

A Director Acts: My Experience Directing and Acting in a Short Film

Benjamin Alexander Grist

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2018

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

Michael Torres, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Douglas Miller, M.F.A.
Committee Member

Pamela Miller, M.A.
Committee Member

James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

Date

Abstract

The purpose of this creative thesis was to test the difficulties of both directing and acting in a short film at the same time. I began my research by completing three honors petitions that covered this subject and used the information I gained while writing and performing them to inform my decisions while completing the thesis. During pre-production, I prepared for my roles in the film and began to discover the challenges involved. In the production phase, I directed and acted in a short film over the course of five days. This experiment has led me to believe that one must prepare seriously for such an undertaking, as it is not an easy task.

A Director Acts: My Experience Directing and Acting in a Short Film

In the early years of cinema, it was not uncommon for the star of a film to also be the film's director, as was the case with Charlie Chaplain (*Charlie*). As the art of cinema developed and matured, the role of actor and director became more and more separate. However, there has been an interesting trend in recent years of actors directing their own productions again. While there have been a few high-profile actors and filmmakers that have attempted to both direct and act in a film, such as Mel Gibson directing and starring in *Braveheart*, it is usually filmmakers working with smaller budgets who pursue this course of action (*Mel*). I have always had a fascination with both filmmaking and acting. While I have experimented with combining these two loves as a child, I had never attempted to do it with any sort of a budget or while managing other cast and crew members. Thus, I decided to use my requirements for the honors program to complete a creative thesis exploring the challenges of directing a film and acting in it simultaneously. The process started during my junior year, in which I wrote two honors petitions analyzing the processes and challenges of both directing and acting in the same film. Work on the creative thesis began in the early fall of 2017, as I entered pre-production of my cinematic arts thesis short film, *King Takes Queen* (see Appendix), which would double as my honors thesis experiment. The thesis came to a head during the production phase of the film.

Honors Petitions

The preparation for this thesis began in the fall of 2016. I was fortunate to gain the agreement of Michael Torres, Ph.D., to serve as my thesis chair. After much

deliberation, we settled on the topic of directors acting in their own films and set about preparing for the thesis. The honors program requires that three honors petitions be completed over the course of the course of an undergraduate honors scholar's junior and senior years. At the suggestion of Dr. Torres, I tailored my petitions so that they would help me gather information to prepare for when the time came for me to begin the experiment for my creative thesis.

Professional Director-Actors

The petition in the fall of my junior year was a case study of Clint Eastwood, Ben Stiller, and Ben Affleck, as they chose to both direct and act in a starring role in *Gran Torino*, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, and *Argo*, respectively. It was difficult to find many articles about the process these men went through when preparing for and making their films as director-actors. This is not that surprising, considering that most authors choose to write about the more technical aspects of filmmaking. Having that option unavailable, I turned to another. While there were not many articles about the process the three men went through as director-actors, there were several articles documenting what they went through individually as directors *and* actors. I noticed three key commonalities among the three men. First, they had all been accomplished actors before they decided to undertake the role of director in a major film production. Second, as a result, all of them could gather investors easily, as the fact that these famous individuals were in a movie would be enough to convince prospective audience members to buy tickets to go see the film. Finally, all three men had previous experience directing and acting in films, and

none of them achieved immediate success. While I did take note of these three commonalities, I did not pay that much attention to them. I should have.

How Actors Act and Directors Direct

Looking forward to my upcoming senior year, the honors petition I completed in the spring of my junior year focused on the similarities and differences between an actor preparing for his role in a film and a director preparing for his work on a film. While both the actor and the director begin work during pre-production, they both go about their work in very different ways. Having done a little work as both a director in film and an actor on the stage, I had a good understanding of what would have to happen in order to prepare for the film. However, writing this particular petition I discovered two important things. First, comparing the two processes side-by-side made the distinction between the two even more obvious. Second, the petition gave me a greater understanding of the magnitude of work both parties need to do to be properly prepared. Once I had finished writing this paper, I completely forgot about that second discovery. I should have paid better attention.

Firsthand Filmmaking and Acting

My final petition gave me a chance to actually experience what it was like to help prepare for and act in a film. As I was required to complete this petition in the Fall of 2017, it would coincide with the filming of my cinematic arts thesis film. Dr. Torres, who is also my advising professor, was afraid that I would be too busy working on my thesis film to be able to write another research paper. So, he suggested that I do a creative thesis by assisting him and a few other professors in a one-day experiment with 360 degrees

recording equipment. The experiment we were to perform was to see if we could use the 360 degrees equipment to effectively tell a story in a short film. Making this film proved to be a very valuable learning experience. Because of how long we took discussing the narrative possibilities of 360 degrees movies, we had only a few minutes to write and choreograph the film, which helped me learn how to quickly create a film from scratch. I also had to prepare myself for the acting role I would play in the film very quickly, which taught me that it is possible to prepare oneself to portray a character in very little time. Acting in the film was also a unique experience because there were three 360 degrees cameras recording at all times, I could not leave character at all while the cameras were rolling. This gave me a unique and unexpected challenge to overcome, which enhanced my ability to deal with unexpected challenges in the future. This project also gave me great insight into working with a team of people that I may or may not have known beforehand. All these lessons will come in handy in future productions. Unfortunately, this experiment took place after I had already finished production of my thesis film.

Pre-Production

As I entered the first semester of my senior year, I moved into pre-production of my thesis film. The creative experiment had finally commenced. The cinematic arts department requires that all its students not only direct their thesis films but also write and produce them. For better or worse, I decided to push aside the work of preparing for acting in the film and focus solely on the work behind the camera aspects of filmmaking. This stage of preparing to film a movie is known as pre-production. I had already written and gone through several drafts of my senior thesis film by the time I had reached the fall

of my senior year, so there was not much work that needed to be done in that regard. I made a few minor changes to create a final draft, and then left the writing portion of pre-production behind me, determining to do both the directing and producing portions of pre-production simultaneously.

Preparations as a Director

The directing portion of pre-production proved to be the most tedious, as usual. While I greatly enjoy directing, I have never looked forward to the pre-production phase of it. This is because, for the director, pre-production consists of filling out page after page of paperwork. Now, this paperwork is very important to filming, as it gives instruction to all the departments as to how to go about creating the film. The lighting map lets the grip department know where to set up their lights and cables. The lined script tells the director of photography what and how to film, and the storyboards give him an idea of what the director is looking for. The blocking map lets the actors know where they are supposed to stand and lets the members of the crew know where to set up their equipment so that they are not in the way of the actors and the cameras. While I know all of this is important to prepare everyone to work on the project, I still find the process of planning out the technicalities of a film on paper a mind-numbingly boring task. All this does not consider the large body of paperwork the producer must fill out, such as schedules, script breakdowns, and budgets. I do not think I will ever become accustomed to filling out all of this paperwork at the start of a new project, but I must soldier on through it, regardless of my displeasure. I thought I had finished my necessary preparations as a director. However, there was one important thing I missed. Charles

Merzbacher quotes Judith Weston, saying that directors should prepare just as actors do (92). I was actually taught to do this in my cinema classes on directing. It helps the director get into the mindset of the actors and helps them understand how to best instruct the actors. Unfortunately, I forgot all about these lessons and did not remember them until I was in the process of writing the paper.

There was one final, major problem I came across during the directorial phase pre-production, and that was a conflict with the director of photography, or DP. While we never raised our voices at each other or had any serious arguments, there was definitely a clash of creative visions. One of the director's responsibilities is to share his vision for the film with the department heads and try to guide their decisions. As head of the camera department, the DP and I had several discussions about the film. The DP was concerned that my original plan for filming the movie would take too much time, and we would be rushing to get it done. We compromised and eventually settled on a much shorter shooting schedule. We went from my seven-day plan to his five-day plan. He also reduced the number of shots down to a third of what I had originally planned. Robert Steele states that visuals are the most important part of films (17). Because the DP drastically restricted the amount of footage available to me, I was unable to edit together the visual interesting film I had intended. Furthermore, he pushed us to only film a couple of takes for each shot of the movie. If done, this would drastically limit the number of options I had when editing the film in post-production. However, I was worried about all of these changes and considered speaking up. However, I had fallen into the trap that Carroll Hodge explains as believing "that conflict was to be avoided at all cost" (18).

Thus, I kept my mouth shut even as I saw my film being changed in ways that would hurt me down the line. In hindsight, I think the main reason the DP made us rush through the project was that the main location we used for the film, the one we got the day before we started shooting, happened to belong to the DP's girlfriend. He probably was trying not to overstay his welcome. Regardless, I should have put my foot down and used my authority as a director to overrule him to get the takes and shots I wanted.

Preparations as a Producer

The producer's part of pre-production quickly became the most grueling aspect of the entire thesis project. It is the job of the producer to procure the funds, food, actors, crew, and locations for a film, essentially making him the one in charge of logistics for the entire operation. While some students had more of an established network of investors, I did not have that luxury. Thus, I had to resort to crowdfunding to get my project off the ground. Crowdfunding is a way of raising money for a project by running a miniature, limited-time marketing campaign to convince members of the public, the crowd, to fund one's project. After making a budget to determine how much it would cost to make my film, I set up a crowdfunding campaign on a website that would allow me to run my campaign for a month. When time was up, I would be given whatever money I had raised, minus a five percent fee that the company would keep for itself. However, when the deadline finally came, I had only garnered half of the money I thought it would take me to create the film. This caused me great distress. Not only that, but I was unable to find any actors, crew or locations for my film, regardless of how hard I looked. I was not the only person who had trouble, at least. The cinematic arts department assigns all of

the seniors one week during the semester in which they are allowed to film their thesis short. Everyone who was assigned to the week after me and the week before me had no trouble finding all the necessary people and locations to create their films. However, for whatever reason, everyone who was assigned to film their movies in the same week as I struggled to scrape together the bare minimum to successfully tell their stories. While it was a little comforting to know that I was not alone in my plight, it only caused more stress as several filmmakers scrambled around the Lynchburg area sweeping up the last few remaining people and venues that were available during that week. I eventually reached out to a fellow film student who was not assigned to make his film that week. While he was unable to help me find any locations, he did direct me to a quality actor who was available. Shortly thereafter, I was able to confirm another actor to complete my roster, as well as a handful of people to use as a skeleton crew on the set of the film. However, I was still unable to find any locations. My aunt and uncle in Lexington, VA, offered the use of their house, but I preferred not to make my cast and crew travel an hour away to film a few scenes, particularly since my very limited funds meant that they were all working for free. Eventually, I had to agree to use my aunt and uncle's house. However, I still needed one more location. As the deadline for the end of pre-production was approaching, the situation looked desperate. Finally, on the last day of pre-production, we were able to find the final location. As we were picking up the equipment we would use to film the movie from the cinema department's vault, one of the vault workers, the DP's aforementioned girlfriend, agreed to let us use her house for the film.

Relieved, I bought a small supply of snacks and light meals to feed my workers and left the producer's pre-production role behind me.

Preparations as an Actor

When it comes to preparing to act in pre-production, I should have done much more than I did. My only experience acting in a production of this magnitude was three years ago when I portrayed a minor character in a comedic play. Even as that minor character, with only a handful of lines scattered throughout the piece, I had to do a fair amount of preparation for the role in order to portray the character in a convincing manner. However, because I became so preoccupied with the other aspects of preparing to make the film, particularly producing, I neglected preparing to act until the very end of pre-production. This left me very little time to prepare for the role. Thankfully, I did do some preparation, which left me in a better state than I would have been had I done none at all. As I read through the script, I made note of the beats that my character went through. Cynthia Baron advocates for using Konstantin Stanislavsky's definition of beats, "units of action", which refers to the point at which a character experiences change in either emotions or literal actions (29). Once I had determined the emotional changes my character would experience throughout the film, I began to examine myself. I looked for times in my life when I had had similar experiences and emotions and used those memories to form the emotions I would elicit from my character. With these few things prepared, I flung myself into production of the film.

Production

The Director's Experience

I finally had the chance to see the fruit of my labor when production of the film began in mid-October 2017. Production is the phase in which the actual filming of the movie takes place. Milcho Manchevski points out that doing two different jobs in a film can be very difficult (275). I quickly discovered that he was right. As the cast, crew, and I worked together for five days of shooting, it slowly became apparent to me that I had greatly underestimated the amount of work necessary to successfully act and direct a film at once. One big thing that came to light rather early on was that I had forgotten one major task that the director is supposed to do during pre-production. I had been so focused on getting all the technical aspects of directing done right that, I forgot to do an in-depth analysis of all the characters and go over the information with the actors. I could have used these rehearsals as what Maria Viera calls “a valuable learning phase” (13). Because I did not do such, I was able to give the actors only basic directions on how I wanted them to play their characters. I did not give them nearly enough to let them know exactly how I envisioned the characters being portrayed. Thankfully for me, I was fortunate to have gotten two very skilled actors to play the roles that I was not filling. However, even they mentioned that I could have been clearer and given them more direction. James Naremore states that most actors are willing to use any technique in order to get a good performance (Film Acting 35). If I had directed them better, I could have made their portrayal of the characters so much better. Another problem we had on set was with sound. Since I had to scramble to find people to work on my crew, the man I found to be in charge of sound had only a small amount of experience as an audio mixer

and was using equipment he had very little time to become familiar with. As such, most of the audio for the first day of recording was ruined. As Starr A. Marcello says, vocal quality is one of the key elements of an actor's film performances (59). While we were able to salvage most of the audio, I fear that the quality, and thus the actors' performances, is permanently damaged.

The Actor's Experience

Besides that, I came across two related problems with myself. The one that was most noticeable was that I had a terrible case of stage fright every time I sat down in front of the camera. I always had a little bit of stage fright whenever I am about to start acting or am about to give a presentation in front of a lot of people. However, it seemed to be worse this time. I think it was because in the back of my mind was the thought that this is my *thesis* film. If I did not do well here, then the entire project, and, by extension, my first steps into the film industry, would be ruined. This was not helped by the second problem; I had just barely begun to fully understand all the advice and theories on acting I had been studying for the past several years. I was putting the focus of my attention in all the wrong places as I was acting. I realized this after the first couple of days of shooting, but by then we had shot most of the film.

Conclusion

Looking back on this whole ordeal, I cannot help but wonder why I did not see the warning signs and take the appropriate action while I was preparing for production of the film. I knew from the research I had done on successful director-actors that most of them had plenty of experience in both areas before they decided to double up on a few

films, so I really should have considered doing a creative thesis project other than this one. I knew through the research I had done into the work that both directors and actors must do far more preparatory work than I originally thought there would be, so I should have allotted more time to myself to complete all the work. I saw that the DP's actions, however small they were, would have grave consequences down the line, so I should have compromised less than I did. I am now left to pick up the pieces. Thankfully, I now have some sound advice that I have followed, as according to Gay Brewer's paraphrase of David Mamet, I am keeping my edits of the scenes simple and keeping them focused on their emotional objective (168). I have had to do a little faster-paced cutting of shots than I would like, but David Bordwell says that this is the style that has been around for several years now, even among big Hollywood movies (17).

Ultimately, I did learn a great deal from my time working on this creative thesis. I was once again reminded that success rarely comes in the first attempt. This is a lesson that I've been learning all of my life, and that I suspect I will continue to learn for at least a few more years before I finally take it to heart. I learned that the earlier one begins pre-production of a film, the fewer headaches one will have later. Finally, while I already knew the amount of work that went into directing and acting separately, I learned first hand how much work went into performing both roles simultaneously. I think that someday I will attempt being a director-actor again, but not until I have a lot more experience doing each separately.

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Appendix

KING TAKES QUEEN

Written by

Benjamin Grist

1971 University Blvd.

MSC Box 122442

Lynchburg, VA 24515

benjamin.a.grist@gmail.com

(478) 957-3889

A car engine roars.

EXT. SAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

A car rushes down the driveway in reverse, heading right towards ANGELICA. She raises her arms in defense.

INT. SAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Angelica throws her purse down on the dining room table. An engagement ring is on her finger. Her fiancé, SAUL leans against the opposite side of the table.

ANGELICA

How could you do this to us?!

SAUL

It's what's best for the both of us, Angelica. It's a big firm. There's plenty of room to grow.

ANGELICA

But it's 200 miles away! You made the decision without consulting me! Did you ever think how this would affect me?

SAUL

Yes, it will give me more money to support you. Much more than I would get if I followed your plan of staying here.

ANGELICA

WE, WE planned to stay here so I could help take care of my dad! Are you really so selfish that you would ignore the needs of my family?

SAUL

Well, are you so stubborn that you're not willing to pursue a better life?!

ANGELICA

Of course, I'm the bad guy! You could never make a mistake. You've never done anything that hurt your family or friends!

SAUL

Don't you dare get historical on me!

ANGELICA

Well, isn't it true?! Haven't you always been like this?!

She slams her fist down on the table, which turns into...

EXT. MICAH'S HOUSE - DAY

Saul knocking on the front door, Angelica by his side. Saul stops knocking and waits for someone to come to the door. No response.

ANGELICA

Are you sure he's home?

SAUL

His car's in the driveway. Could you get the spare key? It's under that little frog statue.

ANGELICA

Sure.

Angelica bends over and takes the spare key from its hiding place. She is not wearing an engagement ring.

ANGELICA (CONT'D)

Here.

SAUL

Thanks.

Saul unlocks the door.

SAUL (CONT'D)

I'm really sorry about this. It's not the best way to start a first date.

ANGELICA

No no, it's fine. If this were my best friend, I'd want to see him right now, too.

Saul smiles. He opens the door and the two of them enter.

INT. MICAH'S HOUSE - DAY

Saul and Angelica enter the house. Saul calls Micah's name a couple of times.

MICAH

How did you get in?

Saul and Angelica spy MICAH, dressed in dark navy blue, and red-eyed from crying. He sits on a sofa staring at a picture of a beautiful woman. A chessboard sits on the coffee table in front of him, on which a lone queen stands.

SAUL

You told me where the spare key was, remember?

Micah continues to stare at the picture. Saul and Angelica sit down in chairs on either side of him.

SAUL (CONT'D)

You holding up alright, Micah?

MICAH

I think my girlfriend has the flue one day, and the next she's dead. Cancer. How do you think I'm holding up?

(beat)

ANGELICA

I'm sorry for your loss.

MICAH

Thank you.

SAUL

At least she's in a better place.

Micah glares at Saul.

MICAH

She has so much more of her life to live.

SAUL

Yeah...

(clears throat)

I know it's tough now, but everything will make sense eventually.

MICAH

How is this ever going to make sense?

SAUL

I don't know. Maybe, you'll gain something from this that you can use to help counsel one of your patients down the line. Maybe Julie wasn't the girl of your dreams and you'll meet the real one in a few years.

ANGELICA

Saul, are you sure that it's appropriate to bring that up just now?

SAUL

It's alright, Angelica. I just need him to see the positive side of this, and then he'll be his old cheerful self again.

(to Micah)

Isn't that right, buddy?

MICAH

Shut up.

SAUL

Oh come on, Micah. Stop letting her hold you back from being positive.

Micah stands up, towering over Saul.

MICAH

Get out of my house.

SAUL

You're not helping anything by being so pessimistic.

MICAH

I SAID GET OUT!!!

Saul and Angelica hurriedly stand up. Saul has never seen his friend so angry.

SAUL

Alright, alright! I'm sorry! I'll go!

Saul gently takes Angelica's arm and they leave the house.

Micah sits back down and looks at the queen on the chessboard. He quietly begins to sob before reaching and scooping up the queen...

INT. SAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

Saul holds his queen piece and examines it for a moment before placing it on the board.

Now both he and Micah have all their pieces set up. They begin playing. (Unless otherwise noted, they will move a piece each time they have a line of dialogue.)

MICAH

(smiling)

Thanks again for inviting me over. What's it been, two years since we spoke face to face?

SAUL

Yeah, just about.

MICAH

Well, it's good to finally see you again. I heard you passed the bar exam.

SAUL

Yep, and now a couple of firms are asking me to come work for them. Soon I'll be in the business of helping kids find forever homes.

MICAH

(chuckles.)

It seems like just yesterday I told you you'd make a good lawyer.

SAUL

And you were right about your uncle's alma mater having a good law school.

MICAH

Well, I wouldn't suggest anything bad to you.

Micah captures one of Saul's pieces.

SAUL

Hold up! This isn't one of your psychologist tricks to distract me from the game, is it?

MICAH

Would I do a thing like that?

Saul laughs.

SAUL

At least it makes our games interesting.

MICAH

You never had any trickery with Angelica, did you? She would just beat you
straightforward.

Micah picks up a piece and brings it down.

INT. SAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Angelica lands the same piece on the table. She's wearing an engagement ring.

SAUL

Wait a minute, that's not legal!

ANGELICA

(laughing)

Oh, I'm pretty sure it is.

SAUL

No, it isn't.

ANGELICA

If you're so sure, I can look it up.

SAUL

(laughs)

No, I'll do it.

Angelica joins the laughter Saul gets up and goes to the bookshelf.

ANGELICA

I'm not helpless, you know. I can do things myself.

Saul pulls a book about chess off one of the shelves and begins thumbing through it.

SAUL

I know, but I like doing things for you, and you're going to have to get used to it, cause we're going to be spending a lot more time together.

Angelica smiles.

ANGELICA

Only three more months until we're married.

Saul stops reading the book and smiles back.

SAUL

I'm counting the days. I didn't think life could get any more wonderful, but you've proven me wrong.

INT. SAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

Saul stares silently at the chessboard.

SAUL

Yeah, that was her way; always say and do exactly as she thought.

MICAH

Apparently. I finally got a Twitter account, and when I found Angelica she had written very opinionated posts about pretty much everything. That's actually where I found out you two were engaged.

(beat)

Saul doesn't make his move.

SAUL

Can we talk about something else?

MICAH

Alright. Have you been getting out any lately?

Saul resumes the game.

SAUL

Not really. Every time I try people don't really know how to deal with me.

MICAH

Well, most of them haven't gone through anything like your recent tragedy.

Again, Saul doesn't make his move.

SAUL

What are you doing?

MICAH

What do ya mean?

SAUL

I'm doing fine, so stop trying to counsel me, okay?

MICAH

I'm sorry. I just...

SAUL

I'm not one of your patients!

MICAH

Okay, okay, sorry. I just thought you needed the help.

Saul resumes the game, slamming his piece on the board.

SAUL

No, I don't. I'm getting along just fine.

MICAH

Oh, sure you are. But you and I both know that you've never known how to deal with a
tragedy.

Micah picks up his queen piece and examines it.

MICAH (V.O.)

(softly like an echo)

I SAID GET OUT!!!

MICAH

No one ever really gets over something like that. You just come to terms with it and
move on. Even then, I still miss Julie something awful, and every once in a while I'll start
to cry when I think about Her.

Micah sets the piece back down on the table. He stares at Saul.

MICAH (CONT'D)

I needed you that day. But you didn't help.

SAUL

That's what this is about? You're trying to get revenge for that?

MICAH

No, no, I know you meant well. But you're overly optimistic view of life hindered you from helping me deal with my grief.

SAUL

No, my optimism I what would have helped you overcome it. You think I'd be able to help people adopt kids if I was pessimistic? I always brought hope to everyone, and I've never hurt anyone.

(beat)

That was until... until...

MICAH

Until the accident.

SAUL (V.O.)

Don't you dare get historical on me!

ANGELICA (V.O.)

Well, isn't it true?! Haven't you always been like this?!

INT. SAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

It dons on Saul that he and his fiancé are in the middle of their first shouting match. He

stops, suddenly becoming calm.

SAUL

Wait a minute, wait a minute. Are we actually having an argument?

ANGELICA

Yes, idiot! We're having an argument!!

SAUL

But we've never had an argument. I thought we'd done everything right, that we'd avoided any possibility for friction.

ANGELICA

Take off your rose-colored glasses, Saul! Life isn't perfect. It's not my idea of perfect. It's not your idea of perfect, and you're certainly not endearing yourself to anyone by forcing them to live according to your idea of perfect!

Angelica storms out of the house. Saul stands still, contemplating. Finally, he rushes outside.

SAUL (V.O.)

Stop! Stop! No!

INT. SAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

SAUL

You're not going to make me talk about that!

MICAH

How come?

SAUL

It... it... it hurts too much.

EXT. SAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Saul bursts through the front door.

INT. SAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

MICAH

I know it hurts, but you can't keep avoiding it. You have to confront these memories.

EXT. SAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

SAUL

Angelica!

No response.

SAUL (CONT'D)

Why that arrogant little...

Saul runs back inside, grabs his car keys, and runs out to enter his vehicle.

Down the street, Angelica is walking back to her house, her arms crossed. She stops. She takes a deep breath and begins walking back to Saul's house.

Saul starts his car. He looks behind him and sees that his path is clear. He barrels down the driveway.

Angelica emerges from behind a hedgerow bordering Saul's driveway. She looks up just in time to see the oncoming car. She raises her arms in defense.

INT. SAUL'S HOUSE - EVENING

Saul slams his king into Micah's queen, toppling it. He stares at the board. It takes everything in him to hold back the tears. Micah doesn't take his move. Instead, he listens.

SAUL

The love of my life, gone in an instant... her parents didn't press charges. I don't know why. I'm the one who killed their baby girl. All the joy they would've had because of her...

Saul looks up at Micah.

SAUL (CONT'D)

This was supposed to be our wedding day.

(beat)

MICAH

I didn't know that... I'm sorry.

Saul returns his gaze to the board.

SAUL

She was right, you know? I was too optimistic, and inconsiderate of others. Maybe this is my punishment for what I said to you after Julie died.

MICAH

I'm pretty sure it doesn't work like that.

SAUL

But I deserve it. I killed my fiancé!

MICAH

It wasn't your fault.

SAUL

Yes, it was. If I had just...

MICAH

If this, if that. You know how many times I told myself "if only I had made her go to the doctor sooner"? There's no way either of us could've know what would happen. It was just an accident.

SAUL

But I deserve to be punished!

MICAH

We all deserve to be punished for one thing or another. But everyone has chosen to forgive you, except you. Don't you think it's time to finally do that?

SAUL

I don't think I can.

MICAH

You have to. It's the only way you'll be able to let yourself grieve properly and come to grips with it and be your old cheerful self again.

(beat)

Micah picks up his king and moves it forward.

MICAH (CONT'D)

So, what's your move?

Saul glances up at Micah, then back at the board. With a quivering hand, he reaches out, picks up his queen, and moves it to a spot that is directly in line with Micah's king.

SAUL

(whimpering)

Checkmate.

Saul breaks down in tears. Micah walks off screen to console his friend. The queen and the king stand motionless on the board.

MICAH (O.S.)

That's it, buddy. Don't worry. I know, I know. It hurts worse than anything you've felt before, but I'm here for you. You're going to come to grips with this. We're going to come to grips with this.

THE END