

THE CATERPILLAR TRAIL

A Screenplay by
Matthew Oquendo

On the night of his marriage proposal,
a man experiences strange events.

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Matthew Oquendo
MatthewOquendo@gmail.com
(626) 222-2012

FADE FROM BLACK

19. EXT. TRAIL - LATE AFTERNOON

Emptiness. The wind echoes. *Push-in* on a WHITE SHEET hanging on a branch. It's stained. We hear a man, MUMBLING.

1. INT. APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The man's face fills the screen. He clears his throat.

KURT (29), clean-cut, studious type, and a bit fidgety because he generates a million thoughts per minute. He has a bad habit of avoiding eye contact when speaking.

KURT

...Dani...so I've been thinking a lot about...about this whole thing...and uh...you know, what's gonna happen...and I just want you to know how happy I've been with you...

(pauses)

Danielle...I want you to be my wife. I want you to be the mother of my kids. I want to spend...the rest of my life with you.

The TV interrupts the moment (OS): static

REVEAL: The man sits ALONE at a table. He gets up and tries to adjust the TV, but turns it off. *Ding!*

KURT

-shit.

At Oven. Inside are two ready-made plates. He grabs them.

At Table. Plates set. He adjusts a bottle of wine. He lights candles. Next to the candles is an ENGAGEMENT RING.

KURT

(in mirror)

All right...don't screw this up.

He hears someone outside and grabs the RING.

At Door. He opens it and DANI (27), enters. She's wearing a RED WORK DRESS.

(CONTINUED)

KURT
(leans over and kisses)
Hey!

DANI
Hey...
(sees living room, pauses)
...so what's the bad news?

KURT
Nothing...just tired of TV dinners.

He opens the bottle of wine and pours the glasses.

DANI
You don't drink.

KURT
I don't dress up either but there's
a first time for everything, right?
Here, let me help you with that.

He helps her with her jacket. She looks at him.

KURT
...what?

DANI
...you got the job, didn't you?

A smirk erupts on his face. He kisses her on the forehead.

KURT
Come on. Let's eat.

MOMENTS LATER - At Table. They look each other up and down while they eat. Two beats.

DANI
So *professor*...should I be looking
for a new job then?

KURT
Try house.
(a beat)
It's in Ann Arbor.

A beat.

DANI
Michigan...? Oh, that's great hun!

She picks at her food.

KURT

You don't seem impressed.

DANI

No, I am impressed. Everything you do is impressive. It's just...I wish you would have told me. I-I like the city. I like it here.

KURT

I think it'll be great for both of us, you know? New places. New faces. Charming countryside in between. Did you know Michigan has over 11,000 lakes?

She smiles.

DANI

No..I didn't know that.

KURT

Yeah, when I was a kid, I used to draw maps to places I always wanted to visit...and uh..I always wanted a private lake.

DANI

What would you call it?

KURT

...Oneiroi. Lake Oneiroi.
(Aww-nee-ree)

DANI

You learned that in one of your books? It sounds pretty.

KURT

Like you.
(she looks down)
It's Greek...I thought you liked nature. Aren't you happy?

DANI

...I'm with you Kurt. I'm always happy when we're together.

He smiles. They eat. Two beats. And now...the moment:

(CONTINUED)

KURT

Dani...so I've been thinking a lot about this whole situation, and you know...what's gonna happen between us. And I just want you to know how happy I've been with you and...

His hands fidget with the RING BOX underneath the table.

KURT

...and how I want you to...
(pause, she's looking directly at him)
...be happy. So if you don't wanna quit and move, we'll make it work. I'll be there for months at a time and I can fly back and be with you.

He gets up and kisses her on the forehead. She nods and takes a sip of the wine.

She picks at her food.

2. INT. APARTMENT, KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

He washes the dishes and pauses: *how did I screw that up?*

He sets the last plate 3/4th of the way on the counter. He locks up and turns off the lights.

The curtains flow...

3. INT. APARTMENT, ROOM - CONT'D

On bed. Dani sleeps. With the covers on, she looks like a mummy. Kurt sits.

The curtains flow...

Moments Later. Power blacks out. Then...

He awakens and hears a MUFFLED SOUND from the kitchen, like someone moving heavy furniture. Then...glass breaking.

In Kitchen. The power switches don't work so we only see shadows cast by the outside lights.

On the floor. The plate from the counter is broken. Then...

From the corner of the frame, the TV turns on again. *Static.*

(CONTINUED)

The light from the TV illuminates a PLANT next to it. He touches its leaf and it's...BLEEDING. *Dnkk!*

The MUFFLED SOUND again...but from the bedroom.

He walks toward the bedroom. We follow from behind. *Slowly.*

4. INT. APARTMENT, BEDROOM - 3AM

There are PLANTS inside the entire room so it looks like a botanical garden with twenty, maybe thirty candles lit.

He sees her COVERED BODY and it looks like a shrine. Through the sheets, blood begins to smear. Everywhere.

KURT (PRE-LAP)

Ahhhh...

5. INT. HOUSE, ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Kurt wakes up. Hyperventilating. He puts his fingers in his mouth: there's BLOOD from biting his tongue.

He reaches for a journal but its contents remain unseen. On the table: pills, cigs, and THE NECKLACE.

By the looks of things, time has passed. Kurt (31) looks perpetually tired and has an overall shaggy appearance.

There are boxes in the background.

6. INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

DR. ZWEIG(40-50ish) points a bright light at the camera.

ZWEIG

Well, I don't see any signs of
brain and nerve injury.

(a beat)

Headaches?

Kurt shakes his head. Zweig gets up and looks at his chart.

ZWEIG

Blood pressure is above normal.

(grabs Kurt's wrist)

Breathe.

Kurt breathes slowly. A beat.

ZWEIG

Keep going. Keep going Kurt.

A beat. His breathes get more aggressive.

ZWEIG

You're having them again, yes?

KURT

It'll be two years tomorrow. You know...the last time I saw Dani...was two years ago.

Zweig watches him. Unaffected.

KURT

She was dropping me off at the airport and I remember the car ride there.

A beat.

KURT

They never caught him. I should have been home. I shoulda been fucking...home. None of this would have happened. She'd be alive.

ZWEIG

Kurt. You're showing signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

A beat. Zweig gets up and comes closer to Kurt.

ZWEIG

Tragedies like this have created external fears, which at severe stages, affect you physically. This can make it hard to get through a day. You have to accept that the killer got away with it and that Dani is gone.

KURT

I was gonna ask her to marry me doc, but I just...I just couldn't do it.

The MAINTENANCE MAN enters. He's got piercing eyes, which meet Kurt's. His KEYCHAIN is noisy. Kurt hears it; triggers:

CUT TO: CU of Keychain - Kurt and Dani riding in a car.

ZWEIG (PRE-LAP)

Look I know this is hard to accept
but you really have to let go. Do
you have any of her possessions?

7. EXT. CAR, PARKING LOT, TWO YEARS AGO - NIGHT

Flashes of Action: Kurt and Dani kiss; he waves goodbye;
she's holding THE NECKLACE; he's looking at THE RING.

6. INT. OFFICE - BACK TO PRESENT

We see a PLANT. The maintenance man pours water in it. For a
few frames, he has a knife and the BLOODY PLANT appears
again. Then back to normal. The maintenance man exits.

ZWEIG

I think it's time you get rid of
them. Objects can remind us of the
past and will continue to trigger
these terrors. It's the only way.

OTS on Plant: Kurt is fixated on it.

8. INT. HOUSE, CLOSET - NIGHT

A junkyard of things, all scattered. Kurt clears everything
and we see a box at the bottom of the pile. It reads: 'DANI'

He looks inside the box: mementos, NECKLACE, THE RING, etc.

9. EXT. HOUSE, BACKYARD - CONT'D

He lights a match.

WIDE: All of Dani's things burn. He watches the fire, lights
a cig, and drinks from the bottle. He looks at the journal.

10. INT. HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MIDNIGHT

ECU: Email list on laptop screen. He's deleting them.

Subject: 'Hey' FROM: caterpillar1460@gmail.com

EMAIL: *Hey Pro-fessor, how was class today? Missing you.*

He considers deleting it. Two beats. But the 'missing you'
part sounds strange.

(CONTINUED)

On computer screen. He copies the email address and pastes it to the chat window to see if the other person is online.

...it turns green. He presses 'invite to chat'. Waiting...

...INVITE ACCEPTED.

He types: *Who is this?*

caterpillar: it's me.

A beat. He looks around.

Kurt: ?

caterpillar: don't you remember?

Kurt: *no. what's your name?*

caterpillar: ...you think I would forget today's date?

KURT

...what?

Kurt: who is this?

caterpillar: guess.

Kurt: is this a prank?

caterpillar: lol. no...we've known each other. for years. but you still haven't come back to me. come back...

A beat. He blinks hard.

CUT TO: Kurt and Dani kiss in the car. Then back to present.

Kurt: dani? (pauses...)

caterpillar: Insert [YOUTUBE LINK]

CATERPILLAR LOGS OFF.

He clicks the link. It's a 12-second video consisting of:

1st scene: *Zwieg's office from earlier. Bird's eye view.*

2nd scene: *Dani driving alone. Angle from backseat.*

3rd scene: *Kurt from moments earlier. He's burning Dani's things over a fire. Angle from inside house.*

He inspects his laptop and the outside window. Nothing.

11. INT. OFFICE - DAY

He walks into Dr. Zweig's office, which is now a storage closet. He looks up: no hidden camera is there.

12. INT. HALLWAY, OFFICE - CONT'D

Kurt closes the door but hears a mop bucket echoing behind.

Kurt turns around. It's the maintenance man. They look at each other. Two beats. Then he goes back to mopping.

13. INT. KITCHEN, HOUSE - NIGHT

He watches the laptop. Awaiting more emails. He is writing in the journal and holds THE NECKLACE.

14. INT. CAR DRIVING, TWO YEARS AGO - NIGHT

THE NECKLACE hangs around Dani's neck. The car is parked.

15. INT. APARTMENT, TWO YEARS AGO - HALLWAY

One continuous take Dani enters the apartment and walks to her bedroom. On the way, she sees:

In Kitchen. broken dishes; wet footsteps

In Hallway. dirt, soil, and a bloody plant

In Bedroom. Push-in. She sees...Kurt! He's sitting.

Then... from behind, a dark figure ATTACKS Dani. Handbag falls. Everything scatters on floor, including THE NECKLACE.

Through her pocket mirror, we see her LIMP BODY on the floor...then the unseen figure's EYES before...

16. INT. HOUSE, PRESENT DAY - NIGHT

Back on couch. He's hyperventilating; tongue's BLEEDING.

Reveal journal: It's a sketch of the figure's EYES. Then...

DNKK! The same banging - *moving furniture sound* - from his dream, but it's from outside the door.

(CONTINUED)

Outside door: No one. But on the floor, it's the ENGAGEMENT RING BOX he threw into the fire. It's burnt, he opens it and the ring is intact...

Ding. Ding. Ding. His emails are piled up. *Ding. Ding. Ding.*

Some of the subject lines read: *It's me - Hey - How are you?*
All of them emailed from: CATERPILLAR1460.

A picture of the RING BOX appears at the chat window.

At Ring Box. Underneath it, there's a folded piece of paper.

At Paper. It's a drawing of a map with a 'S' shaped trail.
In child's handwriting: "Follow me...to Lake Oneiros."

By the lake, there is a house and two stick-figures. The red crayon looks like blood. The green crayon looks like plants.

17. EXT/INT. OPEN ROAD, FROM CAR - AFTERNOON

POV of windshield. He drives.

18. EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

He gets out of the car and walks through the trail.

Moments Later

He walks. We follow from behind.

19. EXT. TRAIL, REST STOP - CONT'D

His FINGERS trace the MAP. *He's close.*

Moments Later. *Tight* on Kurt as he walks from right-to-left.

FLASH CUT: Dani appears, wearing her RED DRESS.

DANI OS

Come back, baby...you're so close.

He turns. OTS: No one there, but the WHITE SHEET flickers on the branches. It's dirty, but also bloody (dried).

He rips it off the branch but it reveals...another set of branches with WHITE SHEETS on it! He rips those off. Then...

20. INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT, DAY - CONT'D

He enters. As more of the room is shown, we realize it's the apartment from two years earlier. *A replica of that night.*

On the table. Plates, candles, wine all set. He sits down and closes his eyes. Three beats. Then opens them. Nothing.

In Bedroom. He sees a figure on the bed. It's Dani.

KURT
(grabs her)
Baby...where have you been?

A beat. She looks at him. He holds her.

KURT
Baby?...

DANI
Here. I've been here. Waiting where you left me.

KURT
Left you? I never left.

DANI
That night. You left me.
(a beat)
Will you stay this time? For me?

KURT
I'm here now. I'll always be here. I thought I'd lost you. I want you to be my wife baby. I want to be with you forever. I love you.

He kisses her. Slowly. They stay like this.

KURT
(at her hands)
Your hands. They're so cold...

Two beats. She looks up.

DANI
...like yours.

He looks at his hands. *They're bloody, wounded.* Then...

Push-in. The TV plays STATIC as before. CUT TO:

21. INT. CAR, DRIVING - NIGHT

It's the SAME SHOT from the video link: Dani drives alone and parks. She adjust her NECKLACE and gets out of the car.

22. EXT. KURT AND DANI APARTMENT - NIGHT

She unlocks the door. This time Kurt opens. It's the opening scene again, but from HER PERSPECTIVE.

KURT

Hey!

DANI

Hey...

(looks at living room, pauses)
...so what's the bad news?

KURT

Nothing...I just-

Before we continue, he closes the door on us.

23. INT. KURT AND DANI APARTMENT - CONT'D

Dani watches Kurt, nervously fumbling underneath the table. FOCUS on Dani's face.

KURT

...and how I want you to...*be*
happy. So if you don't wanna quit
and move...we'll make it work.

DANI

Kurt...I am happy.

Moments Later. Kurt washes the dishes. Dani looks at him.

Then Dani looks at the TV: DR. Zweig is on the television.

24. INT. APARTMENT, BEDROOM - 3AM

Dani sleeps. From the corner, we see Kurt fall asleep next to her like before.

Moments Later. Dani wakes up. She walks toward the kitchen.

In Kitchen. She sees on the floor. Broken plates. There is a PLANT that's tipped over...then...

(CONTINUED)

From behind, a hand wraps around her neck, followed by a sharp blade.

ROBBER
...where the fuck's your money?

Dani, mouth covered, motions: *toward the bedroom.*

ROBBER
Shut the fuck up bitch! Show me!

In Bedroom. They enter. There's more light so we can make out the intruder's face. REVEAL:

Maintenance Man - his piercing eyes peer through the mask.

ROBBER
Keep walking. MOVE!

She points to the dresser and the robber walks over to it.

He starts ransacking the shelves/dresser.

Pan until we see: Kurt, hiding in the background. To Dani, he motions his index finger over his mouth: *sshhhhh*

ROBBER
You lying bitch! I'll fuckin' kill you. Gimme that fuckin' necklace!

He rips THE NECKLACE off Dani. Then...Kurt jumps the robber.

DANI
Kuurtttt!!

Struggle ensues. The robber stabs Kurt, whose bloody hand grabs one of Dani's NECKLACE, while the TV plays *static*.

The robber runs out. Kurt is on the floor; she's holding him, sobbing. CU on Kurt's eyes, on the TV...*static*.

The curtains flow...

25. INT. APARTMENT, TWO YEARS LATER - DAY

It's empty. Dani (now 28) walks into view. She's holding the RING BOX and sets it on top of another set of boxes.

REVEAL: It reads 'Kurt' - The light pours on her face.

FADE TO BLACK