

Screenplay – Scene One

“The Catalyst”

**Ext - Somewhere in desolate America – Day, mid-summer**

Camera pans down from a blazing sun to a deserted suburban street. Scene jump cuts from desolate house to desolate house. Off camera, enter the loud “cawing” of crows; quickly multiply in number and volume.

Camera goes dark but sound of crows remains. Sound of crows is suddenly drowned out by the labored breathing of a person through a respirator. Breathing intensifies as footsteps become audible. Camera fades in behind single person in a full-body bsl-4 hazard suit.

The man in the suit, Gordon Haynlin, 48, passes between two of the wrecked houses as a sea of rubbish appears. Gordon climbs up onto the 6 foot high mountain of refuse with practiced familiarity. He quickly passes over a make shift grid, made up of short and long segments of string tied together, much like an archeologist would at a dig. Gordon beds down and starts to square off a new area as someone calls out behind him.

Unknown person

Gordon...Gordon, is that you?

Gordon freezes, but doesn't immediately turn as the unknown person trudges up behind him.

Unknown person

Gordon, I thought that was you. I mean, I saw  
you and thought...I wonder where he is going?

Gordon slowly stands and turns. The younger man in the suit swats a bug away from his face mask.

Gordon

Why you following me Jay?

The younger man, a digger named Jay looks behind him both ways before answering.

Jay

Well...we aren't supposed to be this far out, right?  
At least I didn't think we were. They say the  
“Burbs” is still one of the hottest zones.

Gordon

(Sarcastic)

Kid, I don't need a babysitter,  
and I don't mean to be one either.

Jay handily ignores Gordon's tone as he takes notice of the grid work all around them.

Jay

Wow, look at all of this. I mean...wait,  
did you do all of this? Have you come  
out here before?

Jay walks past Gordon and immediately drops down to his knees and starts rummaging through the grid of refuse. Behind him, Gordon's gloves crackle as his fists ball up. He inhales deeply and speaks.

Gordon

(Exhaling impatiently)

Yes...I'm looking for something. You can  
stick around and look, just don't get in my way.

And Jay... (*Gordon says in a louder voice as Jay starts  
Turning around*) don't tell them you followed me out  
*Here, heh?*

Gordon's face softens a bit as the younger man considers him.

Jay

I suppose I can do that...but

Jay's voice drifts off as he flicks a piece of debris from his suit. Gordon clears his throat.

Gordon

(Quietly)

2 cans.

Jay

(Coughing quietly)

Well you know my ma has been kinda sick lately...

Gordon

(Cutting him off)

2 cans and 2 vitamin packs, and that's it!

And watch the meter on your respirator filter!

Jay

Deal!

Jay immediately turns, and bouncing on the balls of his feet, heads off to pick through the debris.

Gordon

(Whispering to himself)

Con artist!

With Jay out of the way, Gordon settles down into his newly gridded section and starts to dig. It is the work of only a few short minutes and Gordon shows visible excitement. He straightens and looks down the 100 foot section of grid work, and with an excited, almost manic laugh, returns to digging.

Gordon

(Muttering to himself)

This is...this has to be.

His hands come free of the rubble, grasped around a plastic bag, still tied in a telltale knot. He runs his fingers through the loops of the knot. *Camera swivels in front of Gordon.* His eyes lift up to meet the camera as he starts to untie the bag.

*Fade out quickly:* Silence is broken by the sound of a T.V set growing louder. *Start flashback.* Gordon's wife Susan speaks first, although she is not at first on camera.

Susan

Did you get my text?

*Gordon spaces off, looking towards the TV.*

Susan

Hello? Earth to Gordon.

Gordon

I'm sorry hon, what was that?

Susan

(Sighing)

Never mind – *(she returns to washing the dishes)*

Gordon

*About Friday right...you taking that overtime shift?*

*Susan*

*(Turns her head and cocks an eyebrow)*

*I thought you weren't listening?*

*Gordon*

*You know me; I'm never really actively doing one or the other.*

*Susan*

*(Snorting)*

*Yeah, that's the truth.*

*The couple share a moment of mirth, and Susan reaches over the counter and puts her hand on top of Gordon's.*

*Gordon*

*I'm sorry. It's the call from school, and the car getting broken into again...*

*Susan*

*(Interrupts)*

*And the bombing in Florida, and the shooting downtown,  
and the Government declaring martial law in Tennessee.  
It's too much...*

*The couple continues to hold hands, but both look around, clearly overwhelmed.*

*Gordon*

*(After a deep breath continues)*

*Insurance company called. They're refusing to pay  
death benefits on your father's policy because they say  
he hadn't made his last three monthly payments.*

*Susan*

*(Head drops and she slams a soap cover fist onto the counter)*

*Damnit! We needed that money! I'm calling them tomorrow, and I'm*

going to tell them what horrible leeches they are.

Gordon

Why don't you let me call hon. Bill in legal said he would look over the Hospital records for us and see what he could do.

Susan

(Takes a deep breath and braces herself against the counter)

Why Gordie, why wouldn't they give it to him? They just let him die.

Gordon breaks eye contact and looks away as a tear forms in his eye. It is clear that his wife's pain affects him.

Gordon

It's the system, it's broken...but what if the therapy didn't work? What if it just made him sicker? I heard they said that there is a Possibility that it could... (*Gordon searches for the words*) I heard Someone say that it could make the cancer turn contagious.

Susan

(Wiping her eyes)

But how is that possible? And it if could have helped him, Then why not at least try?

Gordon

News said that they therapy is based off of cloned cancer cells. They said it was biologically altered from a rare blood cancer...I Don't remember what it was called.

Susan

(Snaps her head up)

It's cancer! They would treat his cancer with cancer? How does That work? And why wouldn't they tell us that when they did the consultation? I hate them...Gordie, they took my father from me!

Gordon pushes out of the chair and runs around the island to embrace Susan as she teeters and starts to cry. She buries her face into his shirt and cries for a few minutes as he fights back tears of his own.

Susan

(Still sobbing into his shirt)

The world has gotten so messed up. How did it get so messed up?  
People are killing each other. No one has money. And they won't  
Even help sick people anymore.

Gordon

(Pulling Susan away to arm's length)

We have to look after each other. We can only rely on each other from  
now on.

Susan

(Wiping her eyes on her sleeve nods silently.)

By the way, I packed this up for you to take to the storage garage.  
I'm afraid that if it stays here, someone will break in and steal it.

Susan turns around, and after wiping her hands dry on her shirt, she grabs a plastic bag off of the counter and starts to tie it. The sound of the T.V grows louder suddenly as the air is filled with a rather loud beeping sound. It grows louder until Gordon has to pull his hands up to his ears.

Gordon

Ah, someone turn that down please.

Susan

(Turning around with the now-tied bag held out)

Turn what down? I don't hear anything.

Gordon takes his hands away from his head and takes the plastic bag in his hands and his eyes are inexplicably drawn to the knot and intricate bow his wife has crafted. The beeping grows louder yet as Susan takes a step back and a bright red light fills the room.

Voice

*Twenty minutes remaining...*

Gordon's house melts away, replaced by the over bearing sun and sea of garbage. He is holding the plastic bag, its familiar knot a haunting anchor to obviously painful memories.

Gordon

(Cursing under his breath)

Stupid filter alarm, stupid, stupid...

The LED light inside his mask is flashing red, as the small needle hovers ever-closer to critical red.

Gordon

(Whispering to himself)

I miss you hon.

(Gordon hugs the plastic bag in close as camera fades to black)