.  
Practicing a spiel.

MARINA

Mr. Bauer? Good afternoon, Mr. Bauer.  
You wouldn't happen to be Arno Bauer?  
Mr. Bauer, I have some bad news for  
you. Mr. Bauer, my name is Marina  
Vargas and I regret to inform you ...

EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - DAY

Big old mansion hidden deep in the lonely woods.

INT. OLD MANSION - MOVING ROOM TO ROOM - DAY

Hermetically sealed in decaying mid-century modern décor.  
Where there's light, it's dim and dirty orange.  
Walls lined by ceiling-high columns of newspapers.

A hoarder's hedge maze. A shut-in's paradise. A living hell.

Tottering through the cellulose labyrinth by the light of a coal miner's helmet lamp, wearing oversized cardigan and crusty corduroys, is full-bearded ARNO BAUER (60s).

Audible ticking follows him wherever he goes.

As if a reaper counts down his waning moments.

It's a slow walk up and up through the first, second, and third floors. Several times he stops, backtracks, and takes a different direction. Even he gets lost in this labyrinth.

Finally, and with much effort, he makes his way up to ...

INT. ATTIC - DAY

One large room lit by dim white Christmas lights.

Cavernous summit holds a different maze—meticulously organized bookshelves bursting with hardbacks and soft, magazines, jazz records, and boxes of audio cassettes.

The cassettes are marked with labels like: "Mayoral race '87" and "Gov. interview 1/27/81" and "Reagan May '79."

On his way in, Arno takes a feather duster off a wall hook and cleans the book spines as he searches the volumes.

He takes down a book of poetry, a book on art, and, rounding a shelf, runs his finger along a row of philosophy tomes before grabbing a collection of Diogenes' writings.

Arno takes a portable cassette recorder out of his pocket and clicks RECORD and speaks into the microphone:

ARNO

*"I am Diogenes the Dog. I nuzzle the kind, bark at the greedy, and bite the scoundrels. Quote by Diogenes. Today is November the first, nineteen hundred, ninety-three. He's been dead fifteen-hundred years."*

He clicks STOP on the recorder as ticking gives way to ringing. He pulls from his pocket a windup cook timer.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - MOVING ROOM TO ROOM - DAY

Bell ringing, he hurries, as an old man can, down to ...

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

Sweaty and panting, Arno enters from the cluttered hall and turns on a lamp to reveal an office as tidy as the library.

Among wall photos, a ridiculously large frame on a Polaroid that Arno passes too quick for its subject to be seen.

He sets the books on the desk next to a 1960s typewriter and tall stack of typed pages, and hurries out.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Terribly out of breath, Arno opens the refrigerator door to reveal nothing but many bottles of orange juice and vodka.

The fridge bulb casts little light in the messy room.

Arno guzzles juice from the carton. When he's had enough, he puts the O.J. back and resets his timer for an hour.

INT. MOVING THROUGH FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Closing in on the clack of a manual typewriter.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

By the dim light of a single lamp, Arno types: *Is today the day? Today is not the day. But today COULD be the day.*

A knock at the door startles him. He looks up, listens ...

INT. MOVING THROUGH HOUSE - DAY

Knocking grows louder as Arno slowly makes his way.

INT./EXT. FRONT DOOR - DAY

Confused Arno looks through the peephole. He never has visitors. Finally, with an exaggerated sigh of resignation, he cracks the door to clean-shaven jovial BENEDICT.

Arno spies the outside world with fear and distrust. As they chat, Benedict keeps trying to peek into the house.

ARNO  
You from the corner store?  
I didn't order anything.

BENEDICT  
Well, sir—

Arno clicks RECORD on his cassette player and holds it up.  
The men stare at each other in silent standoff.

BENEDICT (cont'd)  
[Ahem] The Lord's neither buying nor  
selling on this outstanding day.

ARNO  
What's so outstanding about it?

BENEDICT  
Why, it's All Saints Day.

ARNO  
No saints around here.

BENEDICT  
Ah, but see that's just the thing.  
Today is the celebration of all the  
unknown saints around the world.  
People doing god's work without a  
iota of recognition. Why, I might be  
talking to one and not even know it.

ARNO  
Iota, huh.

BENEDICT  
You like that?

Arno smiles. He does. But ...

ARNO  
Less you're *Him*, road's that-a-way.  
Wait. Shh. I hear *Him* calling you.

BENEDICT  
Ain't no shushin' the Lord.

ARNO  
Who are you?

BENEDICT  
My name's benedict.

ARNO  
Of course it is.

BENEDICT

And I am but a humble servant sharing  
*His* magnificent word. Yes indeed.

ARNO

And what word would that be?

BENEDICT

Why, life everlasting, of course.

ARNO

Now that is a distressing thought.

BENEDICT

Name he who don't wanna live forever?

ARNO

Come back in thirty years, young man.  
See how ya feel. Oh wait, I'll be  
dead. So much for life everlasting.

Before Benedict can respond, Arno slams the door.

INT. ARNO'S KITCHEN - DAY

Arno rests against the door, waiting for the unwanted guest to leave. But the man knocks again, his final admonition leaving Arno feeling off balance.

BENEDICT (O.C.)

He has a special message for you: you  
don't have to go on living this way!

INT. FRONT ROOM - DAY

Arno hurries to a window, its shade taped to the casing.

As he goes, he replays the conversation between he and Benedict. The tape distorts demonically as it replays ...

BENEDICT (V.O.)

*Ain't no shushin' the Looooord.*

Arno peels back the tape holding the window shade and peeks out to see Benedict walking away.

About to disappear in the trees, Benedict looks back at the house. He seems to be looking right at Arno's peering eye. Arno hurriedly reseals the shade and turns off the recorder.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

An old tape deck plays a cassette on large speakers of Arno's voice reciting a Buddhist chant over and over.

ARNO (V.O.)  
Oooooom. Aaaaaah.

Arno finishes typing a page and adds it to the pile. Feeds a fresh sheet into the typer, consults Diogenes' book, types. Bits of sentences flash on screen as Arno types.

—"Body count had reached seventeen"  
—"Despite the Killer never having been found"  
—"Was there a copycat on the loose?"  
—"By the spring of 1990, the police had all but given up"

EXT. MARINA'S CAR - COUNTRY HIGHWAY - EVENING

The car slows to turn down a remote dirt side road.

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - DIRT ROAD - EVENING

Marina glances at the map and, looking up, has to swerve around a van parked by a telephone pole. Workers in safety vests jump out of the way as Marina waves apologetically.

Not much farther, a lone entrance road appears.

Marina slows for it and turns at the mailbox of A. BAUER.

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - ARNO'S DRIVEWAY - EVENING

She pulls up the long driveway, marveling at the house. Windows covered and yard overgrown, it looks abandoned.

Marina shuts off the car but hesitates before getting out. She glances into the rear-view mirror and whispers ...

MARINA  
Trick or treat.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - OFFICE - EVENING

Arno types away, unaware of yet another visitor.

EXT. MARINA'S CAR - ARNO'S HOUSE - EVENING

Messenger bag over her shoulder, she closes her door gently, as if not to disturb this dead place.

Breeze in the trees the only sound as she scans the woods. Glancing at the front door, Marina's face darkens. A last look down the driveway before going to the house.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - OFFICE - EVENING

Arno pauses typing a moment. Listens. Nothing. He goes back to work.

EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN DOOR - EVENING

Marina knocks on the door and waits. Hearing nothing, she tries the doorbell. An ominous tune.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - MOVING THROUGH HOUSE - EVENING

The doorbell dirge rings through the many rooms of this spookhouse, finally making its way into ...

INT. ARNO'S OFFICE - EVENING

The doorbell stops Arno mid-sentence. He looks up from his typewriter, frozen in fear. Listens as the chime repeats.

EXT. KITCHEN DOOR - EVENING

Marina tries to peek in a window but it's sealed.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Arno sneaks to the door.

Seeing the battered face through the peephole sends him stumbling back into high boxes of junk mail.

EXT. KITCHEN DOOR - EVENING

The clatter startles Marina.

MARINA

Mr. Bauer?

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Panicked Arno checks his pulse.

Another knock startles him into mindlessly tidying the huge mess but, seeing it's pointless, he gives up.

MARINA (O.C.)  
Please, Mr. Bauer. I have some  
important information to—

EXT. KITCHEN DOOR - EVENING

The door opens a crack to reveal Arno's eye, his cook timer ticking in the background.

MARINA  
Arno Bauer?

Something familiar about her?

ARNO  
Hospital's closed.

Arno opens the door and steps forward but stops short of going outside. Outside frightens him. His nervous joke falling flat, he tries another tack.

ARNO (cont'd)  
I already have a vacuum and I don't  
need saving. So, if you'll please ...

She eyes the madman a tick before remembering her purpose.

MARINA  
I'm sorry to bother, but I represent  
the estate of the late June Landon.

He slowly removes his miner's helmet.  
And sadly whispers ...

ARNO  
Joonie?

... just as his cook timer rings.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Dark pierced by the snap of a match.

Arno dabs several half-melted candles into life.

Clearing old to-go containers from the table, he motions for Marina to pull up a chair.

Arno fumbles with busywork, moving dirty dishes around, throwing trash away, obviously avoiding the conversation.

ARNO  
Offer you tea, had I any.

MARINA  
I'm thirsty.

ARNO  
I have water and orange juice. Or I could make some coffee.

MARINA  
Water's fine.

Arno runs the tap. Rinses a dirty glass a few times and fills it. Before Marina goes to sip it and recoils.

ARNO  
Well water. You get used to it.

MARINA  
I guess you can get used to anything.  
Doesn't make it a good idea.

Winded, Arno takes a seat across from Marina.

Checks his wrist pulse under the table so she can't see.

Then he pulls his cassette recorder out, clicks record, and puts it back in his pocket. He sees her trying to figure out what he's doing and redirects.

ARNO  
If you don't mind me asking ...

MARINA  
I'm fine. Looks worse than it is.

ARNO  
So, how did she?

MARINA  
Cancer.

ARNO  
She sick long?

MARINA  
Little over a year.

ARNO

Bad?

MARINA

It was cancer.

Realizes his dumb question and sad;y ...

ARNO

Yeah.

MARINA

Before we get to the paperwork, I first need to confirm your identity.

ARNO

I'm definitely me.

MARINA

Driver's license, state I.D.

ARNO

Don't have any a that. Y'know, you guys coulda just mailed the papers.

MARINA

Well, this is a special situation we have here. Now, might you have a military badge? I need Something official with your face and name.

Arno mimes an apologetic "no."

MARINA (cont'd)

We need to be certain.

Arno goes to a stack of newspapers and pulls out a dusty edition and leafs through it to the OP-ED page revealing a column marked by his name and photo.

Marina glances back and forth between the photo and Arno's actual face for a few moments until she appears satisfied.

MARINA (cont'd)

When's the last time you spoke?

ARNO

Thirty years at least. Frankly surprised she even remembered me.

Marina pulls out a pad and pen and makes notes.

MARINA

How long had you known each other?

ARNO  
Oh, just a few months.

MARINA  
The nature of your relationship?

ARNO  
Friends. I guess.

MARINA  
Just friends?

ARNO  
I'm sorry. Why is this necessary?

MARINA  
How did you and Ms. Landon meet?

ARNO  
She never married.

MARINA  
No.

This news really surprises him.

ARNO  
Can't I just sign and be done?

MARINA  
I'm sorry but I can't release the estate without proper documentation.

ARNO  
That's fine. I don't want it.  
Whatever it is. Just please go.

Arno rises from his seat but Marina doesn't budge.

As he approaches, she stands and he ushers to the door.

MARINA  
Please, Mr. Bauer.

ARNO  
Give it to charity.

MARINA  
You don't understand.

ARNO  
No, I just don't care.  
Now ... get ... out!

Arno shoves Marina outside, locks the door, and rests breathlessly against the door.

Marina's car starts up and drives away.

Arno sighs with relief.

INT. MARINA'S CAR - ARNO'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Unseen Marina pulls onto the road.

EXT. MARINA'S CAR - CROSSROADS - NIGHT

Marina's car stops where Arno's road meets the highway.

Marina gets out, leaves her door wide open, ignition warning bell dingding, and walks to the middle of the blacktop.

Headlights appear in both directions on the highway as Marina lies down on the asphalt and looks up at the sky.

As the cars near, Marina shuts her eyes.

She's perfectly calm despite impending death.

At the last moment, the car in the northbound lane, seeing Marina, honks and swerves, narrowly missing her.

Finally, she gets up and walks in front of the second car, barely escaping in a flurry of squealing tires as she goes to her car and gets in and drives off.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Arno wretches in the toilet, wave after wave. Finally, eyes watering and out of breath, he lies on the floor to rest.

He pulls out his recorder, stops and rewinds it, hits play.

Sound of him puking.

INT. MARINA'S CAR - COUNTRY HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Marina drives a desolate stretch of road.

Street light shines on a payphone in the middle of nowhere.

Marina eyes it as she passes. Watches the dark swallow it in her rear-view mirror before stubbornly slowing for a U-turn.

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

Marina dials the operator.

MARINA  
(into phone)  
I'm looking for an Arno Bauer.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Asleep on the floor, Arno's woken by the phone in some faraway room. He groans to his feet and staggers out.

INT. MOVING THROUGH HOUSE - NIGHT

The phone rings and rings as the old man struggles on.

ARNO  
(to himself)  
Dance, dance, the hempen jig.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Arno hesitates before picking up the old rotary wall phone. He listens to breathing on the other end before ...

ARNO  
(into phone)  
Get behind me, Satan.

MARINA (V.O.)  
Excuse me?

ARNO  
(into phone)  
Thought you're—never mind. I'm no lawyer but I'm pretty sure's no rule says I have to take the inheritance.

MARINA (V.O.)  
I'm afraid I lied to you, Mr. Bauer.  
I'm sorry. There is no inheritance.

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

They linger in awkward silence.

ARNO (V.O.)  
Are you with the police?

MARINA  
(into phone)  
No.

ARNO (V.O.)  
Reporter?

MARINA  
(into phone)  
Why would you think that?

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sweaty and panic-stricken, Arno searches for the words.

ARNO  
(into phone)  
Is June really ...

MARINA (V.O.)  
That part was true.

ARNO  
(into phone)  
What do you really want from me?

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

Marina listens to Arno's labored breathing.  
She waits a long time before answering.  
Is she torturing him on purpose?

MARINA  
(into phone)  
Mr. Bauer, I'm June's daughter.

ARNO (V.O.)  
What?

MARINA  
(into phone)  
I'm *you're* daughter.

She waits for a response.

Long lingering silence.

Wind in the trees.

The ultimate loneliness.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Arno isn't sure what to say.

ARNO  
(into phone)  
Where are you?

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

She looks. Nothing but darkness beyond the street light.

MARINA  
(into phone)  
I'm not sure. Isn't much around.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Arno's face takes a sinister turn.

ARNO  
(into phone)  
Does anyone know you're here?

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

Marina's taken aback by the question.

MARINA  
(into phone)  
No.

ARNO (V.O.)  
Family? Friends? Coworkers?

MARINA  
(into phone)  
Why do you ask?

ARNO (V.O.)  
I'm a very private person.

MARINA  
(into phone)  
I have no one.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Arno thinks a moment.

ARNO  
(into phone)  
What'd you think was going to happen?

INT./EXT. MARINA'S CAR - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

Marina itches her head bandage.

MARINA (V.O.)  
I didn't know what else to do.

ARNO  
(into phone)  
About what?

MARINA (V.O.)  
My life.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

This whole thing is fucked but he can't say no.

ARNO  
(into phone)  
You'd better come on back.

EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Arno opens the door to find Marina getting out of her car.

She approaches.

They study each other anew.

ARNO  
You walk like your mom.

MARINA  
I'm hungry. I looked for someplace  
but you're way out here.

ARNO  
I usually order supper from the  
little store down the way.  
You like turkey sandwiches?

MARINA  
I'm allergic—

ARNO  
Tomatoes?

MARINA  
How'd you know?

ARNO  
Your mom was allergic.

MARINA  
I thought we never had them in the house because of me.

ARNO  
Do you know for a fact you're allergic?

Marina shakes her head "no."

ARNO (cont'd)  
Huh.

Arno ducks back in, leaving her at the door.

ARNO (O.C.)  
Well, get in here. Before the mosquitoes carry you away.

Before going in, Marina glances around: "What mosquitoes?"

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Marina enters to find Arno gone.  
She peeks down a dark, junk-choked hallway.

Unseen Arno shuffles in another room.

Marina listens. Considers following. Stays put.

Arno reappears from a different door, startling her.

He sits to catch his breath and eyes the tiny photo in the oversized frame from his office wall.

Marina looks over his shoulder. In the frame, a Polaroid of a five-year-old girl blowing out candles on a birthday cake.

MARINA  
You knew?

Arno tries to speak. It's a real fight not to break down.  
She sits, watches, waits for an answer.

ARNO  
Came in the mail last year. No  
letter. No card. Just the photo.

MARINA  
About the time she was diagnosed.

Arno's cook timer rings. He pulls it out of his sweater pocket and resets it for an hour as he goes to the fridge and hesitates, obviously embarrassed by its contents.

ARNO  
I don't normally have guests.

Arno opens the fridge. Marina's shocked by all the vodka but it's his sweatiness and shakiness that concerns her.

MARINA  
You alright?

ARNO  
Blood sugar tends to drop.

MARINA  
You're diabetic?

Arno shrugs. He has no idea.

MARINA (cont'd)  
When did it start?

ARNO  
I don't remember.

MARINA  
You should get that checked.

ARNO  
Haven't been to a doctor in twenty-  
five years. No point starting now.

Arno drinks from the orange juice carton and puts it away.

MARINA  
You should probably eat.

ARNO  
I should get cleaned up first.

MARINA

I can order the food.

ARNO

Number's there by the phone.  
Just say Arno wants two usuals.

Arno points to a rotary wall phone before staggering away.

Marina looks around in awe of the mess.

She tries a light switch. No luck. Then another. Same.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Arno starts the shower and sits on the toilet to unbutton his shirt. As the room fills with steam, he takes a deep breath and lets it out with a mournful shudder.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Marina ties a full garbage bag and puts a fresh one in the trashcan. She wipes a counter where stacks of clean dishes have replaced the dirty.

Curious, she snoops in the fridge. Nothing in the freezer. Not even ice cube trays. She eyes a vodka bottle with concern. Her snooping interrupted by a knock at the door.

INT./EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Marina finds to-go containers on the stoop and taillights of the delivery car disappearing down the driveway. She watches the red glow float away through the trees.

About to take the food, she hears a faint and distant thump.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Marina and Arno have finished their supper.

MARINA

Better? [*off his nod*]  
Ask you a question?

ARNO

Just did.

MARINA

What's with the no lights?

ARNO  
Don't trust myself on a ladder.

MARINA  
How long have they been out?

Arno laughs with a look that says "a very long time."

MARINA (cont'd)  
Can I ask you another question?

ARNO  
Needn't ask permission to ask.

MARINA  
Are you a alcoholic?

ARNO  
No.

MARINA  
Well, your refrigerator is.

ARNO  
You are your mother's daughter.  
I'm a drunk. There's a difference.

MARINA  
Sorry. It's none of my business.

ARNO  
No. It's fine. I choose to drink. Not  
every day. But sometimes you need a  
little stress relief.

MARINA  
Isn't that the definition?

ARNO  
Alcoholics are addicts. If they don't  
drink they drool and shit themselves.  
And then they die. I don't drink, I  
get cranky. And a lot less charming.

MARINA  
Right now: are you more or less?

ARNO  
What really happened to your face?

Marina looks caught.

She reaches into her bag and pulls out ...

A worn-out paperback book.

Her hand obscures the title.

MARINA  
I'll tell you about my face.  
If you tell me about this ...

She moves her hand to reveal the title: *Joined in Blood: The Black River Killer* by Eugene Greenleaf.

She slides it across the table.

MARINA (cont'd)  
Have you read this?

Arno goes pale. Speechless.

EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Trees sway in the wind. A security lamp is the only light.  
POV as if someone is creeping around the house.

Cutting through the swish, faint and rapid thumps, like a  
frantic fist knocking on the door of a soundproof room.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The wind howls outside. Marina and Arno sit in awkward  
standoff over the book. Long silence until ...

MARINA  
First edition. Signed by the author.  
Only book I ever saw mom read. She  
was always reading it. Didn't think  
anything of it til she died. I was  
cleaning out her room and found this.

Marina pulls from her bag an old picture postcard. Flips it  
over to the text side. It's postmarked 1960, Men's Central  
Jail, Los Angeles. Text: "Doing fine. Don't fret. Love, A."

ARNO  
She kept it?

MARINA  
That's when I knew ...

Arno looks panicked as he awaits the horrible punchline.

MARINA (cont'd)  
My father was the Black River Killer.

EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Blustery wind and creaking branches.  
And that faint banging.  
Is it coming from the garage?  
Or maybe the basement?

INT. ARNO'S REFRIGERATOR - NIGHT

Pitch black gives way to dim fridge light as Arno jerks open the door and stares in like a caged and sweaty psychopath.

Without looking back, Arno queries his daughter.

ARNO  
You share this theory with anyone?

MARINA  
It's OK. Really. I'm not upset.

Arno hesitates before pulling out vodka and O.J. Pours three fingers of booze and juice in a rocks glass, and downs it.

Marina's shocked by this.

Arno takes a calming breath and repeats:

ARNO  
Have you discussed this with anyone?

MARINA  
No. Course not.

ARNO  
You're sure.

She nods.

ARNO (cont'd)  
Come on. Show ya somethin'.

Arno dons the miner helmet and turns on its lamp.

Marina watches him hobble into the hallway.

She glances at the outside door—should she run?

ARNO (V.O.)  
You stay close, now. Don't take much  
for a person to get lost around here.

INT. MOVING THROUGH HOUSE - NIGHT

Barely enough light to see, Marina follows Arno through the junkyard maze. They pass Arno's office, lit by the desk lamp. One of the few rooms with working electric light.

It's a long nervous trek through halls and up stairs.

They come to a crossroads marked by paint-stained boxes stacked to the ceiling. Arno has to think: right? left?

INT. OUTSIDE ATTIC - NIGHT

Arno stops outside the attic library door.

ARNO

Do me one favor, ask before touching.

He searches her eyes for compliance.

She nods.

His gaze lingers as if unsure of her sincerity.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Darkness recedes as Arno plugs in the white Christmas lights. Marina gazes around the immaculate library with awe.

She follows him up one aisle and down another.

Several times he thinks he has what he's looking for before grunting with annoyance, backtracking and going elsewhere.

MARINA

What exactly are we—

ARNO

(concentrating)

Shh.

She follows him row after row until ...

ARNO (cont'd)

(eureka)

No no no no no.

Arno hurries to the back where the light is dimmest.

Concerned, Marina follows at greater distance and he loses her in the dark. She stumbles around in a bit of panic until bumping into the old man.

ARNO (cont'd)  
Dance on your own feet!

MARINA  
Sorry.

ARNO  
Well?

MARINA  
Well what?

He motions to the top of a tall shelf.

ARNO  
My climbin' days are behind me.

Marina looks worriedly around before starting up.

ARNO (cont'd)  
That big one. Yut. Nope. Over. Over.  
In the middle. The other middle.  
There ya go. Easy now. I don't own a  
squeegee and you're too big to carry.

Marina climbs up the precarious shelving unit.  
It screeches and shimmies under her weight.  
Odds and ends fall to the floor throwing up dust plumes.

Father and daughter cough as Marina strains to hoist down  
the terribly heavy box. But she loses her grip and drops it.

Arno jumps out of its path, his helmet hitting the floor.  
Out spill dozens of new copies of the book she showed him.

ARNO (cont'd)  
Good christ, trying to do me in!?

Arno picks up a book and opens to the flyleaf.  
It's autographed by its author Eugene Greenleaf.

MARINA  
These are mint condition.

ARNO  
Have one. Have the whole box.  
I happen to know the author.

MARINA  
You know Eugene Greenleaf?

Arno gives her a "guess again" look.

MARINA (cont'd)

No.

He shrugs a "Yup."

MARINA (cont'd)

OK, now I'm totally confused.

ARNO

Runs in the family.

MARINA

Just because you wrote the book  
doesn't mean you're not ...

ARNO

A serial killer?

MARINA

Some might say it's even more proof.

Arno stares at her a long moment. Hard to tell if he's angry  
or concerned. Just then, he glances over Marina's shoulder.

She turns to see what he's looking at as the lights go dark.

OVER BLACK

Marina screams and stumbles in the dark.

MARINA (O.C.)

Leave me alone! Don't touch me!

ARNO (O.C.)

Just hold still.

MARINA (O.C.)

No! Get away from me!

ARNO (O.C.)

Stay put!

Crash! Marina yells in pain.

Arno's miner's helmet is back on his head and shining on  
Marina, writhing on the floor amidst the murder books.

He goes to help her up and she backs away in terror.

MARINA

Don't you dare!

ARNO

Help you up?

MARINA

You went for me.

ARNO

I was grabbing for my helmet.

He holds out a hand. Momentary distrust.

ARNO (cont'd)

Got yourself worked into a frenzy.  
Come on. Shot a vodka'll chill you  
the fuck out.

Refusing his hand, she gets up on her own.

ARNO (cont'd)

You are your mother's daughter.

Making their way to the attic door ...

MARINA

What happened to the lights?

Arno points up. Wind outside thrashes the trees.

ARNO

Where you staying tonight?

MARINA

Hadn't thought that far ahead.

ARNO

Come on. Let's see if we can get the  
power back on.

MARINA

Where we going now?

ARNO

Fusebox is in the basement.

Marina looks skeptical.

ARNO (cont'd)

If you really think I'm dangerous ...

MARINA

You wouldn't kill your own daughter.

ARNO

Wouldn't I?

EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Faintly through the raging windstorm, that thumping.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - BASEMENT STEPS - NIGHT

Making their way down into the creepy dungeon ...

ARNO

Watch your step. My grandmother fell  
down a flight of cement stairs and  
broke every bone in her body.

MARINA

She survive?

ARNO

Not well.

Marina follows Arno through a maze of boxes.

The only light his dim miner's helmet.

MARINA

What's in all these?

ARNO

Voices of the lost and dead.

MARINA

I became interested in BRK cuz mom  
was. Looking back, it was just an  
excuse to get closer to her. Didn't  
work, of course. She never let anyone  
get close. Was that your experience?

Arno flips the breakers and a dim bulb glows far from where  
they stand. It's even creepier in here with the light on.

ARNO

Nothing good comes from poking around  
in the dark. Apt to find monsters.

MARINA

I want you to be a monster. At least  
there'd be a reason for her to stay  
away from you. At least I'd have a  
valid reason for not having a father.

ARNO

You really want to hear my side?  
Why I did the things I did?

Arno goes to a stack of boxes, and another.  
Finds a machete on a worktable.

Marina tenses.

He knocks a stack of boxes over and slashes the seal on one  
and drops the blade with a jangle that makes her shiver.

Finally, he pulls out a stack of cassettes banded together.

MARINA  
What's all that?

ARNO  
I'm going to need a drink for this.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Marina and Arno sit with drinks by candlelight.

Arno pulls a tape out of his voice recorder and replaces it  
with one of the tapes from the basement dated May 1959.

ARNO  
You have to understand, there was a  
time in this country when nobody even  
knew what a serial killer was. The  
Black River killings began nearly a  
full decade before anyone had ever  
heard the name Zodiac. Absolutely  
certain you want to hear this?

She does.

Arno clicks PLAY and a voice from his past speaks.

MARINA  
Who's this?

ARNO  
Chief of police. George Grant.  
He was a good man who did his best to  
solve these murders.

CHIEF GRANT (V.O.)  
... or persons involved. Judging by  
the methods of execution, we are  
treating the crimes as connected with  
two previous incidents in homes along  
the Black River. If anyone has any  
information that might help us solve  
this case, please don't hesitate to  
contact law enforcement ...

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. MURDER SCENE - DAY

**MAY 1959.** CLOSE ON young Arno's hand holding the same recorder in the direction of Police CHIEF GRANT, flanked by two officers and addressing a crowd of reporters.

One of the cops is tall and mean-looking OFFICER ZALE.

A cute young woman, JUNE LANDON, weaves in and out of reporters and lookieloops with a camera.

She takes pictures of everything.

CHIEF GRANT

Now, we're gonna take some questions.  
But let me remind you: this is an  
ongoing investigation and certain  
details will remain unavailable.

The reporters all start to ask questions at once.

It's a jumble-fuck until the Chief points at Arno.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)

Arnie?

YOUNG ARNO

Thanks, Chief. Uh, have you been able  
to determine whether the killer is  
acting alone or's this a team effort?

CHIEF GRANT

As best we can tell, thanks to our  
sole living witness, it would appear  
to be the work of a lone killer. But  
we're not ruling out the possibility  
of accomplices.

REPORTER #2

Whatta you say to critics accusing  
the department of dropping the ball?

CHIEF GRANT

You're referring to our checkpoint  
where the alleged killer was  
questioned and let go. For the last  
time, that gentleman's car was  
thoroughly checked. There was no  
legal reason to hold him.

REPORTER #2

Is he a suspect?

CHIEF GRANT

Right now, everyone's a suspect.

REPORTER #3

But his car was spotted outside the third victim's home the evening that murder was committed.

CHIEF GRANT

You want to do my job, Mr. Pearce?

Chief Grant holds his hat out toward the reporter.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)

You stand up here trying to do the impossible and I'll write half-truths about your every move. Next question.

YOUNG ARNO

What I'd like to know is if there's been any significance regarding the days the murders were committed.

CHIEF GRANT

Individual days, no. But there does appear to be some sort of half-life pattern at play here.

REPORTER #3

Half-life pattern, Chief?

CHIEF GRANT

The kill dates have been accelerating by half each time. The first was sixty days between victim one and two. Thirty days between victim two and three. And fifteen days between victims three and four. We expect the next killing to occur on or about midday seven days from yesterday.

YOUNG ARNO

What happens when that gap reaches zero? The killer just going to quit?

CHIEF GRANT

We just don't know. Judging by the nature of these crimes—something gets a taste for blood, it don't usually stop until it's stopped.

REPORTER #4

This killer a mad dog, Chief Grant?

CHIEF GRANT

That's all we have for now.

Reporters shout indistinctly as the presser wraps.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

Young Arno furiously scribbles notes as he walks to his car.

Stalking up from behind, curious Young June follows closely—he unaware—reading over his shoulder.

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - CITY STREET - DAY

Stopping at his car to finish writing, June startles him.

YOUNG JUNE

Arno Bauer. I read your column. Funny stuff. I like the one about your grandmother falling down the stairs.

YOUNG ARNO

Wasn't meant to be funny.

YOUNG JUNE

That's why it was so funny.

YOUNG ARNO

Well, thank you. I've got a deadline.

YOUNG JUNE

We all got deadlines.

Arno starts his car and puts on his seatbelt. Safety-belted into the passenger seat, Arno's typewriter—the same one in his home office. As he's about to go, June leans into his open door—a little too close as if telling a secret.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)

Wanna tip?

YOUNG ARNO

You always help the competition?

YOUNG JUNE

Oh, you're gonna owe me big-time.

YOUNG ARNO

Alright. Tip away.

YOUNG JUNE  
Salzburg Coffee Shop.

YOUNG ARNO  
What about it?

YOUNG JUNE  
Victims're all connected to it.  
Got your attention now, ain't I.

June counts victims on her fingers.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
Victim the first, waitress at said  
establishment. Victim the second met  
his realtor there the very morning he  
was killed. Victim three's brother is  
a third shift short order cook. And  
victim the fourth—

YOUNG ARNO  
The milkman.

YOUNG JUNE  
You've been paying attention.

YOUNG ARNO  
What about checkpoint guy?

YOUNG JUNE  
He's not the killer.

YOUNG ARNO  
So certain.

YOUNG JUNE  
Be sure and credit, "A source with  
intimate knowledge of the case."

Sirens interrupted them.  
As she runs away ...

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
Time to make the headlines!

YOUNG ARNO  
Hey! Wait! Whattoo I owe you!?

YOUNG JUNE  
TBD!

YOUNG ARNO  
(to himself)  
"TBD?"

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

By the light of a lone lamp. Young Arno types furiously at his old typewriter. Something about the dark he finds safe.

HE WRITES: *"Heads of the victims had been transposed. The father's head was set on the neck of the young son. The mother's on the neck of the daughter, and so forth. Officials dared not speculate on the killer's reasoning."*

Arno's startled by the ringing phone.

It's his newspaper editor LUCY WITT.

All the while, unnoticed by Arno, something indiscernible peeks in through the window behind him.

YOUNG ARNO  
(into phone)  
Crime Desk. Arno Bauer speaking.

LUCY WITT  
Where we at?

YOUNG ARNO  
Lucy. Cops aren't giving up much.

LUCY WITT  
Surprise surprise.

YOUNG ARNO  
But ...

LUCY WITT  
You know I love your butts.

YOUNG ARNO  
Turns out every victim has a connection.

LUCY WITT  
Connection?

YOUNG ARNO  
Loose connection. You ready for this?  
Salzburg Coffee Shop.

LUCY WITT  
Oh god. My dad has breakfast there almost every day. Where you get this?

YOUNG ARNO

A source with intimate knowledge of the case. I know. I know. But this isn't just some second-hand gossip.

LUCY WITT

So it's first-hand gossip?

YOUNG ARNO

I'm confident.

LUCY WITT

You know I like bulletproof. This doesn't feel bulletproof.

Arno listens while Lucy decides.

LUCY WITT (cont'd)

This comes back on us—

YOUNG ARNO

I know.

LUCY WITT

We'll run it.

YOUNG ARNO

Yes.

LUCY WITT

Don't celebrate yet. Got two hours to get it to the copy desk. In other news: how're you feeling?

Arno doesn't know how to answer.

LUCY WITT (cont'd)

Think you might be ready to try coming back into the office?

YOUNG ARNO

Is it my work?

LUCY WITT

No.

Arno lets out a long nervous sigh.

LUCY WITT (cont'd)

Were only up to me, you could work anywhere you want. Just get better.

YOUNG ARNO

I'm trying.

LUCY WITT  
I'll put Zelinski on the coffee shop.

YOUNG ARNO  
No. No. I can handle it.

LUCY WITT  
Alright.

YOUNG ARNO  
Hey. Ever heard the expression "TBD?"

LUCY WITT  
To be determined?

YOUNG ARNO  
Oh.

LUCY WITT  
Deadline's calling.

Arno hangs up and stares off into space with a worried look.  
Jarred from his daze by a sound behind him.  
He turns to look as the figure bolts away from the window.

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arno hurries to the window out back but the figure's gone.  
Something down a dark alley crashes through trashcans.  
He starts as if to chase but fear stops him.

From inside his place, his phone rings (PRE-LAP)

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - NIGHT

Arno's home phone continues ringing as Arno sits outside the newspaper office, his news story on two sheets of typed paper in his hands. He's more stressed than before.

O.S. Breathless Arno answers the phone.

ARNO (V.O.)  
(into phone)  
Crime Desk. Arno Bauer. Hello?

He's greeted by a sinister whisper ...

UNKNOWN CALLER (V.O.)  
I know yooooou.

ARNO  
Lucy? Who is this. Hello? Hello!?

EXT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Arno takes his story up to the door and hesitates.

Fakes a happy face before entering.

EXT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DUMPSTER - NIGHT

Something unseen watches Arno go in the office.

It then goes across the mostly empty parking lot to ...

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - NIGHT

Unseen entity opens Arno's door and sets a perfectly folded and stapled-shut paper lunch sack on the seat.

EXT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Arno looks relaxed and cheery as he walks toward the glass exit doors. But as soon as he bursts from the office, he gasps for air and staggers to his car.

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - NIGHT

Arno goes to get in but the sack stops him cold.

He looks around the parking lot. Nobody. Thinks long and hard before touching the bag. Something heavy inside. He shakes the bag. Examines it under the security light.

That's when he notices bloodstains on the bottom.

Terrified, he jumps in his car and locks the door.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - NIGHT

Arno hyperventilates while checking his pulse.

He turns on the radio. CLASSICAL MUSIC plays.

He leans back and closes his eyes to slow his breathing.

Song ends and he looks at the bag in the passenger seat.

Thinks a moment.

Puts on his seatbelt and starts the car.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Arno's car is parked out front.

CHIEF GRANT (V.O.)  
Alright, let's just take a breath.

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.)  
It's not a prank.

INT. POLICE STATION - CHIEF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Chief Grant is joined by a female officer taking notes.

CHIEF GRANT  
I never said it was. But people in  
our lines of work do sometimes  
receive interesting hate mail.

YOUNG ARNO  
The bag's bloody.

CHIEF GRANT  
That's what we're gonna find out.  
Right now, let's just think about  
anything out of the ordinary you may  
have encountered recently.

YOUNG ARNO  
None that I can think of.

CHIEF GRANT  
What about the phone call.

YOUNG ARNO  
Angry calls all the time. Mostly  
family members the accused.

They're interrupted by another officer who steps into the  
office and nods at the chief. Chief motions the officer over  
and she whispers in his ear. His eyes widen.

YOUNG ARNO (cont'd)  
Well?

CHIEF GRANT  
It's blood.

YOUNG ARNO  
What's in the bag?

Chief shakes his head "no."

YOUNG ARNO (cont'd)  
I've seen a family's heads rearranged  
on their bodies. What could possibly  
be worse than that?

Chief signals his people to leave he and Arno alone.

CHIEF GRANT  
Gonna write a story on this?

YOUNG ARNO  
I-I-I ... I don't know. I mean, I  
kind of have to. It's my job. Why?

Chief thinks real careful before answering.

YOUNG ARNO (cont'd)  
Starting to scare me, Chief.

CHIEF GRANT  
Are you the Black River Killer?

YOUNG ARNO  
What!? No. Of course not. How could  
you even. I came to you for help.

CHIEF GRANT  
Alright. Alright. Calm down.

YOUNG ARNO  
Am I a suspect? Seriously?

CHIEF GRANT  
You're not a suspect.

YOUNG ARNO  
Then why—

CHIEF GRANT  
Cause I needed to know.

Arno doesn't get it.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
Guilty folks don't respond that way.

YOUNG ARNO  
Am I free to go?

Arno gets up to leave.

CHIEF GRANT  
(reassuring)  
Settle down.

Arno retakes his seat.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
There's nothin' stoppin you from  
blabbin' this to congress. Do that  
and I guaran-damn-tee this sicko's  
gonna turn you into his own personal  
assistant. And when you get tired a  
playin' secretary, he's like to do  
unto you as he has done to others.

YOUNG ARNO  
I'm fucked.

CHIEF GRANT  
If you own a gun, I suggest keeping  
it on your person. Lock your doors.  
Don't go out alone. Report any  
suspicious activity directly to me.  
This is my home phone.

YOUNG ARNO  
Am I a target?

CHIEF GRANT  
Most times a bad dog comes around,  
you hold still he loses interest and  
moves on.

YOUNG ARNO  
And if he doesn't. Lose interest.

CHIEF GRANT  
Arnie, I'm doin' everything I can to  
catch this sumbitch. It's why I'm  
here right now and not in bed with  
the missus.

YOUNG ARNO  
I don't have a gun. Whattas that even  
cost? Where do I go to buy it?

Chief thinks, glances around, heavy sighs.

He gets up and goes over to a locked cabinet. Pulls a big  
wad of jingly keys from his pocket and opens the door and  
pulls out an old police issue .38 and a box of bullets.

CHIEF GRANT  
You're gonna take these down to  
Officer Cooper and he's gonna teach  
you how not to shoot yourself.

Arno can't believe any of this is happening.

Chief puts the gun and ammo into a carrying case and hands them over to Arno, who's on the verge of all out panic.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
Keep calm, stay alert, you'll be  
alright. Just remember: this thing is  
for self-defense, not huntin'.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Arno wanders the halls in a daze until he reaches ...

INT. POLICE STATION - FIRING RANGE - NIGHT

Officer Cooper demonstrates to freaked-out Arno how to load, turn the safety on and off, aim, and shoot.

Too afraid to pull the trigger, Arno sets the gun down.

But the vision of the bloody bag flashes in Arno's mind and he picks the gun back up. Still lost, he motions for Cooper, who takes the gun and again demonstrates.

Arno loads the gun, aims, fires a shot. It scares the shit out him. Cooper laughs but reassures him to keep going.

Arno fires the other five shots and misses the target but he empties the chamber and reloads and fires again.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

With his new gun up an out, Arno patrols, window to window, checking each room, peeking outside. Confident his stalker is about, he sits on the couch, caressing the gun.

A few moments and he's back checking for intruders. On his final round, Arno notices the sun starting to rise. Unable to sleep, he gets his reporter tools and heads out.

EXT. SALZBURG COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Arno's car is parked across the street with him in it.

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - DAY

Arno watches customers go in and out of the coffee shop a few moments before getting out of his car just as a horn blares and nearly takes his door off.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Arno pretends to look at fliers pinned to the cash register as he sly scans the place. Mom and kids, truck driver, hungover college students. In the corner, a drifter draws on a paper placemat.

Arno sits the other side of the room so he can watch him. Waitress appears and Arno distractedly orders.

YOUNG ARNO  
Regular coffee. Please. Wheat toast.

Arno hides his audio recorder under a napkin and makes notes of the people he sees. Customers come and go.

On his way to the restroom, Arno tries to see what the drifter's drawing. Exiting, Arno sees the drifter has a hook for one hand. The man sees him staring and scowls back.

It's a tense moment but Arno can't seem to move on.

He finally gets a look at the drawing. It's a stick figure family but the mom and dad bodies have tiny heads and the little bodies have giant heads.

Arno looks horrified.

DRIFTER  
You oughta know.

YOUNG ARNO  
Know what? What should I know.

DRIFTER  
The inside a yer mumma's cunny.

Arno's taken aback by such vulgarity.

DRIFTER (cont'd)  
Dark. Warm. No better place to hide.

The drifter motions with his hook hand as if writing.

DRIFTER (cont'd)  
Left my initials on them pinky walls.

Arno stumbles back into a table of construction workers.

CONSTRUCTION WORKER #1  
Fuck yer doin'?

CONSTRUCTION WORKER #2  
Get off me.

Arno fumbles his way back to his seat and makes a point of not looking at the drifter, though the drifter watches him.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Arno spends all day watching people come and go.

The drifter leaves.

Arno changes tapes on his recorder several times.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

The place looks empty from out here.  
Just Arno in a window seat, a waitress wiping tables.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Arno's tired and bored and about to leave when he's startled by June plopping down in the seat across from him. She has a copy of that day's paper, Arno's story on page one.

YOUNG JUNE

You actually used what I told you?

YOUNG ARNO

Wait, what?

YOUNG JUNE

You reported hearsay. It's hilarious.

Arno can't speak in his shock.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)

Gotcha! I'm starving.

Arno recovers from the scare.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)

Spot any murderer types?

YOUNG ARNO

Was a guy with a hook for a hand.  
Everyone else seemed pretty normal.

YOUNG JUNE

It's always the guy with a hook for a hand. Buying me breakfast by the by.

YOUNG ARNO  
And we're even?

YOUNG JUNE  
No but I'm gonna need the energy if  
we're going back to your place.

YOUNG ARNO  
I—

YOUNG JUNE  
Don't like sex?

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

From the couch, Naked Arno, dress shirt for a blanket, talks  
to June through the bathroom door. First-time awkwardness.

YOUNG JUNE (O.C.)  
Whatta you got to eat?

YOUNG ARNO  
Cereal. I don't really cook.

YOUNG JUNE (O.C.)  
Sure know how to wow a girl.

YOUNG ARNO  
I can order a pizza.

YOUNG JUNE (O.C.)  
Pepperoni. No sauce. Giant diet soda.

YOUNG ARNO  
What kind?

YOUNG JUNE (O.C.)  
I don't give a shit. It's all poison.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Young Arno and Young June eat pizza and drink soda.

YOUNG ARNO  
Thanks again.

YOUNG JUNE  
You're not so bad yourself.

YOUNG ARNO  
Well, that. But the tip.

YOUNG JUNE  
Want another one?

Arno leans in with a hungry look and June whispers ...

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
Get better snacks. I gotta scoot.

YOUNG ARNO  
June. Would you uh want to ...

YOUNG JUNE  
I don't date.

YOUNG ARNO  
Whatta you call this?

YOUNG JUNE  
Sex. And pizza.

As she leaves, she kisses him on the forehead.

YOUNG ARNO  
Can I call you?

YOUNG JUNE  
No phone.

YOUNG ARNO  
How do I?

YOUNG JUNE  
(wink)  
I drink a lotta coffee.

He doesn't get it at first. Then, "Oh."

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - DAY

Young Arno sits outside the coffee shop in the passenger seat, typewriter on his lap. He types over humdrum chatter on the police scanner until an alert grabs his attention.

POLICE DISPATCHER (V.O.)  
Be advised reports of four bodies at  
a residence located south of Alameda  
Street. BRK-related. Officers advised  
to take precautions as toxic odors  
are reported outside the home ...

The alert fades as Arno starts his car and speeds away.

EXT. MURDER SCENE #2 - DAY

Arno ducks under police tape and follows a police officer to the house where he's stopped by a cop guarding the entrance.

ARNO  
Phew. What is that?

COP #1  
Chemical spill nearby. unconnected.

ARNO  
Toxic?

COP #2  
Just stinks to high hell.

YOUNG ARNO  
Chief around?

COP #1  
I'll let him know you're here.

While Arno waits, June sneaks up on him, startling him.

YOUNG ARNO  
Where've you been?

YOUNG JUNE  
Living my life, nosy.

YOUNG ARNO  
No. I just thought ...

June pulls Arno away from the cop guarding the door.

YOUNG ARNO (cont'd)  
I don't think this one's connected.

YOUNG JUNE  
Why's that?

YOUNG ARNO  
Today's six days, not seven.

YOUNG JUNE  
Maybe he found the perfect victims  
and couldn't pass up the chance.

Chief Grant interrupts them.

CHIEF GRANT  
Arnie?

YOUNG ARNO  
Wondering if you might have a few  
moments. Quick interview.

CHIEF GRANT  
Do you one better.

Chief motions for Arnie to follow him into the house.

YOUNG JUNE  
Mind if I tag along?

CHIEF GRANT  
Maybe when your newspaper starts  
treating my office with respect.

YOUNG JUNE  
I'm really sorry about that editorial  
but I had nothing to do with it.

CHIEF GRANT  
So am I, little lady.

Arno shrugs "sorry" to angry June.

On their way inside, chief lays out the rules ...

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
No photos, no personally identifying  
details, and I'm not to be quoted.

YOUNG ARNO  
Yessir.

INT. MURDER SCENE #2 - DAY

Arno, now wearing forensic booties and gloves, follows the  
chief around the house. Before they get to any carnage ...

CHIEF GRANT  
This your first murder?

Arno makes a face as if being accused.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
Murder scene.

Arno doesn't respond.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
If you need to vomit, do it outside.

INT. MURDER SCENE #2 - KITCHEN

White walls sprayed with blood.  
Legs of a man and woman stick out from under a sheet.

CHIEF GRANT  
You alright?

Arno nods.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
Worst of it's in here.

INT. MURDER SCENE #2 - BATHROOM

Blood stains in and around the tub.  
Child's bunny slipper in a blood puddle on the floor.

CHIEF GRANT  
Killer hung the kids upside-down from  
the shower rod. Cut their throats.  
Moved the bodies to the little girl's  
room. Why the tub's so fulla blood.

YOUNG ARNO  
What about the parents?

CHIEF GRANT  
We figure they was either too heavy  
to move to the bathroom ... or the  
killer already had enough blood.

YOUNG ARNO  
For what?

CHIEF GRANT  
Take a bath.

Arno flinches at the thought.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
We found several towels that look to  
of been used for that very purpose.

YOUNG ARNO  
What. So, the killer left here  
covered in blood? Jesus Christ.

CHIEF GRANT  
Don't bring him into it.

Arno notices something and gets on the floor to look.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
No touchin' evidence.

ARNO  
The tag.

Chief Grant gets on his hands and knees next to Arno.

On the backside of the tag is a black upside-down cross.

CHIEF GRANT  
How the hell'd you see that?  
Oughta put you on the payroll.

ARNO  
What is it?

CHIEF GRANT  
Looks like a plus symbol.

ARNO  
Or a cross.

CHIEF GRANT  
Shit. Zale! Get in here! Alright,  
Arnie, this where the tour ends.

Officer Zale appears.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
Let Mr. Bauer out the back way. And  
tell Jenkins I need a camera in here.

Chief Grant glances over at Arno as he gets up and notices  
black marks on Arno's fingers.

CHIEF GRANT (cont'd)  
Grubby paws.

ARNO  
What?

Arno looks at his fingers, rubs them together.

ARNO (cont'd)  
Typewriter ribbon.

CHIEF GRANT  
Those things make a terrible mess.

INT. MURDER SCENE #2 - MOVING ROOM TO ROOM - DAY

Led by mean-looking Officer Zale, Arno sees upside-down crosses in blood on walls, floor, ceiling.

On a table an uncapped black marker sits on an envelope marked with a black upside-down cross and the letters "BRK."

Arno nervously rubs his ink-stained fingers together.

INT. MURDER SCENE #2 - BACKDOOR - DAY

Officer Zale opens the door to let Arno out.

OFFICER ZALE

Bloody enough for ya? It's one for the masturbation rolodex for sure. Eh, they probably deserved it, right. Just jokin' with ya, bud. Relax.

EXT. MURDER SCENE #2 - DAY

Arno exits to find June snooping around the backdoor.

OFFICER ZALE

What are you doing?

YOUNG JUNE

My job. Not everyone gets to stand around looking stupid for a living.

OFFICER ZALE

Chief told you stay back, missy.

YOUNG JUNE

How bout you kiss my big toe.

OFFICER ZALE

How bout I get my ticket book out.

YOUNG ARNO

We're going. Come on.

YOUNG JUNE

Where we going?

YOUNG ARNO

I'm going to work on my story.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Arno works on his typewriter.

June reads over his shoulder. Points out mistakes.

June dances to music while Arno changes a typewriter ribbon.

They have sex.

June searches the empty cupboards and fridge.

END MONTAGE.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - DAY

Arno and June pull through a fast-food drive-thru.

While Arno orders, June picks his recorder up off the seat and hits PLAY to sounds of a woman moaning sexually.

YOUNG ARNO

Whoa!

Arno grabs at the recorder but June keeps it away from him.

DRIVE-THRU GUY (V.O.)

Welcome to Fry Boys. Can I interest you in a strawberry malted?

YOUNG ARNO

A moment please. Give me that back.

YOUNG JUNE

Is that me?

Arno' mortified.

DRIVE-THRU GUY (V.O.)

You need to order something or—

YOUNG ARNO

Just a moment.

YOUNG JUNE

You dirty little pervert.

DRIVE-THRU GUY (V.O.)

Sir, I'm going to have to ask you—

YOUNG ARNO  
Fucking wait!

June's eyes go wide at Arno's uncharacteristic outburst.  
Arno reaches out, showing he's under control.

YOUNG JUNE  
What else have you recorded? Our  
conversations? Me in the bathroom?

YOUNG ARNO  
It's just something I do. It doesn't  
mean anything. I promise.

YOUNG JUNE  
How many a these you have?

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Arno pulls three boxes of cassette tapes from his closet.  
June watches with concern.

YOUNG ARNO  
Started when I was a kid. Birds,  
traffic, bodily functions. Then I  
started recording my parents  
conversations. And arguments.

YOUNG JUNE  
Why?

YOUNG ARNO  
I don't know. I was alone a lot.

YOUNG JUNE  
I want all my recordings. Now.

Arno digs through the box, tossing cassette cases marked  
"JUNIE" on the bed. June collects them one by one.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
"Junie?" This all of them?

YOUNG ARNO  
There's nothing bad.

YOUNG JUNE  
You recorded us doing it!

YOUNG ARNO

Just the once. I mean, the others are just us talking. Or not talking.

YOUNG JUNE

Whatta you mean, not talking?

YOUNG ARNO

Breathing. Sleeping. Watching TV.

YOUNG JUNE

Almost afraid to ask: what do you do with them?

YOUNG ARNO

I get lonely. They help.

YOUNG JUNE

You not see how messed up this is? It's sneaky. It's lying. I thought you were nice, and you lied to me.

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Sad Arno watches June burn her tapes.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arno sits alone examining his recorder. He clicks PLAY and his own voice is heard.

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.)

You are a complete asshole.

He clicks STOP and REWIND and PLAY and again ...

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.) (cont'd)

You are a complete asshole.

He clicks STOP and REWIND and PLAY and again ...

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.) (cont'd)

You are a complete—

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Arno comes in with a cake and flowers. Makes dinner. Sits at the table. Watches the clock. No June. He waits.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's 3 a.m. when June cuddles up next to Arno on the couch.

YOUNG JUNE  
I don't care who else you record.  
I am off limits. Now and forever.

YOUNG ARNO  
Cross my heart, hope to—

She silences him with a finger to his lips.

YOUNG JUNE  
Gonna hold you to that.

YOUNG ARNO  
I made dinner.

YOUNG JUNE  
We should write a book. About BRK.

YOUNG ARNO  
Move in.

YOUNG JUNE  
Before marriage?

Arno's confused.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
Hmm. Would make writing the book  
easier. I dunno. You wearing a wire?

YOUNG ARNO  
What? No. I promised.

YOUNG JUNE  
Don't be sensitive.

Arno holds up a door key.

She shows him a similar key.

YOUNG ARNO  
When? How?

She shushes him and goes in for a kiss.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - DAY/NIGHT

Arno cooks while June reads pages he's typed.

Arno and June sort news articles on BRK.

They cut articles out with scissors.

June lectures while Arno takes notes.

June reads over his shoulder while he types.

OLD ARNO (V.O.)

It was your mother's idea to write  
under an assumed name. To protect  
ourselves from undue scrutiny and to  
avoid becoming BRK targets ourselves.  
We took a lot of crazy chances.  
Sneaking into crime scenes, borrowing  
official documents. We even followed  
the police. Then one night, we came  
very close to quitting ...

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - NIGHT

Parked outside the coffee shop, Arno at the wheel.

June in the passenger seat snaps pictures of a guy—face  
obscured—coming out of the coffee shop.

When the mystery man is about to turn the corner at the end  
of the block, Arno and June jump out and follow him.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Arno and June follow the mystery man down a dark alley  
toward an old van. He gets in but just sits there.

The duo walks past the van. The van starts and follows them.

They exit the alley and take the sidewalk down a street.

The van follows as they circle the block back to their car.

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - NIGHT

June and Arno try to be cool as the van pulls up behind  
them, its lights blinding through the back window.

They drive a while and stop for a stoplight. The van follows their every turn as they make their way through the city.

END MONTAGE.

Finally, they pull into the police station and the guy gets out of the van and yells at them ...

VAN GUY  
Tell Marie she wants child support  
she needs to lemme see my damn kids!

The guy storms off, leaving them laughing with relief.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - DAY

They are happy enough. The stories keep rolling in. They work on the book: Arno types, June dictates.

They get photos back from the developer of various suspects, crime scenes, police press conferences, Officer Zale.

While they look through the pictures, Arno's voice recorder plays a statement from Chief Grant.

CHIEF GRANT (V.O.)  
Considering the ease BRK moves about,  
we cannot discount this individual  
may be employed or posing as someone  
in a official capacity. Anything from  
a utility company, city employee,  
even a fireman or taxi driver. So,  
we're asking everyone to be alert.

June puts on her coat to leave.

YOUNG ARNO  
Where you headed?

YOUNG JUNE  
Editorial meeting.

YOUNG ARNO  
Watch out for crazy van guys.

YOUNG JUNE  
(mocking)  
*You tell Marie, if she wants her  
child support ...*

EVENING. Arno finishes typing and goes to the kitchen, looks in the empty fridge. Notes the clock. Grabs his coat.

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Arno pulls up to the coffee shop and is about to get out when through the window he sees June and Officer Zale at a table and looking a bit too cozy.

He watches them pay the bill and kiss and leave.

Arno follows Zale's.

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR/ZALE'S CAR - CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Arno follows Zale through the city.

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - ZALE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Arno follows Zale to a modest house and watches him go in.

Arno watches Zale's house for awhile then leaves.

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arno pulls up in his car and parks. Watches June walk past a lit window. He thinks a few moments, unsure of what to do.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Arno enters to find June working on her laptop.

YOUNG JUNE  
Hey, where ya been?

Arno closes the door and turns to face her but she hasn't looked up from her computer.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
Hope you brought dinner I'm starved.

YOUNG ARNO  
Where were you?

YOUNG JUNE  
When?

YOUNG ARNO  
Before you were here.

YOUNG JUNE  
What's wrong?

YOUNG ARNO

I saw you.

YOUNG JUNE

Saw me what? Oh, geez. He just tells me things, that's all. Because he thinks I like him.

YOUNG ARNO

I saw you kissing.

YOUNG JUNE

It's just an act. To get us more for the book. And it worked. Look.

She holds up a stack of police reports.  
Arno remains unswayed.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)

I forgave you.

Arno studies her face. Does he believe her?

EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - DAY

The sun's just coming up.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

June wakes to find Arno dressed and tying his shoes.

YOUNG JUNE

Coffee?

YOUNG ARNO

Police press conference at 10.

YOUNG JUNE

Another murder?

YOUNG ARNO

Unclear.

YOUNG JUNE

Wait. We can ride together.

YOUNG ARNO

You can share my pictures.

YOUNG JUNE

Don't hafta twist my tits.

INT. POLICE STATION - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Arno and the usual gaggle of reporters listen to Chief Grant discuss the latest in the Black River Killer case. When it's over, a cop hands out copies of the chief's press release.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Heading to his car, Arno sees Officer Zale getting into a civilian vehicle. Arno hurries to his car and follows him.

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - CITY STREETS - DAY

Arno follows the cop through town: liquor store, food truck.

EXT. OFFICER ZALE'S HOUSE - DAY

Arno watches the house all morning and afternoon.

SUNSET. Zale exits in civilian clothes and gets in his car.

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR/ZALE'S CAR - CITY STREETS - NIGHT

Arno follows Zale.

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - MURDER SCENE #1 - NIGHT

They end up a now-abandoned house cordoned off by tattered police tape. Arno watches Zale sneak inside.

Arno waits a moment, then follows.

EXT. MURDER SCENE #1 - NIGHT

Arno tries to peek in the windows but curtains obscure the interior. What he can see are camera flashes from inside.

Arno goes around the back of the house and spots Zale through a glass door taking Polaroids. Arno makes notes in his notebook and doesn't see Zale coming out the backdoor.

Arno glances up just in time to see Zale's fist.

ALL GOES BLACK.

FADE IN:

Arno wakes alone, his face bloodied and bruised.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arno enters to find June gone.

He strips off his dirty clothes and takes a shower.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Arno wakes to find June's side of the bed empty. He glances around with concern before picking up the phone and dialing.

YOUNG ARNO

Is June Landon at her desk?

NEWSPAPER OPERATOR

Yes. I'll transfer your call.

YOUNG ARNO

No. That's OK.

Arno hangs up and sits deep in thought.

He feels his tender face. Winces.

INT. MAIN PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Arno sits in the main office surrounded by secretaries and lawyers. The receptionist finishes her phone conversation and addresses nervous and badly beaten Arno.

RECEPTIONIST

Can I help you?

YOUNG ARNO

I need to see the prosecutor.

RECEPTIONIST

He's in court.

YOUNG ARNO

Deputy prosecutor in?

RECEPTIONIST

What's this regarding?

YOUNG ARNO

I can't discuss with anyone but her.

RECEPTIONIST

(annoyed)

One moment, please.

She picks up her phone and hits the intercom.

RECEPTIONIST (cont'd)  
(into phone)  
I have Arno Bauer asking to talk to you. He won't say. Mr. Bauer, she's very busy at the moment.

YOUNG ARNO  
Tell her I know who the Black River Killer is.

INT. DEPUTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Arno finishes telling the DEPUTY PROSECUTOR his story.

ARNO  
I didn't know where else to go.  
Couldn't call the police.

She sits with the shock of it.

DEPUTY PROSECUTOR  
I respect your work so I'm going to be completely straight with you: from what you've told me, the only thing I could even attempt to prosecute is the alleged assault.

YOUNG ARNO  
Alleged? Look at my face.

DEPUTY PROSECUTOR  
Without a witness, and the accused being a police officer, your case is far from airtight.

YOUNG ARNO  
You don't find it all a bit strange?

DEPUTY PROSECUTOR  
I find it very strange. And you may be right. But it takes a lot more to indict a cop. And I'd be very careful about who else you share this with.

YOUNG ARNO  
You're just gonna let him off?

DEPUTY PROSECUTOR  
Get me something I can use.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Arno enters to the sounds of cooking.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Arno finds June making dinner.

YOUNG JUNE  
Hope you like whitefish.

When Arno doesn't respond, she glances over at him.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
Oh my god.

Arno flops in a chair as she rushes to him.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
What happened?

Arno silently glares.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
Were you in a crash? Say something.

YOUNG ARNO  
Did you know?

YOUNG JUNE  
Know what?

YOUNG ARNO  
Did you know?

YOUNG JUNE  
About your face?

YOUNG ARNO  
That the man you've been getting your  
tips from is the Black River Killer.

YOUNG JUNE  
What!? Is that who did this? You need  
to tell me what's going on here! Now!

YOUNG ARNO  
You don't get to yell at me. Your  
other boyfriend is a psycho killer.

YOUNG JUNE  
You're my only boyfriend.

YOUNG ARNO  
Oh, Christ.

YOUNG JUNE  
Did my name come up?

YOUNG ARNO  
When he was pummeling me? No.

YOUNG JUNE  
Did you accuse him?

YOUNG ARNO  
I went to the prosecutor.

YOUNG JUNE  
You what!? You don't antagonize a  
psycho! Especially one with a badge!

YOUNG ARNO  
Well, it doesn't matter. Prosecutor's  
office won't do shit. What do I do?

YOUNG JUNE  
Run off to Vegas?

YOUNG ARNO  
I'm serious.

YOUNG JUNE  
So am I. We got nothing holding us  
here. We can write from anywhere.

YOUNG ARNO  
What about the book?

YOUNG JUNE  
We've got enough for two books.

YOUNG ARNO  
This is serious. There's a cop  
killing people with impunity.

YOUNG JUNE  
All the more reason to get the fuck  
outta Dodge, wouldn't ya say? OK. We  
pack the car and leave first thing.

Dumbfounded Arno's mind races.

He's lost.

He nods.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - DAY

SUNRISE. Arno wakes with a start. June's asleep next to him.

YOUNG ARNO  
I'll gas up the car.

YOUNG JUNE  
(barely wakes)  
Mm. Coffee. Doughnuts. Road atlas.

YOUNG ARNO  
Alright.

EXT. ARNO'S CAR - POLICE STATION - DAY

Arno pulls up to the police station. Nervous, he thinks twice before shutting off his engine and getting out.

INT. POLICE STATION - RECEPTION - DAY

Arno waits nervously.

POLICE RECEPTIONIST  
Chief Grant'll be right with you.

Sound of two cops chatting O.C.

Arno looks over to see one is Officer Zale.

The chief comes out of his office and beckons Arno.

CHIEF GRANT  
Arnie.

But Zale gives Arno the death stare.

Arno looks back and forth between the chief and Zale.

Zale seeming to piece his presence together.

YOUNG ARNO  
Just realized I'm late for ...

Zale watches Arno go and makes his excuses to his partner.

OFFICER ZALE  
Hey, I forgot something in my car.

Zale hurries out after Arno.

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - DAY

Arno turns at a stop sign and glances in his rear-view mirror to see Officer Zale following in his squad car.

Arno panics and speeds up but Zale keeps up.

Arno turns down another street and another, progressively getting into more rural parts of town.

Arno's car swerves as he tries to get the gun out of the glove box. He finally reaches it and sticks it under his right thigh and closes his eyes briefly in silent prayer.

He pulls onto a dead-end dirt road surrounded by trees.

Officer Zale pulls up behind him and the men idle to a stop.

Shaking with fright, Arno rolls down his window and hovers a hand near the gun as Zale appears at his door.

OFFICER ZALE  
I was willing to let this go.

Zale unbuttons his holster and starts to pull his gun.

ARNO  
That's not why I was there.

OFFICER ZALE  
Then why'd you run?

Arno has no answer.

Zale levels his gun at Arno's head

OFFICER ZALE (cont'd)  
Yeah. What I thought.

Arno slides the gun out from under his leg.

OFFICER ZALE (cont'd)  
You're not gonna fuck up my—

Before either can strike ...

BAM!

June's car slams into Zale.

Arno screams.

Zale rockets into a tree with a bloody splash.

June's car skids to a stop.

Arno cowers on the floor.

Zale's mangled corpse slides down the tree.

June reverses and rolls down her window.

YOUNG JUNE  
Hey, goddammit!

Shaky Arno peeks up over the door at June.

Wincing, he looks over at Zale's bloody corpse ...

The cop's head is on backwards.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
We gotta go. Now! Follow me!

EXT. JUNE'S CAR/ARNO'S CAR - COUNTRY ROADS - DAY

Dazed Arno follows June deeper and deeper into the country.

They come to a secluded two-track and park in a copse.

INT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - DAY

Arno watches June use towels and bleach on her door handles, seats, dashboard, steering wheel, before getting in his car.

YOUNG JUNE  
You OK to drive?

He just looks at her blankly.

YOUNG JUNE (cont'd)  
Well, do it anyway. I'm exhausted.

EXT. CITY LIMITS - NIGHT

Arno drives them into some new town. June wakes from a nap.

YOUNG JUNE  
Are we?

YOUNG ARNO  
Driving two hours. About. Haven't  
really paid attention to signs.

YOUNG JUNE  
You need to relax.

YOUNG ARNO  
We killed a cop.

YOUNG JUNE  
It was self-defense and you know it.

YOUNG ARNO  
Who's gonna believe that now?

YOUNG JUNE  
Well, it doesn't really matter cuz  
nobody's gonna know who did it.

YOUNG ARNO  
They're going to find your car.

YOUNG JUNE  
Not registered to me.

YOUNG ARNO  
Whose car is it?

YOUNG JUNE  
I don't know.

YOUNG ARNO  
Where'd you get it?

YOUNG JUNE  
Can we stop soon? I really gotta pee  
and I'm starving. To death. What's it  
about adrenaline makes you so hungry?

YOUNG ARNO  
Maybe you're in the clear but I just  
got done accusing him. I suddenly  
disappear and that's not suspicious?

YOUNG JUNE  
Shit.

YOUNG ARNO  
How'd you find me?

YOUNG JUNE  
You said you were going to get gas.  
But you did that last night. When I  
realized you were gonna do something  
stupid ... like the right thing.

They drive on in silence.

EXT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

Arno's car pulls in and parks.

INT./EXT. YOUNG ARNO'S CAR - BUS STATION - NIGHT

Arno digs some cash out of his wallet.

YOUNG JUNE  
What the hell are you doing?

YOUNG ARNO  
I can't go. Wouldn't be fair to you.

June gets emotional for the first time. She doesn't cry but her eyes get a little wet. She hugs Arno a long long time.

YOUNG JUNE  
I ...

YOUNG ARNO  
Shh.

O.S. Old Arno's cook timer buzzes.

FLASHBACK PAUSES

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

PRESENT DAY. Arno and Marina drink at the table. Marina's in shock over what she's heard. Arno resets his timer.

MARINA  
My mother killed a man?

ARNO  
It was self-defense.

MARINA  
If you knew he was BRK, why not say so in your book?

ARNO  
No real proof.

MARINA  
But the murders stopped.

ARNO  
The murders stopped.

FLASHBACK RESUMES

BEGIN MONTAGE:

BACK IN THE PAST ...

June gets on a bus.

Young Arno questioned by police.

June rides the bus through the desert.

Arno stands before a judge.

END MONTAGE.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Young Arno and his lawyer TERRENCE POWELL, the JUDGE, deputy prosecutor, and bailiff are the only ones in the courtroom.

TERRENCE POWELL

Your honor, my client's car was cleared by forensics. He had nothing to do with Officer Zale's death.

JUDGE

This is a separate issue, Mr. Powell, and you know it.

TERRENCE POWELL

Technically separate, your honor. Let's not pretend my client being under suspicion of murdering a police officer isn't directly responsible for this ongoing harassment.

JUDGE

Mr. Bauer, the prosecution seems to think you know a little too much about the Black River Killer. You could end this right now by simply naming your source for the items in question by the prosecutor's office.

YOUNG ARNO

My news tips all came from reliable sources close to the investigation.

DEPUTY PROSECUTOR

Are you the Black River Killer?

TERRENCE POWELL

Your honor!

DEPUTY PROSECUTOR

It's an honest question, Terrence.

TERRENCE POWELL

It's borderline defamation, Susan.

JUDGE

Alright, let's not get silly. You have to admit, Mr. Bauer, there are items in your stories that even the police didn't know.

YOUNG ARNO

I'm unaware what the police do or don't know. I can say my journalistic record is spotless. I never misled my readers nor burned a source. I won't do that in this instance either.

DEPUTY PROSECUTOR

Judge, this is a serious—

TERRENCE POWELL

Forcing my client to reveal confidential sources would set a dangerous precedent. And have a chilling effect on news gathering.

JUDGE

The concerns of both sides have been noted. The necessity of solving these killings, I'm afraid, outweighs the absolute freedom of the press. Mr. Bauer, you're leaving me no choice.

YOUNG ARNO

I understand that, your honor. You have to do what you think is right. And so do I.

JUDGE

Alright, Mr. Bauer. This court finds you in contempt for which you will serve 365 days in jail or until such time you surrender the name or names of the sources to the information in question. Bailiff, please take the defendant into custody.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

Arno, in prison garb, works at his typewriter.  
A pile of typewritten pages stacked nearby.

MARINA (V.O.)  
What'd you do?

OLD ARNO (V.O.)  
I used the year to write my book.

Young Arno's interrupted in his typing by a jail trustee  
pushing a library cart.

JAIL TRUSTEE  
Morning paper, Mr. Arnie.

Arno takes the paper with a nod of thanks and sits on his  
bunk to read it.

Headlines:

"STILL NO LEADS IN OFFICER DEATH"

"BLACK RIVER KILLER MISSES TWO MURDER DATES"

END FLASHBACK

INT. OLD ARNO'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

PRESENT DAY.

Marina and Arno have pretty well polished off the vodka.

Marina looks worried. Almost disappointed.

Arno just looks exhausted.

MARINA  
So it was the cop.  
I really thought it was you.

Arno's stone-faced. His face gives nothing away.

They linger a moment and Arno can sense her concern.

ARNO  
What's wrong? What is it?

She's really hesitant now.

MARINA  
I need. I needa show you something.

INT. MARINA'S TRUNK - NIGHT

DARKNESS gives way to dim illumination of the outdoor security light from our POV inside Marina's trunk.

Marina shows Arno whatever's inside.

With disbelief and horror, Arno slams the trunk closed.

OVER BLACK

Arno and Marina have a terse O.S. talk outside the trunk.

ARNO (V.O.)

What the fuck is this? Well?  
He do that to your face?  
God dammit ...  
Goddammit!  
Why didn't you call the police?

MARINA

I have. Many times.

ARNO

How often this happen?

MARINA

I dunno. A lot.

ARNO

What exactly were you thinking?

MARINA

I didn't know whatta do. This last  
time I put sleepin pills in his beer.

Arno sighs. Groans. Yells. This is way too much.

Marina pleads.

MARINA (cont'd)

Said he kill me if I left.

EXT. MARINA'S TRUNK - NIGHT

Marina fights back emotion.

Arno tries to absorb this fresh new hell.

ARNO

In that shed back there's a wagon.  
Go get it. Hurry up now.

TIME CUT.

Marina returns with a large utility wagon.

They open the trunk.

The man inside is blindfolded, hands and feet bound.

He's unconscious.

ARNO (cont'd)  
Jesus. How much you give him?

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

They put Marina's unconscious man in the empty bathtub.

He startles them with an unconscious moan but doesn't stir.

MARINA  
Now what?

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Marina and Arno drink coffee in silence.

Arno looks at the clock. It's nearing 5 a.m.

ARNO  
I set it with the publisher so your  
mother got half the royalties from  
the book. You been getting those?

Marina nods.

ARNO (cont'd)  
It's not a lot. But, when I'm gone,  
you'll get the whole of it.

MARINA  
I don't understand.

ARNO  
You're going home.

MARINA  
What are you going to do?

ARNO  
Less you know the better.

EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Arno and Marina wait at the end of his driveway by the road where the house can't be seen. Silent til headlights appear down the road. Arno comforts worried Marina.

ARNO  
There's nothing connecting us. [car  
nears] Best not be seen together.

MARINA  
Would it be alright ...

She motions to hug him.

He lets her but doesn't hug her back.

ARNO  
Alright. That's. Alright now.

Arno breaks the hug and walks up the driveway and disappears in the trees as the taxicab pulls up and Marina gets in.

EXT. ARNO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Arno pulls his recorder out, rewinds, hits PLAY.  
It's a portion of he and Marina's recent conversations.

MARINA (V.O.)  
You never married? No kids?

ARNO (V.O.)  
Spent so many years looking over my  
shoulder. By the time I realized no  
one was coming for me. Anyway, the  
one I wanted I couldn't be with.

MARINA (V.O.)  
You been alone all these years?

ARNO (V.O.)  
I have my typewriter. Books.

MARINA (V.O.)  
But if you really cared for her ...

ARNO (V.O.)  
We—

Arno stops the player and tears the shiny black strings of polyester out of the cassette and puts the wad in a dried-up birdbath and burns it with a lighter.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Arno unlocks his desk drawer and pulls out a cassette case labeled "JUNE RETURN 1961" and puts it in his player and plays the scratchy old tape. Sounds of someone walking and knocking on a door and the opening of a front door O.S.

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.)  
What're you doing here?

YOUNG JUNE (V.O.)  
I heard they set ya free.

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.)  
You shouldn't be here.

Arno stops the player and pulls out the cassette and tears the stringy tape from it and burns it in an ashtray.

While the tape burns, he pulls his old pistol from the desk.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Arno makes his way to the bathroom and stops before opening the door to put a fresh cassette tape in his voice recorder.

INT. ARNO'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Arno enters to find Marina's terrified husband trying to plead despite his mouth being covered with duct tape.

Arno presses record on the recorder and sets it on the sink.

FADE OUT

OVER BLACK

Part of the 9-1-1 recording from PAGE 1 plays.

ARNO (V.O.)  
(into phone)  
This is the Black River Killer.  
I've just killed someone.  
You need to send the police.  
There are two bodies.

GUNSHOT on the line and the phone clatters to the ground.

911 OPERATOR (V.O.)  
Sir? Sir. Are you there, sir? Hello?

EXT. BUS STATION - SUNRISE

Marina steps out of a taxi.

EXT. MARINA'S HOUSE - DAY

Back from visiting Arno, Marina lets herself in.

INT. MARINA'S HOUSE - DAY

Marina composes herself before calling 9-1-1.

Her calm demeanor changing to that of the concerned wife.

MARINA  
(into phone)  
Hello? My husband didn't come home  
last night and I'm very worried. He's  
been out of town for business. No.  
He's never this late. Yes, I'll hold.

While on hold, she goes to a desk and pulls out a stack of life insurance papers and sits with a wet rag and begins to remove her bloody head bandage revealing unscathed skin.

MARINA (cont'd)  
(into phone)  
Yes, I'm here. His name is John  
Vargas. He's been away on business.

There's no wound of any kind on her forehead, just the blood stain in the bandage. Her bruises, too, come off on the rag.

FADE TO BLACK

OVER BLACK

Sound of Arno's cassette player being rewound, clicking  
PLAY, and the recording marked "JUNE RETURNS 1961" plays.

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.)  
What're you doing here?

YOUNG JUNE (V.O.)  
I heard they set ya free.

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.)  
You shouldn't be here.

YOUNG JUNE (V.O.)  
I need your help.

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.)  
What is that? Oh my god. Oh my god.

YOUNG JUNE (V.O.)  
Just hear me out, will ya?

YOUNG ARNO (V.O.)  
It was you. It was you.

The tape player stops with a CLICK!

**THE END**