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by

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**Plus/Minus**

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**Plus/Minus**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **Plus/Minus**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

Supervisor: Don Howard

The report details the development, pre-production, production, and post-production stages of *Plus/Minus*. *Plus/Minus* is a short, narrative film about about a young couple examining their relationship as they await the result of a pregnancy test.

## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Foreword.....	1
First Script.....	1
Second Script.....	3
PRE-PRODUCTION.....	5
Casting.....	5
Third Script.....	10
Preparation.....	13
PRODUCTION.....	17
Day One.....	17
Day Two.....	25
Day Three.....	30
POST-PRODUCTION.....	34
CONCLUSION.....	42
APPENDIX 1: SHOOTING SCRIPT.....	44
APPENDIX 2: SHOT LIST.....	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	55

# INTRODUCTION

## Foreword

This is not the movie I intended to make. It is the movie I ended up making. Between where I started and where I finished lies a gulf of intention. That has been my process for as long as I can remember. I start with an idea, some conceit that is so clever that it would prevent me from getting personal. By starting with a concept, I push myself to insincerely and artificially build a story around characters I do not understand. This is all changing, I hope. Instead of looking for stories, I will search for the stories that are already in me. The stories that are lying dormant, waiting to be exposed. But for this film I did not start from within, I started with a mistake.

## First Script

I began with a concept. I was going to make a movie that would recreate the first sex tape ever made. There is nothing inherently dysfunctional about the idea. It provides the essential components for a narrative engine: a relatable relationship, a goal, and relatable struggles to achieve that goal. What it lacks is anything personal to me. Making a sex tape is not something I can relate to, nor was the idea of struggling to make one an experience I could offer any insight to. It was just a concept, a clever idea I thought could turn into a story despite my overwhelming disconnect with the subject matter. This toxic combination accounts for why I struggled so much writing the film. When writing becomes strenuous I fear for the worst. I feel that if I cannot come up with the foundation

of the narrative quickly, there is something flawed about the premise. But without an alternative, I pushed forward and finished my first draft.

I felt uncertain about its potential but still sent it along to my collaborator, Mark Smoot. He read it and shared the same opinion as me: trash it. The trouble with the concept was that it was not a part of who I am. The situation pulled me away from personalizing the characters and pushed me toward moulding them and their conflicts around a preconceived idea.

At this point, I had a month before the spring semester started. My goal was to enter the semester prepared to cast the film in January so that we could shoot it in February. This schedule would give me time to graduate in May and I would avoid the financial repercussions of staying in school another semester. It was a fine plan until my first idea fell through. So, I reached out to Mark to get his advice on what other stories we could develop. He recommended that I write a story based on my tempestuous relationship with my girlfriend.

My girlfriend and I were incapable of sustaining peace for any prolonged period of time. It got so contentious that I developed a severe phobia about making her pregnant. I feared that if she were to get pregnant, no matter how it got resolved, the stress of the situation would extinguish whatever hope there was for our fragile relationship. Mark suggested writing a story based on my fear.

It was an ideal starting point. It provided a situation I knew well and could offer some perspective on. I was excited by the idea and we began to discuss possible situations that would explore this fear. The first scenario we considered was based around

a sex scene. In this story, a man and a woman would be on the cusp of intercourse until the man suggests he put on a condom. The woman would then be taken aback, suspicious as to why he would suddenly wear a condom. From there, the man would become increasingly defensive and ultimately expose his fear of getting his girlfriend pregnant. It sounded like enough of a starting point to begin writing. I sat down, started writing and instantly hit a wall.

Desperation crept in. I felt it was more important to graduate in May than it was to make a meaningful film. It was not a feeling I was comfortable with. Making a movie is too demanding to make substantial compromises. But the suffocating financial reality that lay beyond graduation was so frightening that I relented. I made a conscious choice to value pragmatism over inspiration. It was this misstep that led me to the next script.

### **Second Script**

A year earlier, Mark and I were invited to pitch a web series to MTV. We ended up proposing a series that explored couples and their sexual mishaps. To prepare for the pitch, we outlined several potential shorts, most of which were inspired by personal experiences or from stories we had heard from friends. Since I was desperate to get the short off the ground, I decided to read through the stories we had outlined. One of the stories hooked me, which was inspired by a situation Mark's friend had experienced. It explored the consequences of a three way, as the third party attempts to seduce the boyfriend away from his girlfriend. I suggested to Mark that we do another pass to see if it was worth making. Over the course of a weekend, Mark and I worked through a couple



of drafts and re imagined the film. By the end of the weekend, we had locked the script and were prepared to start pre-production in January.

Down deep, I knew this was not the ideal story. Over the past ten years of making movies, I learned one enduring lesson: make personal stories. But the financial implications of waiting for the right story were too daunting. If I were to graduate in May, I needed to start preparations in January.

## **PRE-PRODUCTION**

### **Casting**

Initially, I wanted to cast the film on my own. Short films are such money trenches that the idea of hiring a casting director seemed idiotic. I proposed to Mark that I reach out to three actors for the roles and begin rehearsing with them immediately. Mark was instantly against the idea. He made a convincing case that I should hire a casting director in order to meet every possible actor for each role. In this instance it was easy to trust Mark's opinion over my own because he could be more objective than me. I was so inherently against the idea of spending money on a short that I simply could not fathom hiring a casting director, even if it damaged the film. In consequence, I heeded Mark's advice and reached out to local casting director, Sarah Dowling.

Casting was set to begin at the beginning of February, giving me a couple weeks to reach out to crew members and secure food donations. During this period, I met with my committee chair, Don Howard, to get his advice on what I needed to accomplish in the coming months in order to graduate. During our conversation, he asked if I had cast Ashley Spillers in the girlfriend role. I had worked with Ashley on my last two films and found her disposition and strengths fit in perfectly with the films I make. Yet, despite how exceptional she is, it never occurred to me to include her in the film. The days following my meeting with Don, she kept popping up in my mind as the ideal actor for the role. Later that week, I offered her the role and she accepted.

With two roles left, we set aside two days in early February to cast the film with Sarah. The first actor that felt right was Rachelle Groth. She was auditioning for the girl who lures the boyfriend away from his girlfriend. She was distinctive from everyone else in how she pursued the boyfriend. She played it as if she had genuine feelings for him which generated more tension than any other actor's approach.

Later on, I met an actor from Houston named Luke Wright. The role he was auditioning for was not an easy one to relate to. His character makes a choice to have sex with another woman while his girlfriend takes a shower in their nearby bathroom. On paper, the character is despicable and if it is played that way, the emotional stakes of the situation evaporate. However, if the actor plays the role with humanity and empathy for the character, the stakes escalate and the story takes off. In his audition, he exhibited the humanity I was hoping for. I saw in his face the devastating mistake he was making by succumbing to his desires. It was clear he was perfect for the role and in his case, it was particularly exciting because I had never seen him in anything before.

At the end of the casting sessions, I was only interested in Luke and Rachelle. I could not see anyone else matching up with Ashley besides them. Between the two of them, I felt much more confident in Rachelle. She had a number of screen credits and I trusted she had the experience to take the role further in rehearsals and during production. Regarding Luke, I had an unfair prejudice against his limited resume. His lack of on screen credits combined with my tendency to distrust my instincts inspired me to have a prolonged call back session with the two of them.

I met with Luke and Rachelle a few days later for the call back. Without any concerns about Rachelle, my entire focus was on Luke. During the first run through, he approached the scene with a greater sense of humor than I expected. For the most part it was a strong choice. His humor offered a layer of levity that was severely lacking on the page. The degree to which he relied on humor was overwhelming the story though. Over a series of takes, we worked through his initial approach and found a way to maintain his humor without forsaking the scene's tension. All the while, Rachelle remained strong and consistent. She and Luke made for a tense pairing and by the end of the session, I was enamored with both of them, especially Luke. He overcame my prejudice against his limited experience and I felt fortunate to have the opportunity to collaborate with him.

As we were going our separate ways, my first impulse was to offer them the roles. I had no one else in mind, and I felt the two of them were the ideal pairing for Ashley. However, I have a tendency to let my emotions get carried away. I felt it would be prudent to give myself time before I made any commitments.

After we separated, I walked home and cleared my head. I played the movie in my mind and I pictured Luke and Rachelle, along with Ashley. I wanted to gauge my reaction and feel what they sparked in me. As I ran the movie in my mind, a sense of excitement and anticipation began to grow. It took me aback. Given my reservations about the material, I never expected to be excited about it. But all of a sudden, I was thrilled to materialize this story and it was all on account of the actors.

The following morning, I called Luke and made certain he was available for the shoot dates. He could make our shoot dates as well as any other other days in case we had to reschedule. Then, I called Rachelle and she hinted at a potential conflict. She was likely to be cast in another film that overlapped with our shoot dates. In the event that she was cast, I would have to reschedule our shoot before or after her film. My first reaction was despondency. I tend to avoid any rescheduling because it causes me so much anxiety to reorganize the rest of the cast and crew. But Rachelle was the only possibility. As a director, it is my job to accommodate the actors in whatever way possible, even if it conflicts with my own irrational anxiety. I reached out to Luke and Ashley to see if they were open to rescheduling and both were able to shoot earlier or later.

Given the actors' flexibility, I decided to use crew availability to determine whether we shot the last week of February or the first week of March. The unanimous preference was to shoot in February so I informed Rachelle that we would shoot earlier. She agreed to the new shoot dates, but I sensed an ambivalence in our conversation. Even though she would be able to act in both movies, her reaction was more neutral than positive. I got this nauseating feeling that the rescheduling was one in a series of gestures that would ultimately end in her leaving the project. But, I have a penchant for assuming the worst and thus far she had been prompt for every meeting and answered every phone call. I internalized my paranoia and hoped for the best.

A few days had passed and I did not hear from Rachelle. I assumed no news was good news, so I locked down the crew and looked into a plane ticket for Ashley. During this time, I received a message from Rachelle. Her voice sounded ominous and her

message was vague. I called her back and she expressed that she was concerned about the sexual content in the film. I empathized with her worries and asked if this was the kind of situation we could overcome together or whether it would be best for her to drop out of the film. She said she did not want to leave the project and felt that we could work through it together. I was terrified. Despite her affirmation, my innate pessimism led me to believe she would inevitably leave the production. I desperately wanted to move on without her but she was the only actor who provided the emotional depth necessary to make her character compelling. I gave her a couple of days and called her again. I asked her if she felt any more comfortable than when we last spoke. Her response was ambiguous and her tone was cold and distant. Then, she abruptly left the conversation and promised to call me back. Several hours later she texted me, stating that she was dropping out of the film.

I reached out to Mark to get his advice on how we should progress. He recommended we look at the audition tapes from the previous casting sessions just in case I overlooked someone. Looking over the audition tapes, one actor did stand out as a possibility. I called her and she agreed to meet for a call back a few days later. She was not the ideal choice but the financial ramifications of delaying the film superseded my actor preference.

This situation turned out to be a flashpoint for me. My heart was no longer in making the film without Rachele and the necessity of pushing forward because of financial circumstances was too depressing of a reality. In that moment, I did not have

another story in hand but I did have a few days before the call back to explore other possibilities.

### **Third Script**

I sat down at my desk and waited for the ideas to come. Nothing new came to mind but one old idea kept gnawing at me. It was that story about the boyfriend who was terrified of making his girlfriend pregnant.

Initially, the story was explored as a sex scene which lead to a dead end. I needed to figure out another premise that was better equipped to exploit the potential stakes of the situation. The first revision that came to mind was to include a pregnancy test. This would allow the movie to elevate the stakes from a fear of pregnancy to a potential pregnancy. Using this as the inciting incident, the next turn would be the result of the pregnancy test, and the rest of the film would investigate how the couple deals with that result. I offered the revised outline to Mark and he felt that it had potential. But he pointed how uninteresting the story becomes after the result is revealed. No matter what develops after the result, it pales in comparison to the anticipation of the result.

Where I took the inciting incident was less than ideal, but at least we had a starting point: a woman takes a pregnancy test and awaits the result. On a blind impulse, I visited a short film I admired, *The Girl with the Yellow Stockings*. Its story concerns a man who offers his girlfriend a ring in hopes of getting engaged. She does not say yes but she does not say no either. From there the boyfriend continues proposing marriage to his girlfriend, and with each proposal the tension escalates, revealing the nature of their relationship and the bleak future that lies ahead of them. I had watched it a number of

times over the past year, usually just to admire it for its simplicity. But this time, I observed something I had never seen before. The short could have easily relied on verbal escalation, with little movement and static blocking. But the movie avoids this trap by utilizing the engagement ring as an unorthodox MacGuffin that keeps the characters moving. Consequently, the movie remains alive while avoiding the limitations of its one room, real time premise. This realization inspired me to apply the same strategy to our story. I could use the pregnancy test just like they used the ring. To do so, I just needed to figure out a way to delay the test results.

I had agonized about the possibility of getting my girlfriend pregnant for months. I had rehearsed the situation in my mind dozens of times and my first instinct was always to remain non committal to her. In each of these mental rehearsals, I would never make the first decision on how to handle the pregnancy. I always deferred to her and suggested we look at the result before we made any decisions. In my mind, my girlfriend would then demand a commitment before she ever revealed the result. I wrote down the rehearsals I had played in my mind. I felt my inability to commit to my girlfriend was the most natural motivation for the female character to withhold the result from her boyfriend.

I finally had a premise. A girl takes a pregnancy test. Fearful of the result, she asks her boyfriend what he will do if she is pregnant. Her boyfriend refuses to commit to an answer until he sees the result. In turn, she refuses to show him the result until he admits to her what he will do if she is pregnant.



After figuring out a way to delay the result, I let the rest of the story crawl out of me. The escalation between the two characters came easily to me because I had obsessed so much about the potential of the situation. I wrote the first eight pages in an afternoon and was about to reach the conclusion until I hit a dead end. I was plagued by questions I could not answer. What would the result be? How would the couple handle it? Would they break up or remain together? Ultimately, I could not find the answers that afternoon but I did have enough material to send the draft over to Mark for his thoughts.

Later that night, we spoke about it. Mark felt the situation was worth exploring and I encouraged him to take any and all liberties with the draft I sent him. The next day, Mark sent his revisions. Before I read it, I remember feeling conflicted. I was excited about the story's potential but I was also suspicious of our unorthodox development process. An actor dropped out, we were considering a replacement, and we proposed another script entirely over the course of forty eight hours. But once I read Mark's draft, all my doubts and concerns dissolved. All the missteps I had taken in my draft were fixed, all the good material was polished and most importantly, Mark contributed an incredible ending. In his version, the conclusion was equal parts resolution and ambiguity. The couple would break up, but the audience could never know the test results. For Mark, the story was not about whether or not she was pregnant, it was about whether or not the couple should be together.

The following day I cancelled the call back. After informing the actor that we were no longer making the film, I felt an unrivaled sense of relief. All the compromises I had made, despite my rational motivations to do so, put me in an uncomfortable position.

I felt down deep that I was only making a film in order to graduate. The story lacked the personal connection and inspiration I should demand from every film I make. In reflection, I see how tenuous my agency was in the whole process. It took an actor dropping out of one film to push me to make another story all together. I felt that fate had somehow intervened, which is never how I account for such developments. But it was important for me to feel like this film was the one I was meant to make, especially since I only had two weeks to prepare.

### **Preparation**

Despite my truncated timeline, much of the film was already in place. All of the preparations I made regarding the food donations, location and crew were easily transferable from the previous film. The only elements I needed to reconsider were the actors.

The most convenient option was to bring them along and assume they would fit in to the situation just as well as the last. But this was not the story I cast them for. I would have preferred to call them in and have them rehearse the script in person. This would allow me to get a sense of where they would take the material and if they were a good fit for one another. To do so, I would have to fly Ashley in from Los Angeles immediately at a prohibitive cost or find a replacement. Since this was not financially feasible, I would have to rely on my gut. Having faith in actors makes me nauseous however. I am much more comfortable seeing the them in person, collaborating together, and then evaluating whether or not their dispositions compliment one another. I considered my options and

ultimately decided to trust Luke and Ashley. Given how fate had intervened, I felt that everyone who was involved was meant to stay involved. So, I surrendered to fate, went with my gut, and kept the actors that were already in place.

I contacted everyone involved with the film and let them know we were changing scripts. The crew was amicable to the change and the actors agreed to take on their new roles. The only drawback was that Ashley's schedule only allowed her to be present for three days. I would have preferred an additional day in order for us to rehearse for the two days leading up to our shoot. However, our film only required two days to shoot and I felt we could get by with one rehearsal day. I booked her flight and we finally locked our shoot dates for February 27th-February 28th, with February 26th as a set up and rehearsal day.

All of a sudden, my short two week preparation schedule felt relaxed. With all major components in place, I did not have any essential elements to resolve. I used this time to consider how to best shoot the film and prepare a shot list.

The script was dramatic and escalated the tension through dialogue. I thought it would be best to rely on close ups as the building blocks for our edit. But since I had plenty of preparation time, I began to investigate alternatives to conventional coverage. I always admired the way Lars von Trier shot his scenes, so I studied how he approached his films since *Breaking the Waves*. Upon examination, I found that with each film, his mise en scene became increasingly complicated and difficult to imitate. But, looking at *Breaking the Waves*, I saw a film that emphasized close ups but also used additional coverage to supplement the edit. The additional coverage appeared to be set ups that

roamed between characters during a scene. These takes were then utilized along with the close ups to create an exciting mise en scene. His tact in that film was a perfect model for me because it struck a nice balance between convention and innovation.

I spent the next week breaking down how certain scenes were shot, how often they relied on close ups, and how frequently they implemented the “roaming” takes in the edit. The majority of *Breaking the Waves* is composed of close ups, which gave me confidence that we could pull off a similar approach with our film. Down deep, I felt our film could be told entirely in close ups. Therefore, we would approach our shooting with an emphasis on executing the close ups for each character and then shoot the “roaming” takes. That way, if the “roaming” takes did not work out, it would not affect the emotional impact of the story.

After committing to our shooting approach, I began breaking down the emotional escalation of the script. On my previous short film, *Hearts of Napalm*, I made a number of mistakes directing the actors. The film unfolded entirely in real time and most of my mistakes were grounded in the moment to moment emotions of the characters. I felt like at times, one moment played lighter than it should, and at other times, one moment played too tense than intended. In order to avoid this situation, I color coded our script. Using colored pencils, I assigned each beat a color that corresponded with its level of tension. The color coding was based on the color spectrum, using blue as the lowest grade of tension and yellow as the highest grade. Since I only had one day to rehearse, I

hoped this preparation would allow me to make adjustments on set that I would not have otherwise foreseen.

The days leading up to the shoot were productive but not overwhelming. Aware of my tendency to worry and obsess, I consciously forced myself to relax. I wanted to go into the film at ease and open to all the adjustments I would have to make due to our lack of rehearsal time. In my conscious attempt to suppress my inherent anxiety, one idea did keep coming to mind: Mark should be on set. He offered so much to the script, it was clear he was able to relate to the story the same way I did. I reached out to him a few days before the shoot and invited him to be a part of the production. At first, he was reluctant. He was concerned his voice would interfere with my established relationship with the actors, especially if we were to disagree. It was a relevant point. Complications could arise if we were to disagree, although up until this point, we had not disagreed about anything regarding the story. Therefore, we both felt that if we were to have any conflicts, they would be far outweighed by the benefits of having us both on set. I also assured him that if any problems would arise, they would be resolved by figuring out what was best for the film. Following my conversation with Mark, I felt completely at ease. We had plenty to accomplish in a relatively short period of time, but I was confident that together, we could pull it off.

## **PRODUCTION**

### **Day One**

The first day started off with rain. Our initial plan was to set up the lights while I rehearsed with the actors. This schedule would allow us to shoot early on Thursday, giving us plenty of time to wrap the film by Friday afternoon, so that Ashley could make her flight. But with a forecast that called for rain the entire day, we trashed any hopes of setting up the lights. I was disappointed but given how kind fate had been up until this point, I considered this nature's way of getting even.

We checked out and headed over to the location house. Our plan was to drop off all the equipment in the garage and use the rest of the afternoon to rehearse with the actors. The stakes were particularly high since the majority of the story took place during one, uninterrupted eight page scene. In order to pull the scene off, we had to lock down the blocking and commit to the emotional pitch of every beat. I was confronting a set of circumstances I had never encountered before, and it was not until we were approaching the location that it fully hit me. When I realized this, I felt relieved that the weather eliminated the crew and that we could concentrate solely on our rehearsal.

As I was approaching the location, I heard a cacophony of engines and hydraulics. As I got closer, I saw the immense arm of a massive excavator along the horizon. Construction on a nearby home was going on one hundred yards away from our location. My first impulse was to find another house. However, given my penchant for pessimism, I tried to remain open to less drastic points of view. I spoke with the director of

photography, Huay Bing-Law, and the assistant director, Chris Shea about our situation. Their instinct was to stay put for now. By this time, the excavator operator had stopped working, so it was possible that his work schedule was intermittent. We all agreed that we would table our location discussion until we spoke with the excavator operator about his schedule.

In the meantime, we discussed our preferences. Huay wanted to keep the location. A bank of windows that lined one of the bedroom walls was ideal for his lighting needs. Chris also preferred to stay at the location if only to avoid all the complications of relocating. I was desperate to move on. The threat of construction and its potential destruction to our sound recording was not a risk worth taking, even if it hurt the look of the film and created unexpected inconveniences.

At this point, it was not essential that we find a new location immediately. There was still a chance that the excavator would not affect us during our two day shoot. But the anxiety was heart wrenching for me. The only activity that could relieve my stress was searching for new locations on the internet. However, the additional cost of paying for a location would have doubled our budget. I had to weigh the cost of renting a location against peace of mind and it was an easy decision. The relatively immense cost was worth protecting the sound from avoidable harm.

None of the places I found were ideal. They were homes decorated specifically for temporary rentals. The spare, nondescript interiors did not match the world of the characters at all. The limitations were troubling but I was willing to live them since the

movie was meant to live in the close ups. I narrowed down my search and found a home that I could live with. It was affordable and the interior would work for our purposes.

Meanwhile, the excavator operator returned back to work. Chris met with him and asked about his schedule moving forward. The operator said he was committed to working the site for the next two weeks. Although he would be operating intermittently, he would be working the excavator from seven to seven every day, including during our shoot days.

Chris informed me of the situation. I immediately contacted the owner of the rental I was considering. She was empathetic to our circumstances and was amicable to our rental request despite the short notice. Before I made the reservation official, I wanted Huay and Chris to tour the location and confirm that it would work for our needs. We agreed on a time for us to meet later that night to scout the home. Barring any unexpected developments, our intention was to lock the location and shoot there the following day.

Given my habit for being over dramatic, I was on edge at this point. The weather delay in conjunction with the location debacle hit me hard. All these situations were more or less resolved, but I abhor interruptions like these. I deliberately plan simple, straight forward film shoots in order to dodge the complications that go along with more complex scripts. But before the shoot even started, I already experienced the kind of stress I would expect from a much longer, more complicated production. So, when it dawned on me that Ashley's flight was arriving in hour from Los Angeles, I insisted on picking her up. It was



an opportunity to get away from all the disappointments and focus my energy on our rehearsal.

I picked her up from the airport and explained everything that went wrong that day. She was empathetic enough to listen and bear my whining. I would have preferred to keep the production complications private from the actors. It is not their business and I also worry it sends the wrong message in terms of my preparation. But I struggle with internalizing my stress so I tend to overdramatize and run my mouth. It was therapeutic for me to get it out of my system, even if it was at the expense of exposing an apparent lack of preparation on my part.

We arrived at my apartment at the same time as Luke. I invited Mark to meet us there as well. His personal connection with material and impeccable dramatic instincts would only enrich our rehearsal process. Once we were all at my apartment, I was flooded with a sense of relief. I seek refuge in this part of the process. Actors renew my sense of purpose and validate all the hangnails and aggravations of pre production. But at the same time, I was terrified because Luke and Ashley had never met. I suddenly realized all the preparation and faith in the story hinged on whether or not these actors could make a convincing reality together. Right before they were about to do the first read though, I was paralyzed by fear. What if I casted incorrectly? How would I proceed? My fall back plan was to cancel the shoot. Right before Ashley said her first line of dialogue, I took solace in that. No matter what happened, I could always pull the cord.

A minute into the read through my worst fears were dissolved. Ashley and Luke owned the material. They felt like one of those couples that should not be together, which

is a component to the story I did not think through entirely. The standard practice for casting to find actors who will share a chemistry together. But in this story, the couple has lost their chemistry. As their situation unfolds, revealing a vast void between them, it is important to feel that this couple should break up. It is not a tragedy but an inevitability. It was exciting to see Ashley and Luke convey that feeling in the room. It was a lucky break to encounter something so essential to the story that I never anticipated.

Another remarkable development also occurred in the read through. The story has a steady escalation of tension that culminates in what feels like a break up. Mark and I discussed how this would escalate in actors' performances. The actors would not necessarily be screaming at one another, but as the tension increased, so would their emotion. But the actors did not approach it that way. Half way through, the story makes a drastic turn when Luke's character gives up on their argument. He feels there is nothing left to discuss since he has no real influence over what they would do if she is pregnant. Mark and I thought this turn would escalate the frustration and anger between them but Luke and Ashley took it in another direction. Even though the stakes escalate, as Luke hints that he would leave Ashley if she were to keep the baby, the characters emotions are down played. They chose to approach this turn with sadness, not anger.

This unexpected turn came about naturally on account of Luke's performance. On paper, we perceived that his character channels his anxiety into a form of manipulation. This manipulation is used to subtly suggest that the couple would be better off if she got an abortion. But this was not at all the way Luke played it. On his part, he perceived the

character as sincere and genuine. He dealt with anxiety through fear, not manipulation. In turn, when Luke is at his most fearful, he expresses his worst impulses. What we considered a threat on paper, Luke played as a moment of weakness. It was an exciting choice and Mark and I fully supported it.

After a few read throughs, Chris dropped by the apartment. He wanted more details regarding our potential location. As I was sharing the benefits and drawbacks of the rental home he suddenly interrupted me. Out of the blue he proposed another location. He apologized for not realizing it earlier, but a couple he knew was out of town. They entrusted Chris to look after their place while they were away so Chris suggested we consider shooting there. I was immediately excited by the prospect. Of course it may not work out, but my only other option was a location I was more or less ambivalent about. He contacted the owners and in exchange for a nominal fee they allowed us to shoot at their home.

I wanted to make this new location work no matter what. I felt like unless there was excavation going on next door, we should be shooting there. With this resolve, I suggested that the actors join us for the location scout. We would more than likely be shooting there so we might as well rehearse after we approved of the home.

When we entered the house, I knew instantly it was the ideal place. The furniture looked cobbled together, like a couple who had combined their belongings into one space. It was clean but chaotic. The home reminded me places I had lived in and felt perfect for the couple in our story.

I relaxed. We overcame a series of unfortunate incidents that were steadily steering our production into a ditch. This feeling of accomplishment was quickly replaced by fear however. I started dreading the rehearsal process. Despite the progress we made in the read throughs, I had never rehearsed or blocked anything like this in my life. Ideally, I would have rather had an entire day to figure out how to block the scene, and another day to lock it down. But given everything that transpired, we only had four hours.

During the first rehearsal the actors sat at the edge of the bed. No one moved or readjusted themselves and it felt completely wrong. I remember thinking there was nothing to glean from it except to not do anything like it again. But where should we begin? There had to be a right way and a wrong way to go about blocking but I lacked the experience to know how.

Without experience, I was able to try ideas without hesitation or pretension. I had no idea what good or bad blocking was. What I did know was what blocking would work or not work based on seeing it in front me. My first idea was to move the actors to the front of the bed and we proceeded to read the scene that way. It was an improvement but not the right solution. Then, I suggested they lie down next to each other. It felt better but it seemed unnatural for them to be in each other's arms so quickly. From there, we explored when the right moment would be for them to lie down next to each other. We tried a number of options until we finally hit upon the right beat. Relying on instinct allowed me to work quickly and efficiently. We worked so rapidly that I did not quite fathom how much the opening had changed. What was written as an tense exchange was

now softer and sweeter. It was not exactly what Mark and I had intended but we both agreed that it worked.

We followed a similar process for the rest of the script. We would feel our way through each beat of the scene and try a number of different possibilities until we found what worked. But how long would this process take? We only had a few hours to figure out how we were going to handle every movement for eight straight minutes of the characters' lives. It was not until that moment when I truly got my head around what rehearsing an eight minute scene was like. I knew we would have to go through dozens of ideas for each character before we hit upon the right one. Those options, compounded by the unorthodox length of this scene overwhelmed me. But internally I committed myself to figuring out the scene. I refused to leave the location until we more or less locked down our blocking.

We moved forward and never stalled out. As we progressed, I remember feeling eternal gratitude for the script Mark and I had written. During the rehearsal, we made slight adjustments to script, rephrasing certain lines or cutting some all together. But we never hit a false moment. The efficiency and craft of the writing allowed us to focus the majority of our attention on the movements of the scene. It also provided us a foundation to return to after a misstep in the rehearsal process. Ultimately, the strength of the script combined with Luke and Ashley's input allowed us to complete the blocking in just under three hours. As we were leaving the location, I felt a sense of accomplishment. At one point in the day, I was fully prepared to cancel the shoot. Now, I was excited by our film.

We had a strong script, a great cast, and we were prepared to shoot as soon as the lights were ready.

## **Day Two**

Given the simplicity of the story, we were able to shoot chronologically. This was essential because we had to somehow make the eight minute bedroom scene feel as if it was unfolding in real time. But before we started that scene, we had a short scene in the bathroom. In this one page scene, the story establishes that Ashley's period is late and that she is about to take a pregnancy test. It is was the ideal place to start. The scene is short, simple and the stakes are relatively low.

Our plan was to capture the close ups first, and then shoot the "roaming" takes that were inspired by *Breaking the Waves*. We shot the close ups quickly and efficiently. The actors required few adjustments and the script remained unchanged. Then, we moved onto the "roaming" take. Huay repositioned himself so that he could capture the scene from one vantage point and we proceeded to do our first take. From the moment it started, it felt wrong. It was not Huay or the actors, it was just that this set up felt superfluous in the edit. I had no idea how it would be utilized, and therefore, I had no idea what we needed from the actors. We did a few more takes which only confirmed my first instinct. We scrapped them from the shot list and focused our attention on the close ups.

After we wrapped the bathroom, we were about to embark on the eight page bedroom scene that makes up the majority of the film. My goal was to run through the

scene all at once, allowing us to shoot each close up in one, uninterrupted take. However, it was impossible to coordinate the cast and crew given the modest space and extensive blocking. So, we broke up the scene into segments, dividing them up according to the actors' movements.

In the first beat of the scene, the actors begin far apart. But during the first minute, they become progressively close and end up in an embrace. Their proximity ended up creating issues with their close ups. They were arranged so tightly together that it was impossible to shoot clean close ups of each actor. I considered losing the close ups and committing to shooting a two shot for the opening segment. This simplified our shooting considerably but it also meant we would only cover this segment in one set up. I felt trepidation about committing to only one option for one minute of screen time. I weighed my possibilities. I could either make the actors move apart, giving us enough space to shoot their close ups or I could shoot the two shot. I decided on the latter. I did not want to interfere with the natural positioning of the actors and I felt opening the scene with a two shot would be a nice respite from how the rest of the film would be covered.

The two shot went well. We did several takes and I felt their performances were strong enough to support a minute long take. But when it was time to move on to the next segment, I felt uncomfortable. Committing to one set up was something I had never done before. My lack of experience and the level of commitment it involved inspired me to rethink my decision. So, we went ahead and shot a reverse two shot just in case. It was hard to imagine how the two shots would cut together but some coverage was better than no coverage.

After the actors broke their embrace, we ended the segment. From here on out, the actors would remain a comfortable distance from one another. We did not need to reconsider our approach any further and could commit to the close ups for the rest of the film.

Moving forward, the rest of the day progressed without any further reconsideration of our shooting plan. The only development that took some getting used to was how the film was divided up. Since I did not anticipate the film being broken up into so many pieces, I was not prepared to overlap each segment in order for the footage cut together seamlessly. This became my obsession for the rest of the day. We would shoot enough material so that each segment overlapped into the next, but I was not entirely sure how everything would cut together. Nonetheless, I felt confident that it would somehow work in the edit. Our shooting approach could not have been simpler. So long as every moment was covered and every segment overlapped with the next, we would be able to cut between the close ups at will. Besides that preoccupation, our day went without incident. By nightfall, we had shot seven of the nine total pages. Since we only had two pages left, our second day forecasted to be light and relaxed.

As we were wrapping, I felt a confidence and excitement I had never experienced before. In the past, I would end a shooting day feeling equal parts relieved and worried. I usually left set preoccupied about a certain beat or a particular performance that did not feel right. In turn, I would stay up at night, putting together an edit that would either



confirm or negate my doubt. But with this film, I felt none of that. The day went so efficiently and smoothly that I saw no reason to edit any of footage that night.

When I got home I called Mark. As the conversation went on, I sensed he was less confident in the footage than I was. It was unfathomable to me that there could be anything wrong so I asked what preoccupied him. He expressed concern about how the segments would cut together. I assured him that we sufficiently overlapped each one but he still had his doubts. The only way I could actually satisfy his curiosity was to edit the film overnight. However, I wanted to avoid going through that. I felt confident for one in my life and I wanted to revel in it.

However, I implicitly trust Mark. Even if I could not relate to his concern, I could not help but wonder if there was something to it. I sat down at my computer and considered editing the film in order to resolve his concerns. It was a choice I wanted to think about because if I started, I would not stop until the next morning. I needed to weigh the pros and cons of staying up all night against leaving the film alone. It was an easy choice. The only drawback of editing was a loss of sleep. The upside was the possibility to improve the film during the second day of shooting in case Mark's concerns turned out to be true.

I went straight to the transitions Mark was concerned about and began cutting the segments together. It became clear that Mark's worries were not an issue. We overlapped enough in order to bridge each segment. But, since I started editing, I thought I might as well start from the beginning and piece the movie together.

Right off the bat, there were massive issues with the opening bathroom scene. The performances lacked the anxiety necessary to establish the tension of the situation. It was not the actors fault though. Their approach was a good starting point but I should have pushed their anxiety even further. Since it was the first scene of the shoot, it was a forgivable oversight. It takes everyone, especially me, some time to get accustomed to the world and how the people should behave in it.

I went on to the opening bedroom scene. I was immediately dissatisfied with the two shot I committed to. By letting this segment play out in a long take it was out of step with the rest of the film and lacked the intimacy of the close ups. Desperate, I tried cutting it with the reverse two shot, and as I anticipated on set, it did not work at all. I was only two segments in and felt we had to reshoot both of them. It was not a promising start.

I moved onto the next segment and found no issues. The close ups cut perfectly together and the performances were wonderful. All the overlapping we shot cut seamlessly into the following segment. As I cut the next segment, I found the execution was spot on as well. I may not have directed the film perfectly, but I also did not screw it up entirely either. I continued editing and only encountered one more segment that was problematic.

Before the characters break up, they reach an impasse in their argument. The man suggests that he has no say in what the woman will do if she is pregnant. In the moments leading up to this impasse, the performances were effusive and demonstrative. Since we

shot the movie in segments, I did not realize that these performances did not transition naturally into the sadness of their break up. It felt as if the movie was missing a reel, as the characters leapt from demonstrative anger to internalized sadness. Their performances needed to be more subdued, yet still maintain the stakes of the scene.

By the time I finished the initial edit, the sun was rising. With an hour before call time, I accounted for all the material we needed to reshoot. It added up to three pages in addition to the final two pages that were planned for the day. I arrived on set and informed Chris about the reshoots. He rearranged the schedule and I explained to Luke and Ashley why it was essential we do them. They were empathetic to my needs and were eager to move forward. The lighting was set up for the bedroom already, so we started there.

### **Day Three**

We began with the opening segment when the characters are locked in embrace. I knew now we had to shoot the close ups, no matter how much we inconvenienced the actors. We worked through a number positions in order to find what worked best for the coverage. After a few false starts, the actors found a comfortable arrangement and we shot the close ups. The actors nailed their performances and we moved onto the next segment. The ease with which we accomplished our initial set ups was encouraging. I felt we would be able to work at our own pace for the rest of the day and still have ample time to get Ashley to the airport.

Our next do over was the transitional moment into the climax of the movie. This segment was especially challenging because it was hard to articulate what I needed from

the actors. All I could offer is that they needed to find a reason within themselves to subdue their emotions in order to bridge into the climax. I hate offering impersonal direction like that, but I trusted they both knew how to translate it for their own needs.

We did a couple of rehearsals before we shot. Their approach felt in line with what I needed but it also felt right the day before. Given how my instincts betrayed me the previous day, I was never completely confident in what they were doing. I could only go with my gut. We shot several takes of each actors until their performances began to suffer and we wrapped the segment. When we moved on, I could only have faith in my instincts and nothing more.

We then picked up where we left off the day before. The next segment dealt with the aftermath of the man admitting that he would leave his girlfriend if she decided to keep the child. The man does his best to repair the damage of his admission while the woman makes it clear that his confession has done irreparable damage to their relationship. Before we shot, I was still fearful that the segments may not cut together because of my experiences the night before. For preparation, I only asked that they remember where they were coming from in the previous segment. We shot their close ups and their emotional pitch felt perfect. We did several takes in order to get as many options as possible and we wrapped the bedroom. I was desperate for a sense of closure but it was elusive. I could not put all the missteps behind me. No matter how much footage we shot in that room, I would never feel completely certain we got what we needed.

We returned to the bathroom and prepared to shoot the opening of the film. We started with Ashley's close up. We shot her takes and with each take, she layered in more and more anxiety. Her performance was sufficient and I felt we could move on until Mark suggested she heighten her anxiety even more. I spoke to Ashley about it and she explained that she wanted to match her anxiety level with the opening of the next scene. It made sense but it would not hurt to try another version. We shot another series of close ups and this time her heightened anxiety made the scene feel alive. It was a complete oversight on my part and a credit to Mark's instincts. From there, Luke took Ashley's lead and layered in an anxiety that I had not witnessed the day before. After we completed his series of close ups we had nothing else left to shoot.

When we wrapped, I experienced a fulfilling catharsis. Instead of wondering whether or not it would all cut together, I was grateful for the opportunity to reshoot sections of the film. I considered what life would have been like if I did not edit the night before. I speculated on the devastation I would have experienced in editing and the torture of forever knowing those mistakes were avoidable. By avoiding this fate, I went into the editing phase confident. All known disasters had been averted.

After we wrapped the location, I took a walk to clear my head. I started to look forward to the editing process and projected how it might go. At that time, Mark and I had not discussed how the film would be edited. I presumed I would edit alone and he would drop by periodically to give his opinion and offer feedback. It was strange to me that we would distance from one another at this point in the process. He had been such a contributor to all phases of development that to exclude him now felt like lunacy. I called

him immediately and proposed we edit the film together. He accepted and was grateful to be included in the process.

## POST-PRODUCTION

The next day I began syncing the footage. As the day went on, I got increasingly excited about our film. I felt it would end up closer to what I intended than anything else I had previously attempted.

Once the footage was ready, I avoided watching the dailies. Although it is unorthodox to skip straight to cutting, I felt it would ultimately serve the edit. Since the film exists entirely in close ups, it would consist solely of shot reverse shot editing. Using only two set ups in the entire film meant we could easily compare takes as we built the edit. However, we needed to establish a method to our cutting if we were going to skip past the dailies.

Using non linear editing gave us the opportunity to watch a series of edits in succession without interruption. I utilized this ability and devised a system for Mark and I to evaluate the footage. We would begin with the opening shot of a scene. We compared all the takes of whoever spoke first in the scene and chose whichever one felt best. We then took that clip and copied it several times into our sequence. We would then pair that clip with every other take of the reverse shot to see how they played. By watching all the takes in a row, it was easy to figure out how which one played best with the previous shot. Since the movie is always using shot reverse shot coverage, we could apply this system for the entire edit.

We started chronologically with the bathroom scene and moved forward from there. In this scene, the characters' blocking was static and did not present any continuity issues. With the characters positions remaining consistent, we could consider every

possible take. Choosing the takes was a fairly intuitive process. Some stood out while some felt glaringly wrong. The process became less intuitive and more verbal when we had two strong takes to choose from. At this point, Mark and I would discuss what each one offered. When we verbalized what we saw in the takes and articulated how they would affect the story, it made easy for us to decide which was best. We finished the bathroom and watched the scene. The purpose of reviewing the scene was less about identifying problems and more about making sure that the scene would work. After watching our assembly, we agreed it was rough but that it would ultimately make for a strong opening.

The bedroom scene was more complicated. I expected to encounter problems based on writing and performances. From previous experiences, I learned the biggest editing issues stem from the script and then compound themselves in performance. While I expected those issues to be less common in this project, I still felt those would be the issues we grappled with most. However, that was not the case at all. As we applied our process to this lengthy scene, the writing and acting did not present any issues. The issues that ended up plaguing us pertained to character positioning and continuity.

Continuity is usually of no interest to me. It rarely determines what takes I choose or exclude. But in our case, it became a preoccupation because we got every close up dirty. By including part of one character while shooting the other character in close up, their geography to one another was always visible. However, when the actors movements were inconsistent, their reverse shots did not match and became distracting. Therefore,



some takes were excluded simply because they did not cut with the previous edit. The actors did an admirable job repeating their actions in each take, but in several instances some takes could not be salvaged. As we proceeded, I experienced more and more anxiety with each series of reverse shots. I was waiting for that one segment that simply did not cut together, and I dreaded the prospect of cutting around a scene on account of continuity.

As we progressed through the scene, there were no such incidents however. As each segment cut with the next, my anxiety diminished. Despite some takes being thrown out, we always had one if not two possibilities we were happy with. Our editing process in the bedroom scene ended up being very similar to the bathroom scene. We watched all the takes and threw a number of them out based on performance. We were usually left with two possibilities we both felt confident in and from there, we discussed the positives and negatives of each option and always came to a unanimous decision.

In the end, I became so worried about the actors' blocking that my biggest fear became an afterthought. All the doubt that hung over me about the reshoots cutting together never became a problem. I may have mislead the scene a couple times but the overnight editing allowed me to evaluate what was necessary to reshoot. After Mark and I chose the final take for the final shot in the film I was completely at ease. We never compromised on a take and we believed we had enough raw material to shape the film into a compelling real time sequence.

Our next phase would be watching the film for the first time. The day before we saw it, I anticipated that what we were going to watch would be extremely rough. In this

instance, our rough cut, was not much of a cut at all. It was basically all of our favorite takes strung together in chronological order. We did not edit the material beyond that. Given my tendencies for fatalism, I needed to gauge my emotions appropriately.

We watched the eleven minute sequence from end to end. From the first frame, it slowly and systematically drained my spirit. Whatever emotional preparation I had made vanished. What I thought would be a scene of steady, tense escalation felt lifeless. I turned to Mark for his thoughts. He agreed that it felt slow but he was confident in what he saw. He went to say that there was nothing fundamentally alarming about the material and that we just needed to continue editing. I was disappointed and vulnerable but I was eager to follow Mark's lead. His reactions and responses tend to be more measured and thoughtful than mine. I felt that in the end, his opinion would triumph and my disappointment would evaporate as we steadily progressed with the edit.

Our first order of editing was to cut all the lengthy pauses the actors took exchanging their lines. It was a simple, straightforward task that turned out to be more fulfilling than tedious. With each edit, I accounted for all the time we were removing from the film. The seconds accumulated steadily with each cut and by the end of the day, we removed ninety seconds. We were able to cut over ten percent of the film without removing a beat or a line of dialogue.

The following day, we watched it again. Immediately, Mark's observations turned out to be true. There was nothing fundamentally wrong with the movie, we just needed to

refine it. By removing a minute and a half, a lifeless eleven minute discussion transformed into a compelling nine and a half minute argument.

After our second editing pass, we focused on the edit as a whole. By editing the footage the way we did, the movie cuts on each character before they begin speaking. For the most part it works nicely since the dialogue is terse leaving us little opportunity to cut for a reaction shot. But there were opportunities to break that pattern. The first phase was to experiment staying on a character after he or she spoke, resisting the temptation to cut to the other character when he or she responded. We tried a number of options and found several opportunities to remain on one character after he or she spoke, and watch that character listen to the other character's response.

We were now far enough along in the edit that we could begin reevaluating the takes we initially chose. No approach is foolproof and we felt we may have chosen the wrong takes for particular moments in the film. We went through the movie and flagged any takes we felt may not be our best option. After going through it beat by beat, we found a number of takes we felt could be stronger. We then replaced our current take with other takes to see how they played in context. Although we did not change all of the suspect takes, we ended up replacing several of them.

The film was getting to the point where it would be beneficial to share it for feedback. But before we shared it, we wanted to get microscopic with each edit. So, we took each edit and laid out three variations of it. One had three frames removed from the A side, the other had three frames removed from the B side, and the other had three frames removed from both sides. We then watched all three in a row and tested how they

played against one another. By watching variations of each edit, we could get a better sense of where the right frame was to cut. From there, we would test one frame variations of each edit to find where the perfect cut point lied. This was by far the most tedious part of the process. Once we finally got through the film, I checked its new duration and discovered that we removed fifteen seconds during the process. I was particularly excited to see how the film would play now. Having made all the macro editorial decisions, I was fascinated to see how these micro decisions would accumulate and change the film as a whole.

Before we shared it, we watched the film to see how the changes played. Overall, the removal of a few frames here and there made the film a more tense and satisfying experience. I admit to feeling like a lunatic, going edit to edit, testing to see how one, two or three frames can change each edit but it was validating to see how much a difference being fastidious can make with a film.

Mark and I had no further ideas regarding the edit. Each take and its duration felt right to us. It was the perfect time to begin sharing the film and get feedback from people who were either familiar or completely unfamiliar with story. We shared it with a number of people and for the most part received great, specific notes. For instance, Huay suggested we start the bedroom scene with a wide shot instead of a close up. It was something we had never considered before and it worked beautifully. We continued to experiment with every suggestion. No matter how little sense it made to us, every note

was worth trying. Ultimately, Mark and I only made a few changes based on specific notes but they all of them benefited the film substantially.

Broader notes were more difficult to address. They were so all encompassing that it became impossible to address them literally. We had to look for the meaning behind the note before we could experiment with it. For example, someone suggested the film is too redundant and that we should remove substantial amounts of dialogue in favor of looks and reaction shots. We were at a loss. We did not know exactly how to deal with the note because a movie about a couple arguing is inherently redundant. That said, we were committed to experimenting with every note. So, instead of questioning the redundant nature of the film, we decided to consider the note at a microscopic level. If the movie felt redundant, it was possible that some moments could go and no one would ever notice.

I proposed to Mark that I go through the movie one last time and remove potentially unnecessary beats. He was curious about the idea and agreed it was worth trying. As he drove over to my apartment, I went through the film and removed three exchanges I felt were potentially unnecessary. When Mark arrived, I let him know that three moments had been removed but I did not inform him of which ones. He agreed it would be best if he was kept in the dark so that he could figure out what was missing on his own. After we watched the film, he noticed two of the missing exchanges but could identify the last one. I let him know which moment had been removed and we agreed to leave it out of the film.

After that, we met every few days and watched the movie. We took detailed notes and experimented with lengthening and shortening particular edits. To begin with, most of our ideas improved the film. They were always small, imperceptible changes but ones we felt made the edit stronger. But as we continued to meet, our notes led us more and more astray. On our final day of editing, every single idea we tried caused the film more harm than good. After that day, Mark and I agreed the movie was picture locked.

## CONCLUSION

We completed the film and for the first in my life, I regretted nothing. It was a new experience for me. Unlike previous productions, nothing haunted me about this film. There was no misstep or mistake that would torment me forever. I made the film I intended to make, I thought. Yet, to say I made the film I intended to could not be further from reality.

In the beginning, my only purpose was to fulfill the requirements necessary to graduate in May. That deadline was the inspiration I started with. From there, I tried developing one idea. It went no where. Stifled, I attempted to revitalize an old story. That actually went somewhere. I got a cast and a crew together and we had everything intention of seeing it through. At least until an actor dropped out. When she left, she triggered an epiphany for me. If I were to replace her, I would be making one too many compromises. At that point, I considered another old idea and that ultimately became my thesis film.

It was certainly an unorthodox development process. Leaving so many creative decisions to chance is not a sustainable working model moving forward. But I did learn three lessons I can carry with me forever.

The first one is remain personal. This movie came from me. It does not borrow or steal from anybody else. It is entirely my own nightmare. That is what makes it special.

The second is remain collaborative. I harbored a fear of making my girlfriend pregnant for months and never once considered making a film about it. It took Mark's foresight to suggest that I turn it into a film. In fact, much of what I most proud of are

Mark's contributions. I am fortunate to share such a great collaboration with him and it would be unfathomable for me to make a movie without him.

The third lesson is to remain productive. I did not start with this film, I ended up making this film. What I started with may have been the wrong idea but I needed to have a bad idea in order to get to the right idea. Whether or not I see any promise in what I try next, it is essential that I begin. By having a beginning there is a potential that I will find an end.



## APPENDIX 1: SHOOTING SCRIPT

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

LUKE stands in the doorway, as his girlfriend ASHLEY, standing at the sink, unwraps a home-pregnancy test, slides the test into her palm, and hands the empty box to him.

ASHLEY  
What're you thinking?

Luke chortles, shaking his head.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
Tell me.

LUKE  
Honestly?

ASHLEY  
(dead-pan)  
Yes. Honestly.

LUKE *making a joke*  
How much I've taken your period for granted.

*not funny joke*  
Ashley, test in hand, lowers the toilet seat but just stares into the bowl.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
You need me to shut the door?

ASHLEY  
I need to know something.

LUKE  
Sure, what's up?

She looks to him.

ASHLEY  
If it's positive. . .

✱ Luke waits for her to finish her sentence, but she leaves him hanging.

LUKE  
yeah?

ASHLEY  
What are we gonna do?

LUKE  
I don't know.

single

ASHLEY  
You don't know?

Luke searches for the right words.

LUKE  
I'll support you in whatever you  
want to do.

ASHLEY  
You'll support me?

LUKE  
(with greater confidence)  
Yeah.

ASHLEY  
What does that mean?

LUKE  
Can you just take the test, please?

ASHLEY  
I mean, if it's positive, what are  
we gonna do? What are you gonna  
want to do?

LUKE  
I'm not talking about this anymore  
until you take the test.

He closes the door in her face.

~~TNT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER~~

~~Luke lies on the bed, staring at the ceiling. Ashley enters  
and lies down next to Luke, holding the pregnancy test in her  
hand.~~ *sits on the bed next to Luke*

~~LUKE  
what's it say?~~

~~ASHLEY  
I don't know. It takes a couple of  
minutes.~~

~~LUKE  
We'll look at it while we wait.~~

~~Ashley shakes her head and rolls away from him, holding the  
test close to her chest, guarding it from Luke's attempts to  
snatch it from her hands.~~

*Luke grabs her.  
They lie on the bed  
together, being  
each other*

} single

ASHLEY  
You don't know?

Luke searches for the right words.

LUKE  
I'll support you in whatever you want to do.

ASHLEY  
You'll support me?

LUKE  
(with greater confidence)  
Yeah.

ASHLEY  
What does that mean?

LUKE  
Can you just take the test, please?

ASHLEY  
I mean, if it's positive, what are we gonna do? What are you gonna want to do?

LUKE  
I'm not talking about this anymore until you take the test.

He closes the door in her face.

TNT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Luke lies on the bed, staring at the ceiling. Ashley enters and lies down next to Luke, holding the pregnancy test in her hand.

*sits on the bed next to Luke*

LUKE  
what's it say?

ASHLEY  
I don't know. It takes a couple of minutes.

LUKE  
We'll look at it while we wait.

Ashley shakes her head and rolls away from him, holding the test close to her chest, guarding it from Luke's attempts to snatch it from her hands.

← Luke grabs her. They lie on the bed together, facing each other

ASHLEY  
I need to know what we'll do before  
we see the result.

LUKE  
I told you.

ASHLEY  
You told me what?

LUKE  
That I'll support you in whatever  
you want to do.

ASHLEY *2 shot*  
And if I want to keep it?

LUKE  
If you're pregnant. . .and if you  
want to keep it, then. . .yeah, I  
mean, we'll talk about it.

ASHLEY  
Talk about it?

He nods.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
But I thought you'll support me in  
whatever I want.

LUKE  
Will you just let me see it?

He reaches again for the test, and she scoots to the edge of  
the bed. *Ashley moves  
away to edge of  
bed.*

ASHLEY  
I need to know what you'll do if  
I'm pregnant.

LUKE *use keep*  
I'm not gonna tell you until I  
know, so let me see the damn thing.

She gets up from the bed. He grabs at her, but she pulls  
away.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
*turn* I'm ~~serious~~. This doesn't just  
affect you, y'know.

ASHLEY *single dirty*  
But you said it was up to me.

Luke shakes his head in frustration. Doesn't readily have the words to come to his own defense.

ASHLEY (CONT'D) *ashley pulls away from him*  
 So, you lied?  
 LUKE  
 I just don't know if we're ready for this right now, okay?  
 ASHLEY *deep seeded issue*  
 We're not ready?

*1st non-deflection*  
*↳ Ashley*  
*I checked it*

LUKE  
 Oh, so it's just me that's scared?

ASHLEY  
 You always are.

LUKE  
 The fuck is that supposed to mean?

ASHLEY  
 Just like you were reluctant to live together, even though we had been seeing other for three years. Three years!

LUKE  
 Will you let that go?

ASHLEY  
 I'm seeing a pattern developing. You're actually quite predictable. *Not sure why I'd expect you to react any other way.*

LUKE  
 Okay, this situation, the one we're in right now. This is different.

ASHLEY  
 How?

LUKE  
 This is the kind of thing you have to be absolutely certain of. It's permanent.

ASHLEY  
 Whereas your commitment to me. . .

*Dissonance*  
*style*

*Earl Seymour 1*

*Asks if it's personal*

*Defensive attack*

*gets up, he tries*

*pulls her back down*

*possibly use*  
↓  
LUKE  
(Please) don't do that. I hate it  
when you use my own words against  
me like that.

Ashley gets back on the bed, arms crossed, the test out of  
his reach.

ASHLEY  
I'm getting the feeling you've made  
up your mind.

*Ashley gets back  
up on the bed*

LUKE  
And don't assume you know what I'm  
thinking. I haven't made up my  
mind. I'm just talking this  
through. Like an adult.

Ashley nods along, patronizingly.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
And, honestly, I just don't think  
we're ready.

*gets on knees here*

ASHLEY  
Again, with the 'we.'

~~*gets on knees on bed*~~

LUKE  
Like you are?

ASHLEY  
I am.

*gets up*

~~LUKE~~ *is offensive, been defense*  
~~you're ready to take care~~ *of the wife like*  
~~of a kid? A baby? A living thing~~  
~~that can't eat or shit~~ *not personal. Generalizing*  
go five  
fucking minutes without your  
attention?

ASHLEY  
Sure, why not?

Luke chortles.

LUKE  
I can tell you've given this a lot  
of thought.

*she pulls away  
from him*

ASHLEY  
Fuck you.

LUKE  
Everything'll change. Your whole  
life has to revolve something other  
than yourself. Do you know what  
that means?

6.  
to ~~She gets up~~  
holds her  
Luke pulls her in

ASHLEY  
Yeah, I've done it before.

LUKE  
For who?

ASHLEY  
You.

Luke sighs. Here we go.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
I moved away from my home, my job,  
my family, I left everything to  
move in with you.

All covered

Luke rises from the bed, becoming more animated as he  
struggles to contain his mounting frustration.

Transition W/2

LUKE *accusation:*  
Okay, one: you're 26 years old, you  
shouldn't be living at home. Two:  
you left a shit dead-end job that  
you hated. Three: you talk to your  
mom like every day.

Accusation, personal  
attack on her

ASHLEY  
What have you sacrificed for this  
relationship?

Attack mode

LUKE  
Plenty.

ASHLEY  
Like what?

LUKE  
I live with you don't I?

Transition - Breaking point

Fed up, Ashley gets up to leave. Luke grabs her and throws  
her back onto the bed, pinning her to the mattress.

Just

LUKE (CONT'D)  
Let me see it.

Luke grabs her hand and tries to unlock her grip.

Ashley single

ASHLEY  
I'll show you if you tell me.

LUKE  
Tell you what?!

ASHLEY  
What you'll do if I'm pregnant?

LUKE  
I've told you.

ASHLEY  
No, you haven't. You've said everything but that. Now, tell me what you want to do.

Luke moves off of her and the bed. Starts to pace.

LUKE  
Why? What's the fucking point? It doesn't matter what I want.

*Turn into his frustration. The heart of his dilemma that he has been keeping private*

ASHLEY  
What's that supposed to mean?

LUKE  
It means exactly that. Doesn't matter what I want. What I think, because it's up to you. You can do whatever you want, and I can't stop you.

Ashley sits up.

ASHLEY  
So, let's say it's positive.

LUKE  
Yeah?

ASHLEY  
And I decide to keep it. What are you gonna do?

LUKE  
It's your decision.

ASHLEY  
That's not what I'm asking. I'm asking what are you gonna do?

Again, Luke searches for words.



ASHLEY (CONT'D)  
The answer is: you'll stick by me  
whatever I do.

Ashley waits for him to say those words.

LUKE  
I can't do that.

Ashley's eyes widen, stunned.

*Devastated not pissed*

*↳ Ashley's big turn, something changes  
within her, how she look at him  
Is this real? IS THIS*

ASHLEY  
You said you'd support me.

LUKE  
That doesn't mean I'd stay with you  
necessarity.

ASHLEY  
You'd leave me?

LUKE  
I'd have to think about it.

Ashley, stunned by Luke's admission, doesn't know what to  
say.

LUKE (CONT'D)  
I'm not saying I would, I said I'd  
think about it.

ASHLEY  
What the fuck is wrong with you?

LUKE  
You get to have your choice, and I  
have mine.

*] confirms the choice  
that it is real  
Ashley still  
is wrong*

Ashley takes a moment to process what she's just heard. She  
gets up from the bed and goes to move past him, but he grabs  
her wrist.

ASHLEY  
Don't touch me.

Luke releases his grip.

LUKE  
Where are you going?

ASHLEY  
To my mom's.

LUKE

Wait, stay. I didn't mean that.

ASHLEY

Mean what exactly? The part about me being such a burden to live with? The part about me not being fit to be a mom? Or what is it the part about abandoning me if I have your baby?

Not wanting to lie, but also not wanting to say the truth, Luke doesn't have an answer for Ashley, so she heads to the door.

*silence / closure  
not knowing what  
to say*

LUKE

You can't just leave like that. What about the test? Don't you wanna know?

Ashley looks down at the test. Her expression indecipherable.

ASHLEY

She tosses the pregnancy test to him, before turning and shutting the door behind her.

The test now in his hands, he hesitates to look down at the result. Closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

His eyes open to see their fate in this tiny digital square. He falls back onto the bed and stares at the result, his face morphing from relief at the resolution to regret at the recognition of what just transpired between him and Ashley. How he allowed his fear, his self-absorption, to drive her away.

And now a panicked feeling sets in. Does he let her go? Has a line been crossed, one from which there is no turning back? Or does he go after her, do and say whatever he can to repair the damage done? The damage he caused.

He springs off of the bed and darts out the door to go after her. In such a hurry, he leaves with the door wide open.

THE END.

## APPENDIX 2: SHOT LIST

SHOT LIST		PLUSMINUS			
Shot					
SCN#	Shot Description	Framing	Framing Notes	Special Notes	Priority
1	A Luke single	ECU	Stay on Axis/Keep fame clean as much as possible/Frame tip of nose in center of frame/Frame up so we can see 3/4 face/Only move when character moves	Tracks actor the entire scene	High
1	B Ashley single	ECU	Stay on Axis/Keep fame clean as much as possible/Frame tip of nose in center of frame/Frame up so we can see 3/4 face/Only move when character moves	Tracks actor the entire scene	High
1	C Roaming Single/Tight two shot	CU	Floats between characters in tight close up/Shot in profile/EXTREMELY helpful when characters are close to each other	Pan between characters/No one take should be the same	High
1	D Roaming single/Tight two shot	MS	Stay on Axis/Keep fame clean as much as possible/Frame tip of nose in center of frame/Frame up so we see 2/3 to profile	Camera movement TBD on set	Medium
1	E Luke and Ashley two shot	WS		Optional/No more than two takes/No tweaks to lighting	Low
1	F Insert of upwrapping pregnancy test and handing it to him/run for the entire scene	ECU		Priority: may be the first shot of film	High
2	A Luke single	ECU	Stay on Axis/Keep fame clean as much as possible/Frame tip of nose in center of frame/Frame up so we can see 3/4 face/Only move when character moves	Shoot ending two ways: camera stay on bed with pregnancy test visible on bed/camera follows him to door	High
2	B Ashley single	CU	Stay on Axis/Keep fame clean as much as possible/Frame tip of nose in center of frame/Frame up so we can see 3/4 face/Only move when character moves	Tracks actor the entire scene	High
2	C Roaming Close up Single	CU	Floats between characters in tight close up/Pan down for pregnancy test	Pan between characters to get their line readings	High
2	D Roaming single/Tight two shot	MCU	Stay on Axis/Keep fame clean as much as possible/Frame tip of nose in center of frame/Frame up so we see 2/3 to profile	Camera movement TBD on set	High
2	F Luke and Ashley two shot	WS		Optional/No more than two takes/No tweaks to lighting	Medium
2	G Insert of pregnancy test on bed/must visibly show positive/Framed so titles will fit somewhere	ECU		1st shot of day	Medium
2	H Insert of Luke holding pregnancy test/must visbly show positive	ECU		2nd shot of day	Low
<b>ADDITIONAL SHOT LIST</b>					
1	A Shot of pregnancy test pan up to Ashley	ECU	starts on pregnancy test, pans up to Ashley, run a few lings		
1	B Ashley single OTS Dirty	ECU	Must be over the shoulder, stage them closer		
1	C Luke single OTS Dirty	ECU	Must be over the shoulder, stage them closer		
2	A Ashley single/CANNOT INCLUDE Luke's mouth, SHOOT TIGHT	ECU	Beginning of scene/End at "This doesn't just affect you, you know?"		
2	B Luke single/CANNOT INCLUDE Ashley's mouth, SHOOT TIGHT	ECU	Beginning of scene/End at "This doesn't just affect you, you know?"		
2	A Ashley single/OTS dirty	ECU	Start at "I moved away from my home"/End at her walking toward bed		
2	B Luke Single/OTS dirty	ECU	Start at "I moved away from my home"/End on Ashley walking toward bed/Must match mood of end		
2	A Ashley Single/OTS dity	ECU	Start at her leaving bed after break up/Go until end up script		
2	B Luke Single/OTS dirty	ECU	Start at "I moved away from my home"/End at her walking toward bed		

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