

NO TWO SNOWFLAKES

screenplay
by

Jason Paul

October, 2015

Copyright 2015

BLACK SCREEN

Rhythmic panting, the crunch of footsteps hurrying through snow, the swish of winter clothing.

FADE IN:

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

CRYSTAL (23) zigzags a path into a snow-dusted hemlock forest. She dodges branches and rocks, hurdles a gnarled log. A glance over her shoulder; she runs from something, someone. Her pace is urgent, but not desperate.

PRE-LAP - the VOICES of YOUNG CRYSTAL (8), JAMES (35).

YOUNG CRYSTAL

Daddy, is it true that no two snowflakes are alike?

JAMES

As far as anyone knows, sweetheart. And if you look closely...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. HOUSE - YOUNG CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Young Crystal - in pajamas - and James - sturdy build, military haircut - stand before a frosted second-story window splayed with snowflakes. James sweeps over the glass with a pocket magnifier.

JAMES (CONT.)

You can see each unique shape.

Young Crystal studies, her eyes follow the magnifier.

JAMES (CONT.)

Like this one.

THE MAGNIFIER

frames a stunning 12-sided flake.

Young Crystal gazes, wide-eyed.

JAMES (CONT.)

It has twelve sides. That means two snowflakes grew together to form something very special.

Young Crystal looks up at James, glints.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

Crystal trudges across a shallow icy stream, halts on a snow bank, catches her breath.

She looks over her shoulder, then forward into a tight stand of hemlocks that force her to choose a path. She bolts toward an opening.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

A throwing knife thwacks nearly dead-center into a mounted wood target, joining a half-dozen others.

Young Crystal pulls a blade from a leg-mounted kydex sheath, aims from 4 meters. James observes from behind.

Young Crystal launches. Another expert throw.

JAMES

Excellent, Crystal. Next time we'll throw from 7 meters.

James walks to the target, pulls blades out of the wood.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

Can we please try right now?

James checks his wristwatch.

JAMES

Sorry, honey. It's getting late. I want to have time to tuck you in before my flight leaves tonight.

Young Crystal sighs but understands; a familiar routine.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

Crystal keeps her brisk pace, slips the reach of extended tree branches. She settles momentarily behind a trunk, slows her breathing. She takes a peek over her shoulder, whips forward, sprints off again.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. HOUSE - YOUNG CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Young Crystal in bed. James sets the magnifier on a lamp table, drapes Young Crystal with a pony comforter.

CRYSTAL'S GRANDMOTHER stands in the doorway, watches, admires. James kisses Young Crystal on the forehead. Their looks shift to a framed photo on the dresser - CRYSTAL'S MOTHER - smiling, posing in a golden meadow.

CRYSTAL
(to the photo)
Goodnight, mommy.
(to the sky)
I miss you.

James nods, smiles, remembers fondly. His loving look shifts back to Young Crystal.

JAMES
Goodnight, Crystal. I'll see you soon.

Young Crystal forces a smile. James stands, shoots a look of thanks to grandmother. Grandmother strokes James's shoulder, reassures as James exhales, exits. Crystal tugs on her covers, looks deflated, misses her daddy already.

EXT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

James walks toward a pickup truck in the driveway. A black travel bag is slung over his shoulder.

OFFSCREEN - a VOICE...

YOUNG CRYSTAL (O.S.)
Daddy!

James turns toward the garage. Young Crystal - still in cute jammies and slippers - rappels down a rope line from her bedroom window above the garage. James smirks. Young Crystal lands safely, patters over to James.

YOUNG CRYSTAL (CONT.)
Do you really have to leave tonight?

JAMES
I really do, sweetie. Before the storm hits.

YOUNG CRYSTAL
Promise you'll be back in time for the school holiday show?

James smiles, seems to stare through Young Crystal...

A SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS - JAMES ENVISIONS...

EXT. MIDDLE EAST DESERT - PRISONER CAMP - DAY

James - in all black, goggles, body armor, MP5 submachine gun - kicks open the door of a squalid adobe structure.

A SPECIAL OPS GROUND BRANCH SOLDIER follows James, slides a concussion grenade into the structure. The grenade blasts.

James and the soldier bum-rush behind a cloud of smoke.

INSIDE THE STRUCTURE

James moves like a phantom, dots foreheads and chests of surprised INSURGENT SOLDIERS slacking on guard duty.

James tugs HOSTAGES by their arms, pushes them toward a hovering Chinook helicopter.

James and a squad of GROUND BRANCH SOLDIERS are safely extracted, out as fast as they came in.

END OF SEQUENCE

BACK TO JAMES AND YOUNG CRYSTAL

James nods.

JAMES

I promise.

Young Crystal bear hugs her daddy.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

I love you, daddy.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

Crystal slides down a snow bank. A stray branch rips her pants at the knee. She brakes on a trail cutting through high hemlocks, examines the tear.

OFFSCREEN - the HOWL of a COYOTE in the distance. Crystal's look pans the surrounding woods. Her eyes catch something OFFSCREEN, further up the trail. She rises, still locked on something; concentrated, hypnotic.

YOUNG CRYSTAL (PRE-LAP)

Daddy...

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. BACKWOODS - DAY

Young Crystal and James sit on a fallen tree log, share a snack in front of rifle targets with bullet holes near dead center hanging from trunks of surrounding trees.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

Do you think there are more heroes in the world, or more villains?

JAMES

Well, honey, I've seen a lot of bad people do a lot of bad things, but the world continues to survive in spite of them, so I have to believe that there will always be more heroes.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

Maybe one day I'll save you, daddy, and I can be your hero.

JAMES

I don't doubt that you will, sweetheart. Just remember: You can't predict when every bad thing will happen...but you can be prepared.

Train hard...

SERIES OF SHOTS - YOUNG CRYSTAL TRAINING...

EXT. HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Young Crystal with mma gloves on - circles James, throws a jab-cross-thai kick combo into James's focus mitts...

JAMES (V.O.) (CONT.)

Train smart..

EXT. BACKWOODS - DAY

James points a yellow rubber training pistol at Young Crystal. She performs a krav maga trap to disarm James...

James observes - Young Crystal's hands are bound behind her back with duct tape and zip ties. She raises her arms, yanks forcefully toward her backside, the zip ties snap...

She sits, loops her legs through her bound arms so her arms are now in front of her instead of behind her back. She raises her arms high above her head, pulls them full speed apart from each other, busts the duct tape...

JAMES (V.O.)(CONT.)

Train often.

James and Young Crystal jog along a steep, rustic trail.

JAMES (V.O.)(CONT.)

Be as strong in mind as you are in body.
Strategy is as lethal a weapon as any
fist or firearm.

BACK TO:

INT. CAR - (MOVING) - EARLIER - DAY

Crystal drives along a snow-blanketed mountain road that cuts through the hemlock forest. Her eyes fall on a charm bracelet around her wrist - a twelve-sided snowflake dangles from link clasps. Her distant look recalls...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Young Crystal under stage lights, in a snowflake costume, dances and sings with CLASSMATES. The holiday show.

The big number ends. APPLAUSE. The kids bow, wave, beam. Young Crystal peers into the AUDIENCE, smiles.

James gives a "thumbs up" from behind his video camera.

BACK TO CRYSTAL - DRIVING

She recalls with hints of fondness, sadness...

BACK TO YOUNG CRYSTAL - FLASHBACK

Post-performance. KIDS and PARENTS, congrats and pics. James presents Young Crystal with a rose. As she admires it, he slips the snowflake charm bracelet on her wrist.

Young Crystal lights up. She grasps a flat sliver of silver with an inscription - LOVE, DADDY. She smiles.

BACK TO CRYSTAL - DRIVING

She gazes at the snow-glazed road, recalls...

BACK TO YOUNG CRYSTAL - FLASHBACK

INT. CAR - FOUR-DOOR COUPE (MOVING) - NIGHT

On a country road sprinkled with fresh snow. Young Crystal in the back seat, discarded snowflake costume and rose at her side. She fondles the snowflake charm on her bracelet.

James - behind the wheel - looks at Young Crystal through the rear view mirror, flashes a warm, content smile.

James's look shifts back to the road.

Bright globes of headlight splash across him and Young Crystal. The desperate BELCH of an eighteen-wheeler HORN.

THE EIGHTEEN-WHEELER

skids sideways through a blind curve over a furrow of wet snow, careens straight toward James's coupe.

James pulls his wheel left, barely misses the fishtail. The eighteen-wheeler thunders past.

THE COUPE

bumps a snow bank on the shoulder, spins, bumps a bank on the opposite shoulder. The force sends the coupe spinning over slippery roadway toward...

A BRIDGE OVER AN ICE-COVERED RIVER

The coupe's front end smashes a wood and concrete barrier railing; wood splinters, glass spiderwebs.

INSIDE THE COUPE

A threatening slab of timber jams through the passenger window; its force stops only inches from Young Crystal's head as she whips back toward her seat. Glass shards launch like shrapnel around her.

FROM THE BRIDGE - THE COUPE

Its front end halts past the shattered barrier, dangles on the edge over the icy current below.

INSIDE THE COUPE

Young Crystal - red welt on her forehead - tears off her seat belt, pushes the timber slab back through the window of her dented door, looks to the front seat, gasps.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

Daddy!

JAMES

A bloody mess, dazed, his legs crushed under the twisted steering wheel. He makes a weak effort to pull free but cannot. He looks to Young Crystal, extends an arm toward her. He needs her help.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

composes through tears, rises from the back seat to reach for James's hand.

Her movement causes a violent shift in the coupe's weight. POPS and CREAKS of metal.

Young Crystal is thrust forward into the backside of the front seat, then backward into the passenger door. Her weight forces the door open. She tumbles out of the car, screams.

James looks on, unable to help.

JAMES

Crystal!

Young Crystal's freefall quickly stops as she clasps the edge of the span of concrete running under the bridge at the point where the coupe had broken through. Her fingers white-knuckle-grip the span. She wisps in the wind.

The coupe teeters, whines; its stability is giving way.

Young Crystal hugs a stable vertical slab of the bridge barrier at the point just before it was breached. She pulls her weight up, throws her leg over her body, climbs and shimmies her way safely onto the bridge.

She turns her task to helping James. She looks inside the coupe at her injured, trapped father.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

Daddy!

James is still weak, helpless under the steering wheel.

Young Crystal looks around, reaches for the longest, strongest straight slab of wood she can find, raises it with effort, wants to extend it toward James...

The coupe wracks, jars loose from the frail railing, plunges quickly toward the river.

Young Crystal darts blindly to the very edge of the span.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

Daddy! No!

The coupe punches through the river ice. Frigid water bullies its way through the open windows. The car is swallowed whole by the river.

Young Crystal drops to her knees at the edge of the span, looks down at the river. She could not save her daddy. She cries uncontrollably, her world broken and haunted forever.

BACK TO CRYSTAL - DRIVING

She inhales, closes and opens her eyes, blows a breath out.

BACK TO YOUNG CRYSTAL - FLASHBACK

INT. TOWN CAR (MOVING) / EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Young Crystal in the back seat, clutches a triangular military funeral flag to her chest. She turns around, peers through the back window...

YOUNG CRYSTAL'S FAMILY HOME

has a FOR SALE SIGN on the lawn.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

watches the house get smaller as the town car drives away.

INT. TOWN CAR (MOVING) / EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

GRANDFATHER driving, looks at Grandmother in the passenger seat; both as sad and lost as Young Crystal.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

looks out her passenger window, watches the landscape scroll past...

YOUNG CRYSTAL ENVISIONS...

in a clearing - she and James practice shooting guns...

at the foot of a hiking trail - she and James jogging...

atop a large fallen tree log - she and James sparring with rattan sticks.

YOUNG CRYSTAL

Her face furrows. She knows her next move.

INT. GRANDPARENTS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Young Crystal at the breakfast table. Grandma picks up Young Crystal's empty plate, shuffles to the sink. Young Crystal downs a last gulp of milk, sets her glass on the table, holds a steely glare forward.

Grandma dumps the plate into the sink, turns back to the table to reach for Young Crystal's glass. Young Crystal's seat is empty.

Grandma's look shifts to the living room window, near the front door. She sees Young Crystal jog away from the house toward surrounding backwoods.

SERIES OF SHOTS - CRYSTAL TRAINS ON HER OWN

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD / EXT. BACKWOODS - DAY

She jogs off a neighborhood sidewalk onto a rustic trail...

In a backwoods clearing, she throws knives at a wood target; overhand, underhand, sidearm, backhand. Always stellar aim.

JAMES (V.O)

There will come a day - hopefully not for a long time, but it will come - when I'll be gone, and all of your training and preparation will have to be enough to keep you safe, protected. But just know that in every step, every throw, every shot and launch... a part of me will always be right there with you.

Young Crystal reaches a peak on a mountain trail. She stops at a cliff edge, looks out at the vast landscape, takes in every syllable of her father's words.

BACK TO CRYSTAL - DRIVING

Her look floats to the road shoulder...

AT THE ROADSIDE

A STRANGER (40s) in a puffy snow jacket hunches over the rear wheel of an older model Impala sedan. He jerks a tire iron, blanches in pain, grabs his hand.

CRYSTAL

locks on the man, concerned. She slows for a better look.

THE STRANGER

doubles over, clutches his hand, shoots Crystal a desperate look. His face is partially shadowed in the bad weather.

CRYSTAL

cautious in nature, examines the scene...

CRYSTAL'S POV - ROLLING PAST THE IMPALA

sees through frosted windows, in the front passenger seat - a shadowy figure - STRANGER #2; frail build of an elderly woman; bundled up, wiry hair, wool fedora church hat.

CRYSTAL

pulls over to the shoulder.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. GRANDPARENTS' HOUSE - YOUNG CRYSTAL'S ROOM - DAY

Young Crystal sets a "YOUTH ARCHERY CHAMPION" trophy on her dresser, next to a medal with blue and red ribbon encased in plastic. An engraved placard on the case reads "DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS - UNITED STATES OF AMERICA."

Young Crystal's eyes fall on the medal, on a framed photo of James in uniform. Thoughts of James.

JAMES (V.O.)(CONT.)

When my time comes, I'll be fine, knowing that you learned well.

BACK TO CRYSTAL - ROADSIDE

She approaches The Stranger. He kneels near the rear wheel, grips his hand in pain. Crystal cranes toward The Stranger.

Something catches Crystal's eye in the distance, beyond the back of the Impala. She frowns, squints into the patch of snow that covers the road shoulder...

FOLLOWING CRYSTAL'S LOOK

A set of footprints are punched into the snow, leading from the back of the car and into a clearing of the woods just off the roadside.

CRYSTAL

frowns. Something isn't right.

CLICK! ZIP! Crystal is taken aback, looks down at a handcuff tightened around her left wrist. The Stranger snarls at her, reaches for Crystal's other wrist.

Crystal throws a push kick to the Stranger's shoulder. He is thrust backward, slams into the rear wheel. He grits his teeth, grabs the tire iron, lunges toward Crystal.

Crystal closes the distance, traps the Stranger's arm, knocks him to the ground with an open palm thrust dead on his nose, simultaneously secures the tire iron.

Crystal swivels toward the front passenger seat of the Impala, to the shadowy Stranger #2 behind frosty windows.

Crystal wields the tire iron, tucks and rolls. In an instant she pops up right at the front passenger door. She opens the door, raises the tire iron.

STRANGER #2

raises his head toward Crystal. It is a MAN, dolled up to look like a vulnerable woman; bait to lure passersby, to gain trust in order to attack.

Stranger #2 uncoils but Crystal crescent kicks his temple, knocks him back inside the car, across the front seat. She teep kicks the car door closed. Before she reacts again...

A pair of hands clasps onto her neck from behind. Stranger #1 reemerges, wrings Crystal. She fumbles the tire iron.

Crystal grabs Stranger #1's arm, juts her body into his, bucks him backward, slams her fist into his groin, breaks his grip.

She turns to Stranger #1, blasts him to the ground with a horizontal elbow strike to the jaw. The back of his head smashes against a boulder. He dies on the spot.

Crystal snatches the tire iron, rises. OFFSCREEN, a CLICK! Crystal finds the sound coming from the other side of the car. Stranger #2 stands outside the driver's side door, aims a single-shot rifle across the roof at Crystal, grins.

Crystal pauses, slings the tire iron at the rifle barrel. The barrel is knocked skyward. Stranger #2's bullet errantly fires. He is knocked backward to the roadside.

Crystal sprints toward the hemlock forest.

Stranger #2 gains his bearings, shucks the rest of his disguise off, snarls toward the woods, grips the rifle.

IN THE WILDERNESS

Crystal stops her run, looks down at her cuffed wrist, then at her other wrist, at her snowflake charm bracelet.

JAMES (V.O)

You won't always see the bad guys coming,
but if you're prepared...

when the opportunity comes...

you will seize it, and stop them...

She slides the bracelet off, grips the sliver of metal with the inscription "LOVE, DADDY", guides it into the keyhole of the cuff, frees her hand.

She stuffs the cuffs into her jacket pocket, slides the bracelet on, dashes into the forest, leaps the gnarled log that she leapt over earlier in the story.

STRANGER #2

frowns, loads another round into his single-shot, stalks Crystal's path into the wilderness.

THE HOWL OF A COYOTE

CRYSTAL - IN THE WILDERNESS

back once again where her look shifts from her torn pants leg to the echo of the coyote's howl, then to something on the trail. She rises; again just as before, her look is concentrated, hypnotic...

A DEER CARCASS

Half-decayed. Some blood and meat hang on a rib cage; antlers still connected to the spinal column.

Crystal glances over her shoulder, then back at the carcass. Gears turn in her head.

STRANGER #2

stomps past the gnarled log, hot on Crystal's trail.

BACK TO CRYSTAL - A SERIES OF QUICK EDITS

unzips her jacket hood, lays it in the snow like a bucket.

slams a heavy boulder onto the deer carcass. Rib cage bones break away.

Crystal's foot crushes the deer antlers. She breaks off straight and pointed pieces.

She uses the serrated ratchet from the set of handcuffs to whittle sharp points on the rib and antler pieces.

She whittles, looks back at the trail, gathers.

STRANGER #2

trudges through the shallow icy stream, senses Crystal's trail through the tight stand of hemlocks, bolts forward.

CRYSTAL

carries her jacket hood full of antler and rib cage pieces, breaks her pace in front of a v-shaped snow clearing bordered by stands of hemlock trees and cut off by the face of a rocky mountainside.

Crystal trots into the mouth of the clearing, stops at the dead end mountain face, turns to look out at the clearing from where she came. The COYOTE HOWL is closer now. Gears again turn in Crystal's head...

STRANGER #2

negotiates the snow bank, speeds through the wilderness past the now even more minimal remainder of the deer carcass, which is hidden from view with loose branches, logs, brush.

CRYSTAL

kneels over a hole - 2 feet deep - she dug in the snow. Sharp pieces of antler and rib cage stick out from the edges inside the hole. She drapes light hemlock branches over the hole, sprinkles snow over the branches.

Crystal turns away from the hole and toward the vulnerable dead end of the clearing. She treads a careful course of steps back to the mountain face.

JAMES (V.O.) (CONT.)

You won't often be bigger...or physically stronger...or better armed...but you will always be ready...

Crystal squats in the corner of the clearing, at the mountain face, turns to look out at the trail that leads to the clearing.

She retrieves the handcuffs from her jacket, uses the serrated ratchet to cut a bigger hole in her torn pants leg at the knee. She keeps a vigilant eye on the trail. She stuffs the cuffs into her jacket, composes; she's ready...

AT THE TRAIL

Stranger #2 emerges, rifle in hand. He stops at the outer edge of the clearing, spots Crystal trapped in the corner.

Crystal grabs her knee near the torn pants leg, feigns a grimace, feigns wide eyes of fear at Stranger #2.

Stranger #2 grins - the cat gets his canary. He walks into the clearing toward Crystal, toying. He aims his barrel at Crystal's forehead, walks closer...closer...

Crystal appears more and more panicked, more in pain. Her eyes dart between the man's face and the trail of her footsteps in the snow he faithfully follows...

Stranger #2 cocks his rifle, fondles the trigger, zeroes in...

Stranger #2 sinks right into the covered hole. The rifle fires skyward and is flung into the snow, out of his reach. Stranger #2 screams in pain. Blood erupts from hole. Stranger #2 screams more intensely.

Crystal rises, shoots a "gotcha, motherfucker" frown at Stranger #2.

Stranger #2 screams, looks down at...

THE HOLE

his mangled, bloody leg pierced by the sharp pieces of antler and rib cage. He is maimed, trapped.

Crystal walks confidently, retrieves the rifle, approaches the screaming Stranger #2, wallops him across the cheek with the rifle barrel. Blood shoots from his mouth. He yelps, dazed.

Crystal reaches for Stranger #2's coat pocket, retrieves another bullet, leers at the man stony-eyed, loads the rifle. She holds a look on him. He whimpers, winces in expectation of a bullet.

Crystal raises the barrel away from Stranger #2, walks back to the mountain face, to a pile hemlock branches from which she pulls out her jacket hood.

Stranger #2 moans, shivers, a look of terror as he wonders what she has planned.

Crystal stops above Stranger #2. OFFSCREEN, the HOWL of a coyote, closer. Crystal's eyes shift toward the howl, then to Stranger #2. She dumps bits of deer carcass meat and blood from her jacket hood on and around him.

Stranger #2 blenches. OFFSCREEN, coyotes HOWL more vigorously, closer. Stranger #2's eyes widen. He screams, pleads for Crystal to have mercy.

Crystal walks away from the clearing, back to the trail. She dumps the remaining bits of deer chum in her wake; the trail leads directly to the trapped Stranger #2. She drops the empty jacket hood onto the trail.

Stranger #2 can't yank himself free. He pleads to Crystal.

Crystal walks down the snowy trail, out of the wilderness.

Three COYOTES trot into sight from behind the tree line leading into the clearing. Their snouts and eyes ping directly to Stranger #2. His eyes bulge. He yells.

The coyotes' ears pin back, their mouths froth, they growl, creep toward Stranger #2.

Stranger #2 lets out a whelping yell. The coyotes growl, snarl, and pounce.

BACK ON THE TRAIL - CRYSTAL

She never breaks her sure stride, never flinches at the growls, crunches, and screams in the DISTANT B.G.

JAMES (V.O.) (CONT.)
And I will always be proud of you,
Crystal.

Crystal continues on the trail. Her confident look drifts to a loving look of fond remembrance, of sadness.

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY

The spot of James and Young Crystal's tragic accident. The bridge has long since been repaired; only scars remain. Snow falls onto chunks of ice that smother the river.

Crystal walks to the edge of the barrier, where the coupe had punched through. She looks down from the span, into the river.

YOUNG CRYSTAL (V.O.)
Daddy...

FLASHBACK:

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

After the holiday show. James holds Young Crystal's hand as they walk past CLASSMATES and FAMILIES toward the parking lot. Young Crystal is still in her costume, looks at her snowflake bracelet, strokes it.

YOUNG CRYSTAL
Remember when you told me that no two
snowflakes are alike?

JAMES
Yes, Crystal. I do.

Young Crystal's look shifts from the bracelet to her father.

YOUNG CRYSTAL
Well...

BACK TO CRYSTAL ON THE BRIDGE - DAY

Crystal looks at the bracelet clutched in her hand, looks across the span and the river, into the distance.

CRYSTAL
Now I'm not so sure...

Her revelation brings a bit of peace. She smiles.

FADE TO BLACK

