

# Who's Next?

By

Donald W. Ayer

Close-up of a woman's face— a beautiful face: **JULIE'S** face, eyes open. She is gorgeous. Bright red lipstick is slowly applied to her mouth, with finesse, diligence... then— the lipstick slips, sliding down her cheek in a ragged red line: a wound... *beauty's wound*.

Cut to **DON** in a hardware store. Don stands before an endless wall of red paint cans. He studies their names: *Lover's Regret, Vivid Heart, Portrait of the Bride, etc.*— the insipid poetry of consumer culture. His phone rings; he answers it. Cut to **MAUREEN** at home; she screams into the telephone, panicked, weeping— but all we can hear is an all-consuming whine, as if the aftershock of a bomb. Don listens, trying to cut in; but his words are lost in the deafening silence. Suddenly, in a flash, sound returns— Maureen moans: "*She won't wake up! She can't wake up! Don!*" Don stares blankly at a can of paint... *Sunset Body*... and begins to tremble.

Smash-cut to— Terri Shiavo in her hospital bed, comatose, curled in a fetal position. Slowly, we pan out, revealing the image to be on a TV screen— a news program; video of right-to-life protestors, Jeb Bush, Michael Shiavo, etc. We pan out further to reveal the TV mounted on the wall of a hospital room and in that room— **JULIE**: lying comatose on the bed, a breathing tube down her throat. A supertitle reads: **September, 2003**.

Don, Maureen, and **BONET**— Julie's fiancé— stand beside the bed, watching the spectacle in melancholy silence... the sound of the breathing device, only. Bonet shakes his head— and speaks. "She... just went in for breast augmentation, you know and... and she just... you know... she just never woke up." A nurse enters and, to Bonet, asks, "Are you the father?" Bonet turns red. "No, I'm her *fiancé*." The nurse turns then to Don. "Mr. Rubenzer, then." Don shakes his head; Maureen interjects, "Ayer." "Rubenzer was her *ex-husband*," Bonet growls. "We're Julie's parents," says Maureen. "What happened?" The nurse explains that Julie is in a coma and under heavy sedation to help control brain seizures. Something went wrong during her cosmetic surgery, she elaborates, but in her experience many patients wake up from comas perfectly fine— but nothing can be near certain until Julie undergoes an MRI. There is the possibility that she suffered a major stroke.

Don reaches out slowly... takes Julie's hand... and gently squeezes. He murmurs, "*Sleeping beauty*." A silence— and he bursts into tears, rushing out into the corridor. He leans against a wall, trying to catch his breath. When he looks up, he sees **DR. DANGL** and **MICHELLE LAWRENCE** watching him intently. The doctor introduces himself as the cosmetic surgeon who undertook Julie's breast augmentation. He and Ms. Lawrence, his nurse, tried to resuscitate Julie when her heart suddenly stopped after the operation. They were able to stabilize her, but when she did not wake up, they called the EMTs. Don thanks Dr. Dangel for coming to check on Julie— but, from the doorway, he sees the hospital nurse watching the scene suspiciously. When Don looks at her, she quickly turns away.

Cut to— Bonet's house the next morning. Don and Maureen sit with Bonet and Bonet's sister and mother. They drink coffee in a state of exhaustion. Bonet and Don leave for the hospital; Maureen is going to stay behind to collect a few of Julie's personal items to bring for her bedside. When Don and Bonet get outside, Don sees Julie's Porsche and tells Bonet that he'll

return his rental car and drive Julie's car while they're here. Suddenly, Don spots that the Porsche is stripped of its plates. Bonet clumsily explains that Julie was planning to sell the car, but Don can make temporary plates out of paper. An awkward silence passes... an air of distrust. Don says he'll need the title in order to get official plates. Bonet quickly changes the subject, tripping over his words. Don looks back to the house— a look of doubt crossing his face.

Back in the house: Maureen collects one of Julie's sweaters, a family photo, and a gold necklace. She then asks Bonet's mother and sister if they know where Julie's purse is— the hospital staff needs to know what medications she's been taking. Bonet's relatives simply stare blankly at Maureen. Maureen slowly begins to look on her own: but there is no sign of the purse. Her search grows in escalation; panic sets in; her actions become hurried, frenzied— a life or death situation. Bonet's mother and sister track Maureen through the house, muttering that she has no right to tear apart Bonet's things, to invade his privacy. In a sudden burst, Maureen is faced with the pure futility of it all, with the static endlessness of groping in the dark for something, anything to hold onto. She collapses on the sofa, weeping. Bonet's sister picks up the phone, staring daggers at Maureen, and dials a number.

In the hospital parking lot, Don's phone rings. He answers and, simultaneously, Bonet receives a call. The two part ways across the asphalt. Dr. Dangl is on Don's line. He explains that the MRI showed that Julie will be fine and that there's nothing to worry about. When Don protests that the results aren't in yet, Dangl explains that he went to neurology personally so that the family could be informed immediately. Don thanks him vociferously and hangs up the phone. He looks to Bonet who, still on his call, glares back at him with boiling disdain.

Don runs down the hospital corridor, Maureen on the phone. He shouts the good news over and over with abandon. When he turns the corner, he sees the hospital nurse from before. When Don tells her the good news, a shadow crosses the nurse's face. Julie is still in the process of getting her MRI— the procedure won't be over for another hour, and the results won't even be in for another four. Don freezes. "Is Dr. Dangl... part of Julie's case?" he asks. The nurse scowls. "Absolutely. Not." An overwhelming silence— the sound of Julie's breathing device pumping over and over again in Don's head... Maureen muffled on the phone speaker, still shouting, "*Thank God! Thank God!*" Don stumbles, dazed. Bonet suddenly marches around the corner, roaring through his teeth. "*Your wife can't just go through my things, Don. I'm not the bad guy here, okay? You can't just show up and start bossing everyone around, got me?*" Then, off camera, a woman's voice calls out, "Dad!" Imperceptibly, Don mouths, "*Julie?*" he turns. It is his daughter **COLLEEN** and his son **WADE**. He suddenly snaps back to reality. The children throw their arms around Don. Don and Bonet watch each other from across the hall... hatred building.

Cut to— Julie's hospital room, that night. Don, Maureen, Colleen, and Wade sit around Julie. **DR. H**, a pulmonologist, enters, frowning. He explains that Julie is in a vegetative state— and it is very rare for a patient to recover from such a severe coma. After a long pause, Wade suddenly slams his fist against the arm of the chair. The family looks over— watching the small drops of blood forming on his knuckles. Dr. H whispers, cautiously, "If Julie has a will... I advise

you obtain a copy of it.” Maureen stares at Julie in deep contemplation. “That’s not living... is it...” she says. Don hangs his head, placing his hands to his face.

An upscale home, the next morning. **RUBENZER**, Julie’s ex-husband, sits with Don. “So you met Larry Bonet,” says Rubenzer. “He’s quite a piece of work, wouldn’t you say?” Don nods. “It doesn’t surprise me that Julie was going to leave him. No one could blame her there.” Don proffers a confused look. Rubenzer sighs, explaining that Julie was trying to get back together with him. She missed him and her stepdaughters; Bonet was a boar; she felt alone when she was with him; she just wanted to be happy again. Don breathes, “Don’t we all” in a single breath, gripping one fist in the other. Rubenzer then hands over a stack of Julie’s legal documents. He stares blankly at Don, then whispers, “I’m... so...”— simultaneously, a woman’s voice speaks the same word over Rubenzer’s— “...sorry.”

Cut to— **BABETTE BACH**, an attorney— the woman saying “sorry” in voice-over. She sits in her office with Don and Maureen, the stack of legal papers before her. “The will names Julie’s stepdaughters as heir to her estate,” says Bach. She pauses. “If it comes to that. But,” Bach presents a folder of documents, “it is not a living will, therefore, the question of guardianship is a grey area.” She lays a finger firmly on the folder. “We must ensure that you become Julie’s legal guardians under these circumstances. While it might seem obvious that you, her parents, would logically fill that role, without the proper paperwork, your daughter’s future could rest in the hands of another. She is divorced from Mr. Rubenzer and has only been engaged to Mr. Bonet for two weeks but, nonetheless...” Bach opens the folder, spreads the documents before Don and Maureen, and offers each a pen, which they take. Don looks down— his pen is running, staining his hand. He watches the red ink drip, drop by drop, onto the floor, forming a bloody pool.

The slam of a gavel— a courtroom. A judge decrees: “*Guardianship of Julie Ayer Rubenzer is hereby granted to her father, Mr. Donald W. Ayer. Court is now adjourned.*” The judge slams his gavel once more.

Julie’s hospital room. The Ayer family, Bonet, and **DR. STEIN**— a neurologist. Bonet clutches Julie’s purse, his hands trembling. Slowly, he passes it off to Don. Don looks through the purse, finds Julie’s wallet, flips through it, and takes out a credit card. He hands the card to Bonet. “That’s yours,” says Don. Suddenly, Bonet flies into a rage. “She’s not dead yet! You’re all acting like she’s already dead! You all *want* her dead, is that it? *Isn’t that right?*” Dr. Stein firmly steps forward, growling, “I would advise you to keep your voice down, Mr. Bonet, or I’ll be forced to call security.” “Does she look dead to you? *Does she?*” moans Bonet, gesturing. We see Julie, curled in a fetal position, her eyes wide open, as if staring. Bonet moves to her, looking deep into her eyes. “You can hear me, can’t you sweetheart? You can *see* me, can’t you? You can... you can.” “No,” replies Dr. Stein. “She cannot. Her eyes are open, but she cannot see. Her hands can move, but they cannot feel. I’m sorry to say, but Julie has no more than a ten percent chance of recovery... and even that’s being generous. She’s deteriorating.” “A hyperbaric chamber!” shouts Bonet. “You haven’t tried putting her in a hyperbaric chamber, *have you?*” Dr. Stein, nonplussed— “That would be of absolutely no use, Mr. Bonet.” Bonet suddenly whips

around to the Ayer family. “And where’s her trachea tube, huh? How is she supposed to get *nutrition*? Well, you all put a DNR in her file, didn’t you. *Very* telling. So... so, what? You’ll just let her die... just like that?” “What... if she did wake up, Larry?” says Don suddenly, breaking the family’s stoic silence. “What... would she be waking up to? What... would she be waking up for?” “Is that living?” asks Maureen, rhetorically. “Why don’t you let the doctors do their jobs,” snaps Colleen. “Why don’t you just get out of here!” barks Wade. Bonet takes a step back— the whole Ayer family, solidified, resilient, as one, before him. “Just you wait,” mutters Bonet. “Just you wait.” He storms out of the hospital room, weeping tears of rage. “He’s going to take her away from us,” says Maureen. “Isn’t he. He’s going to try to take her away... and she’s already gone.” A heavy, heavy silence.

Smash-cut— a close-up on Julie’s face (as before). Rouge is slowly applied to her cheeks with subtlety, perfection. Then— small drops of water slowly fall, one by one, onto her cheeks. The rouge begins to dampen, to run, to pour— like blood.

Cut to— a courtroom. A supertitle reads: **October, 2003**. On one side of the courtroom sits Don, Maureen, and Bach; on the other sits Bonet and **JACKSON**— Bonet’s attorney. At the judge’s request, Jackson stands and delivers his argument. “We request that guardianship of Julie Ayer Rubenzer be removed from Mr. Donald Ayer and given to Larry Bonet, Julie’s fiancé, the man she plans to spend her future with, and the one person here today who has Julie’s best interests in mind— that is, her life.” Maureen hangs her head; Don grits his teeth. “It is clear to all parties involved,” continues Jackson, “that Mr. Ayer is impulsive, manipulative, and fatalistic. He has failed to provide any persuasive evidence that Julie will not recover, resolving himself instead to gloom and doom at the expense of his daughter’s very existence. We, however, have evidence that Julie is far from the ‘lost cause’ her cynical family has declared and, what’s more, it is this very attitude, we would argue, Mr. Ayer’s negative attitude, which has in fact contributed, substantially, to his daughter’s condition.” The Ayers and Bach exchange a look of disbelief. Don moves to speak— but Maureen places a hand on his shoulder.

Jackson then reads an affidavit from Dr. Zhao. Don turns to Maureen and quietly mouths, “Who?” The affidavit explains that Dr. Zhao is a doctor of Oriental Medicine who, at Bonet’s behest, performed an assessment of Julie’s condition in the hospital. By his estimation, Julie could recover if proper treatments were implemented to soothe her stress and energies— particularly a hyperbaric chamber. “*Goddamn hyperbaric chambers again,*” Don hisses. Maureen touches his shoulder. “That quack doesn’t have authorization to even be in Julie’s room!” The judge looks to Don— but only cautions him with a sympathetic look.

Bach then rises, delivering her own argument. She attests to the Ayer’s having followed all medical advice, having taken great pains to care for Julie, and never once refusing treatment— hyperbaric chambers are rarely used in these cases. Furthermore, a trachea tube was not inserted so as to delay forcing Julie from the hospital and into a nursing home— as corroborated by Dr. Stein’s written refusal to administer the device. Finally, she explains, all attacks on Mr. Ayer’s character are unfounded and nearing libel. From her own experience and the testimony of family and community members, Donald Ayer is a model citizen, businessmen

and, above all, father. Bach sits, her argument ended. Silence. The judge considers. After a pause, he makes his determination: a third-party neurologist must be agreed upon by the two parties; the neurologist's assessment will be final— and determine Julie's condition and, therefore, the competence with which the Ayer's have acted as guardians. With this evidence, the case will be heard by Judge Donellan: the original arbiter of the guardianship case. Court is adjourned.

Don turns to Bach. "What the hell just happened?" "Terri Shiavo," says Bach. "What?" asks Maureen. "No judge wants to touch a case like this. Not with Terri Shiavo and all the right-to-life furor going on. Donellan's on vacation. Owens just punted it back to her. But we haven't lost this thing yet. You'll just have to be patient." "There's not enough time to be patient," says Maureen. Bach makes to speak— but sighs instead... nodding, sadly, understanding.

Cut to— Julie's hospital room. Colleen sits beside Julie; Wade stands in the doorway, watching the hall. "She was always so beautiful," says Colleen. "Perfect face. Perfect hands. Perfect breast. So why.... how..." she looks to Wade, "...could she not see it? Or did she see it... and perfect... just wasn't perfect enough?" "Florida," mutters Wade. "There's no perfect in Florida. There's no beauty. No life. There's not... even death." He shakes his head. A group of nurses passes down the hall. Suddenly, as the group moves by the door, a note is dropped at Wade's feet. Wade bends down, picks it up, but when he looks— the nurses have turned the corner. Wade unfolds the note and reads.

The voice-over of a young woman: "Take Julie back to Wisconsin. Get out of Florida. She's a pawn here; she's being taken advantage of by the lawyers and the doctors and Bonet— she's just a piece in their never ending game. And, above all, watch out for Dangl, the plastic surgeon— he's keeping an eye on you and your family... and he will do everything in his power to protect himself. Julie's coma was his doing, his negligence, his ineptitude. In a word, his malpractice. In another... his criminality. No one can know I contacted you. If you would like to speak further, please e-mail me at the address bellow. I sincerely hope the best for your family."

Wade lowers the note— and slowly turns to Colleen. "Call dad," he says.

Cut to— Bach's office. Bach, Don, and Maureen. "Yes," says Bach, "I'll put you in touch with Rich Filson to file a malpractice suit against Dr. Dangl." "We've had our suspicions from the start," says Don. "But there's just... so much going on." Bach nods. "Now," she says. "Are you both ready for the neurologist's assessment?" Don and Maureen pause— then nod their heads.

The hospital. **DR. NEDD**, a neurologist, performs his assessments on Julie— who has deteriorated noticeably. The Ayers, Dr. Stein, two nurses, and Bonet watch from a distance. Dr. Nedd begins: he pries open Julie's eyes, sprays ice water in her ear, shoves a Q-tip up her nose, and, finally, shouts at her. She does not react. "I am confident that Julie will wake up," says Dr. Nedd. Dr. Stein shakes his head in silent dissent. Bonet looks at the Ayers. Maureen suddenly shouts, "Don't you glare at me!" A silence. "I'll perform a follow-up assessment in thirty days," says Dr. Nedd.

A supertitle reads: **November, 2003**. Don and Maureen sit at a diner. Maureen is working studiously on a handwritten letter. Don's phone rings; it is a New York area code. He answers. On the other line, a woman's voice: "I'm a friend of Julie's, *Don*. And, since you *know* Julie's *money* will be going to Rubenzer's *daughters*, how about you *stop* trying to *kill* your daughter and just let her *live*?" "Who is this?" asks Don. The woman hangs up. Don's hand begins to tremble. He looks down— seeing a pool of ketchup beside his plate. Aggressively, he digs his finger into the red mess... pushing harder and harder, his rage building. Maureen suddenly breaks in, reading out loud from the letter. It is a statement to the press, explaining Julie's situation, the struggle between the Ayers and Bonet, the emotional toll suffered by all, and a desire for sympathy and understanding. It is perfect; it is beautiful. A tear comes to Don's eye. They both smile, sadly.

Then— Bach suddenly approaches their table, pulling up a seat. "No one's heard back from Dr. Nedd. He keeps rescheduling and rescheduling." Maureen hangs her head. "So..." Bach allows for a dramatic pause, "Bonet is going to settle." Don and Maureen look to Bach in disbelief. "He may be an obstinate man. He may be an uncouth man. But he is a man who has suffered. And he is a man in love. All he asks... is that you let him have a voice in all of this. He just wants to be heard. Every decision will be yours... he simply... wants to help... in whatever way that he can." Don and Maureen exchange a look. "Do you trust him?" asks Don. Bach pauses. "He's signed away his rights. But... do I trust him?" A heavy silence. "We have to get Julie back to Wisconsin," says Maureen. Bach nods in full agreement. "I'll file the motion," she says.

Cut to— the hospital room. Don watches Julie from the chair. "We're taking you home, sweetheart. We're taking you home." Don's phone rings. It is Bonet. Don rises, moves into the hallway. "Yes, Larry. I called before to let you know that we're taking Julie back to Wisconsin. She needs to be in a nursing home, that's what the doctors are saying." Suddenly, muffled screams burst through the phone speaker. Don moves the device away from his ear. The shouting and vitriol continues. Don then sees, down the hall, a police deputy; he motions for the deputy to listen. After a minute of hearing this telephonic bile, the deputy nods. Don returns to the call, and tries to speak calmly to Bonet. It is to no avail, and Don hangs up. The deputy turns to Don. "I'll need that man's name, address, and phone number—" Suddenly, Bonet steps off the elevator, rushing towards Don. The deputy steps directly in front of Bonet. "We're not going to have any of that here in this hospital, sir. Do you understand me?" Bonet glares wildly at Don. "My attorney's on the phone with the Governor's office right now. We'll get Jeb Bush and the whole right-to-life cabal on you so fast it'll make your head spin! We're taking this to the *legislative* level *now*! You've opened up the wrong can of worms, Don! Do you hear me?" The deputy swiftly takes Bonet by the arm, escorting him further down the hall. As Bonet and the deputy talk— Bonet in a seething rage— Don quickly hustles down the stairs, dialing his phone. "Ms. Bach? The plane taking Julie back to Wisconsin is scheduled to leave Monday. We need it to leave *Sunday*— and we can't let *anyone* know. Can you do that?" A long pause. "Thank you. That's all I ask."

Cut to— the Ayers and a team of nurses packing up Julie’s medical files. Don checks his watch continually, look over his shoulder from time to time. A nurse brushes by him— he feels something slide into his pocket— he checks— and sees a note. Don makes to read it, pauses, and puts it back for later.

Cut to— Julie, on a gurney, being wheeled down the hallway— the Ayers close behind.

Outside— Julie being wheeled towards an ambulance. Don looks and sees Bonet watching at a distance— two deputies standing before him, blocking his path.

The airport— Julie is taken from the ambulance and placed on a jet. The Ayers board behind her. Wade, the last to step on, stops, studying the Florida skyline. He spits.

The jet— the family, sitting around Julie. A long silence— and the plane takes off. They rise and rise and rise into the air and, when they finally reach cruising altitude— Don lets out a deep, relieved sigh; Maureen weeps tears of joy; Colleen claps; Wade smiles.

They soar smoothly through the air. Then, after a while, Don takes the note from his pocket. He unfolds it. A woman in voice-over: “Propofol and Demoral. Start your investigation into Dr. Dangi by investigating these drugs. You may have left Florida... but your journey is far from over. Follow the trail to the top— this all goes much farther than you think. I am praying for you and your family. Stay strong... and never give up.” A heavy silence. Don looks to Julie, then up at the rest of his family. They are still smiling. Don forces a weak smile back.

Close-up of Julie’s face— eyeliner being applied. The hands then put away the pencil— and close Julie’s eyes. We pan back to reveal Julie on a mortician’s table— the touches to her last beautification being performed. Her lipstick, rouge, and eyeliner are perfect... she is perfect... still, silent... and absolutely gorgeous.

Cut to— a cemetery. A supertitle reads: **December, 2003**. Don stands before a congregation of friends and family at Julie’s funeral. He speaks eloquently, movingly, about his departed daughter. He talks about her life, her character; he discusses the night they received the call that she’d passed away, that she’d died quietly and naturally in her own hometown. Then Don pauses. He looks to Maureen, then back to the congregation, and says: “We have attempted to keep the Florida legal battle out of this service. We will deal with that in detail at another time and in another place. But, I will say this much. No matter how much time it took, no matter how much money it took, no matter what, we were not going to let someone hijack our daughter. Julie’s life was no ordinary life; her death was no ordinary death. It was a wrongful death— and, I swear to you all: I’m going to do something about it.” The congregation nods in understanding, in full support. Don looks to Maureen, Colleen, and Wade. They wear a look of renewed resilience.

Cut to— the Ayers’ home. A supertitle reads: **January, 2004**. A sense of growing stabilization, a move towards normalcy. Maureen does the dishes; Don sits, going through the mail. The mail is mostly condolence cards; the dishes mostly Pyrex containers once holding casseroles and other thinking-of-you foods. Don opens another card. Suddenly, he freezes. We see the card and a hand written note at the bottom, which reads: “*Seek and ye shall find— I know what happened on Sept. 25, 2003.*” Don slowly lowers the card. “She was right,” says Don. “Who was?” asks Maureen. “The nurse. It really is... just beginning.”

Cut to— Don and Maureen before television cameras. They are set up in Ayers' living room— the finishing touches on the lighting and camera angles underway. **SUSAN MCDONALD**— a television producer— explains to Don and Maureen the mechanics of the interview, what to expect, and how important it is to get their message out to the public. Then, they begin.

After the essential events of the story are summarized, Don takes out the *Seek and Ye Shall Find* card, showing it to the camera. He begs the author of the note to come forward and tell the family what happened, to help hold Dr. Dangl accountable for his actions, and to bring justice to Julie.

Cut to— the Ayers' bedroom at night. The phone rings. Don, stumbles out of bed, answers it. Susan McDonald is on the other end. *Seek and Ye Shall Find* came forward. He held an off-camera interview with ABC's investigative reporter— **ROBIN GUESS**— and, after a few questions, they were able to verify that he was indeed the man who wrote the Ayers the cryptic note. McDonald asks if Don has pen and paper— she is going to give him *Seek and Ye Shall Find's* telephone number. Don snatches up the necessary supplies— and waits with baited breath.

The next morning— the Ayers' kitchen. They sit before the telephone, placing it on speaker. It rings, rings, rings... and is answered. A man's voice comes on. "Mr. Ayer," he says. "Yes," says Don. "The story I'm about to tell you is a tragedy," says the man. "But, at the end of every tragedy, there is always catharsis. I need you to find that catharsis, someday, somehow... otherwise... it will destroy you." Don says that he wants the truth— no matter the cost. So the man begins his tale.

We see the story unfold across the screen: Julie, undergoing her surgery. **AMANDA FORTNER**, a nurse, applies the anesthesia. Dangl instructs her to give a few more cc's of Propofol; she does so, hesitantly. The surgery commences. A montage. Finally, Dr. Dangl applies the last few stitches; the medical staff stands by. Suddenly, Julie flat lines. A medical technician— **BRUCE CROWE**— steps forward to resuscitate her. Dangl tells him to back off, for all the staff to back off; instead, he calls for Michelle Lawrence. Michelle tries to give Julie a pulse reading, but is clearly unfamiliar with the technique. Bruce turns to another staff member, asking, "What kind of nurse is *that*?" The staffer responds, "She's *not* a nurse." Michelle continues to fumble and fail; Julie's fingers begin to turn blue. Bruce Crowe makes to step in once more; Dr. Dangl slides in his way, shouting out, "God damn it! I don't need this fucking shit today!" After another minute of Michelle's ineptitude, Dangl snaps for Bruce to begin chest compressions. Bruce does and, slowly, Julie begins to breath. Michelle calls the EMTs, panicked. Dangl paces, furious. When the EMTs arrive, Dangl suddenly blocks the door, growling, "Give us a *minute*. The situation is under *control*. We don't need any *interference* from *you*." Bruce Crowe shakes his head, appalled.

We suddenly cut back to the Ayers on the phone. A heavy silence. "You have to tell them," says Don. "Tell who?" asks the voice. "The world," Don replies.

Cut to— a television screen. *Seek and Ye Shall Find*, cast in shadows, his voice altered, speaks to an interviewer. He explains that Dangl called for a deadly amount of Propofol; that Michelle Lawrence was not even qualified to be a part of the surgery whatsoever— given her total lack of medical training— and that Dr. Dangl was aware of this and was more concerned with

covering his own liabilities than with saving Julie's life. We pan-out to see Don and Maureen watching the interview— they hold each other's hands, a look of melancholic resilience on their faces.

Suddenly— a montage of articles, interviews, cover stories: **Cosmetic Surgery Tragedy; Family Files Wrongful Death Suit; Doctor Found Guilty of Malpractice: License Restricted** — video of Robin Guess confronting Michelle Lawrence in a parking lot, Lawrence jumping in her car and driving away; the Ayers interviewed; statistics of plastic surgery fatalities nationwide; Dr. Dangl brushing by a cameraman, etc. The montage slowly fades to black.

A supertitle reads: **Florida— August, 2004.** Don sits with **RICH FILSON**— the attorney in charge of the wrongful death suit— along with Babette Bach and Robin Guess. Filson explains that, while the license suspension is a good first step, pursuing criminal action will take time and effort. Don replies that all he has left is time and effort— that is his very lifeblood, his drive, his purpose. Filson goes on to say that Dangl has set up this mediation in order to gage Don's true intents, the extent of his veracity, and just how much Dangl will have to fight in order to keep himself out of jail. Don replies that there is no amount of fight that will keep Dangl out of jail, not as long as he lives. A man then enters through the door. He introduces himself as Bruce Crowe. Don looks puzzled. Bruce pauses, then says, "Seek and Ye Shall Find." Don suddenly throws his arms around Bruce. Bruce explains that the media found out his name, so he might as well accept his spot in the public eye. Bruce then produces a slip of paper, handing it to Don. "Call this number, Don," he says. "Julie wasn't Dangl and Lawrence's first brush with the criminal. This is pathological. We can't just put a band-aid on it. The disease must be *excised*." Don nods, shaking Bruce's hand.

Cut to— a diner. Don sits with a woman dressed in a headscarf and dark sunglasses; it is clear she is striving for anonymity. "It was 1999," she says, "When I went into Dr. Dangl's for a basic fat transfer. To fill out my face. To be beautiful. That's all I wanted. Who doesn't in this day and age? Who can't help but feel they have to? No one I know. No one in Florida. No one in America, for that matter. So... I went to Dangl. Michelle Lawrence was there; she introduced herself as Dangl's nurse. That was the first lie. The first of many."

The woman's story unfolds before us across the screen. She meets with Lawrence and Dangl, they are over-friendly and affable; she then awakes from the surgery, groggy, her face swollen and red, her legs a terrible black and blue— Lawrence and Dangl quickly move her from the surgery table and out into the hallway. We then see the woman at home in her bed; she fully comes to— only to see that one of her left leg is now a dark, all-consuming black. She calls the office, but Lawrence nervously waves away her concerns, saying that it's normal. The next day, Dangl examines the woman's leg— a look of horror crosses his face. He calls the hospital— and tells them that he has a patient in immediate need of a hyperbaric chamber.

Don suddenly cuts in— flashing us back to the diner. "Did you say... a hyperbaric chamber?" he asks. The woman nods. Don is struck by a sudden revelation. "Dangl... *and Bonet*..." he whispers. The woman looks confused. Don motions for her to ignore him and continue.

The woman's story continues. At the hospital, she is told that the skin on her leg is completely dead— Dangl misused the wand employed to remove the fat from the woman's

leg... leaving behind layer after layer of corroded flesh. We see, over the span of months, her skin being peeled away— an excruciating procedure.

We cut back to the diner. The woman explains that she sued Dr. Dangl, but was quickly intimidated to settle. “I wasn’t the first,” she says. “And Julie won’t be the last.” The woman lifts her skirt part way up— revealing a deep hole in her left leg, scarred over, deformed. “And it’s not just Dangl. There are hundreds of these men... and hundreds just like Michelle Lawrence... promising beauty... making a quick buck... and destroying lives in their wake. Find the others, Mr. Ayer. This goes to the top.”

Cut to— the mediation. Don and Filson sit across from Dr. Dangl and **KEVIN CREW**, his attorney. Dr. Dangl is extraordinarily bedraggled, worn down— almost, seemingly, broken. Crew speaks for him, explaining that Dr. Dangl has been devastated by Julie’s death, that he lives every day with the regret that he could not do more to save her— but that there was nothing more he could do. Furthermore, going after Dr. Dangl’s money will not bring Julie back; it is a needless assault born from grief, but it is not the doctor’s responsibility to bear the brunt of that grief. Filson responds that damages will be paid in a punitive measure commensurate with Dr. Dangl’s gross negligence and, if that results in bankrupting the doctor’s practice— such is the consequence of taking a young girl’s life. “And,” Filson adds, “Yesterday’s arrest of Michelle Lawrence certainly changes things. No doubt... *new light* will be shed on this entire matter. Light... revealing the *criminal* nature of your actions.” Crew frowns; Dangl shakes his head in a display of misery. Don looks at Dangl— an expression nearing sympathy crossing his face... but he quickly recovers, turning once more resilient.

A supertitle reads: **Wisconsin— October, 2004**. Don and Maureen feverishly researching on their computers. Maureen scrolls through the Florida Department of Health’s records— scouring page after page of the report on Dr. Dangl and his various lawsuits. Don reads multiple articles on cosmetic surgery tragedies all across Florida— a montage of images flash across the screen: facelifts gone wrong, liposuction disasters, comas, deaths, etc.

A supertitle reads: **November, 2004**. Don and Maureen watch the television— election results. A CNN crawl reads: “*Florida voters approve a referendum to suspend a doctor’s license after three incidents of medical malpractice.*”

A supertitle reads: **December, 2004**. Don walks out onto his front porch. A forwarded copy of the Sarasota *Herald-Tribune* sits on the doorstep. Don bends down, picks it up, and opens the paper. A front-page story reporting that before Julie’s death— several of Dr. Dangl’s patients had stopped breathing while he was operating on them: and the paramedics were never called. Don pauses— and suddenly rushes inside.

Cut to— a courtroom. A supertitle reads: **Florida— January, 2005**. Don and Maureen sit with **IRVING LEVINE**, the attorney for the Florida Department of Health. Dangl and his attorney sit apart. An ABC camera crew— managed by Robin Guess— films the evidentiary hearings. Levine calls his first witness to the stand. It is Amanda Fortner— the nurse who applied the anesthesia. Fortner explains that Dr. Dangl instructed her to apply the anesthesia— though she herself is not an anesthesiologist, but that is pro forma in the cosmetic surgery world. Dr. Dangl did not

and does not keep any records but, to the best of her memory, Amanda relates that Julie was given more than the usual dosage— but there was nothing exact about the whole procedure.

Slowly, a few reporters from different papers enter the courtroom.

Levine then calls Bruce Crowe, who relates his story for the court. Dangle's attorney then tries to discredit Bruce on the grounds of his limited medical training and his lack of a college degree. Bruce stands steadfast, nonetheless— rebuffing the attorney's attacks left and right.

Three camera crews enter the courtroom— setting up their equipment.

Levine calls his third witness: Larry Bonet. Bonet is thin, worn down, a different man. He describes taking Julie to Dr. Dangle's office... and the post-surgery aftermath. Levine then asks him if he has a personal relationship with Dr. Dangle. "Is it true that you and Dr. Dangle have played golf on numerous occasions, Mr. Bonet? Is it true, in fact, that Dr. Dangle and his *girlfriend*, Michelle Lawrence, were regular dinner guests of yours... and Julie's?" Bonet looks to Dangle— then casts his eyes away. "No," he says. Don shakes his head.

More and more journalists and reporters enter.

Levine's next two witnesses are called: **DR. CHRISTIE**— a professor of anesthesiology— and **DR. VIGGIANO**— a plastic surgeon. Both testify that Dr. Dangle prescribed an overdose of Propofol, leading to Julie's respiratory arrest.

By now, the courtroom is packed to the brim with media— and a look of grave concern crosses Dangle's face.

Then, the defense calls its witnesses. A montage of various doctors and professors— all testifying that, while Dr. Dangle prescribed a large dose of Propofol, it was by no means excessive. Don looks to Levine with an expression of saddened bewilderment. Levine rises, moving to the current witness. He asks the medical professional about the risk of employing an unlicensed nurse, especially during a surgery. The witness attests that such an action is not only professionally reprehensible: it is highly illegal... and, in certain cases, deadly. Levine then offers into evidence the various other lawsuits filed against Dr. Dangle— all attesting that, in their case, Michelle Lawrence applied the anesthesia. Levine then turns back to Don. Don nods with full resolution.

Cut to— Dr. Dangle's office. Detectives scourer through his files. Finally, they come upon document after document with Michelle Lawrence recorded as the medical staffer responsible for anesthesia during various surgeries. Once detective turns to the other, saying, "Get the judge on the phone— we need a warrant for Dangle A.S.A.P."

Cut to— a sheriff's station. Dangle enters: hands above his head— and surrenders to the authorities.

A montage of media: newspaper headlines read— *Gross Malpractice Found in Plastic Surgeon Case; Judge Recommends Cosmetic Surgeon's License Be Revoked*; etc. The Ayer family on various new outlets; photos of Julie, Dangle, Michelle Lawrence, etc.

We then home in on an interview with Don and Maureen. "We are happy with the judge's ruling," says Don. "But Dr. Dangle's actions weren't just negligent; this was not simply a case of malpractice. What happened was criminal, and it doesn't begin and end with Dr. Dangle. This is a systemic problem— and we'll be taking this to the legislature. Anesthesiologists need to be *required* in cosmetic surgery procedures. That they're not already... is criminal in itself." Maureen then speaks. "We're calling on Assistant State Attorney Peter Lombardo, Senator Lisa Carlton, and the rest of the Florida legislature to take action now. Studies have shown that

office based surgery incident rates are twelve times higher than those performed in ambulatory surgery centers. Patients of these procedures deserve oversight. They deserve... to *live*."

A supertitle reads: **One Year Later**. Don on the phone— infuriated. "Probation? Probation for *murder*? Because that's what it *is*. That's not *right*... that's not... *just*." Don paces. "Yes, for employing an unlicensed nurse, yes I understand, but they overdosed Julie and let her lie there, dying, for five minutes, without oxygen for five minutes; *that's* the charge that *matters*. Everything else is... is... *palliation*." Maureen enters, watching Don from a distance. "So what if Michelle Lawrence won't flip? So what if he pleads the Fifth? This is about the *law*; this is about *lives*; something needs to *change*, don't you understand?" Maureen slowly takes a seat, placing her head in her hands. "Then call the SA and have Dangl put in front of a jury. He should have to answer to the citizens of Florida, to the American people— not hide behind bureaucracy and litigious gridlock. That's not justice, that's not—"

"Don," Maureen suddenly interject. "He's bankrupt. He can't practice medicine. His life is over. That's all they'll give us. They'll punish him, punish him severely, sure... but they'll never... make it right. They'll never call him what he really is. They'll never say murderer. That would open up a door... they can't afford to crack, even a little. The insurance companies, the lawyers, the senators... they'll never let it get that far. Thousands more will have to die, and maybe... not even then. There's too much at stake. Too much money, too many political connections— too much... so far beyond us... beyond the average American. They don't care about us, the citizens. We're not rich enough; we're not powerful enough. We're just a mother and father who lost their daughter. And in their world... that's worth next to nothing."

Don slowly hangs up the phone. He sits down next to Maureen. "You're right," he says. "You're absolutely right." A silence. "But if we don't fight now... if we don't keep fighting... then what has this all been about? If nothing can come from Julie's death... then all we'll ever have... is a dead daughter. And I can't live with that. I can't live... without her. This fight is all we have left of her. Every day we say her name, ask for justice in her name, try to change the world with her name... I can feel her here, watching. All of this... is keeping Julie alive, in a way. Certainly... it's what's keeping me alive."

A long, heavy silence. Maureen picks up the phone, studying it. She then hands it back to Don. "Call them," she says. Don pauses. "Who?" "All of them," says Maureen. "All those people who have suffered at the hands of plastic surgeons, suffered at the hands of the law, suffered at the hands of injustice. Call them. The survivors. Their families. And the families of those not lucky enough to survive. Call them, Don. Be their voice. Be Julie's voice. And speak the truth."

A supertitle reads: **Four Years Later**. Don stands before the Wisconsin State Assembly. It is a Health Committee Hearing on AB 760— a bill for licensing and accrediting surgery facilities. Don begins his speech with one word: "Propofol." He explains that the drug is now a household name— after the death of Michael Jackson just ten months ago. But the Ayers have known the name Propofol for over seven years. "It is the drug," he says, "that killed my daughter— along with countless others. But no one knows my daughter's name; no one knows these other names; no one cares about these lives: because they were ordinary lives— not celebrity lives."

Cut to— Maureen and Richard Filson: talking to various families of survivors, getting statements, filing suits.

Don continues: “But it is time now for America to care about its citizens, to throw off this cult of celebrity that drives women and men both into the clutches of rogue doctors who promise beauty, feeding off the latest glossy magazine cover or swimsuit ad telling all the ordinary folk that they can be just like celebrities if only their breasts were larger or their faces thinner or a dozen other needless changes.”

Cut to— Colleen and Robin Guess: interviewing doctors, medical professionals, professors, compiling a list of figures and facts.

Don continues: “In today’s world, with the current conditions of these surgery offices, with the current lack of oversight and criminal negligence, the dream of beauty can quickly turn into the nightmare of death.”

Cut to— Wade: lobbying congressman, senators, governors, pushing for legislation and bills.

“So the laws must change,” Don concludes, “because our culture isn’t going anywhere— at least... not anytime soon.”

A silence— and the State Assembly breaks into applause. The screen fades to black, the applause continues.

A postscript reads:

*For more than a decade, the Ayers have been fighting tirelessly to draft a bill that would enforce the use of anesthesiologists in cosmetic procedures, provide oversight for in-office surgeries. Additionally the Black Box Bill would hold all doctors and medical practitioners accountable in the case of any incidents by requiring that all surgeries be filmed and that the footage be made available to the patient. Their fight to prevent another death like Julie’s and to protect the rights of all patients continues to this day. In a grave miscarriage of justice, however, Dr. Kurt Dangl has regained his medical license— and is currently practicing in Pennsylvania. So the fight is far from over: and the Ayers will not stop until justice is delivered to all.*

**End of Film**