

Walker's Vale

screenplay by

Paul Rose, Jr.

Based on the novel by

John J. Zelenski

Paul Rose Jr.  
PO BOX 214  
Burbank, CA 91503  
818-861-9416  
paul@paulrosejr.com

EXT. WALKERS VALE MEADOW - DAY

A dozen children run around an open grassy field, flying kites. The sound of the children's playful laughter fills the meadow, but with a weirdly distinct dissonance.

In the air above the children, the kites appear to dance in an almost synchronized fashion among puffy white clouds. In the distance, a dog barks.

Suddenly, the clouds turn dark, the sky following suit, the clouds dissolving into great black crows that attack the kites, shredding them like tissue paper.

Pieces of kite fall from the sky and the children's shrieks of delight rapidly warp into screams of dismay as the birds begin dive-bombing towards the children.

Driven by the birds, the children run towards a beautiful classic-looking cathedral with a steeple that reaches heavenward.

Just before as the children reach the doors, smoke begins seeping out of the cracks around the door.

The church sign - and even the building itself seems to warp before our eyes.

Over the wooden church sign, bright red letters come into focus as if pushing out of the smoke: "ANGELUS LAPSUS"

The smoke seems to billow outward from the building. Building, then it dissolves, evaporating to reveal

A ramshackle building that looks barely able to support the weight of the cross that stretches a mere 20 feet into the sky.

Standing in the shadow of this poor steeple is a MAN in his 70's, dressed all in black. He looks sternly at the children as black smoke begins pouring from his mouth and nose.

The smoke sends the children scattering. As the smoke touches them, they disappear one by one, until all that is left is a small rag doll, clutched in the man's hand.

INT. EZEKIEL WALKER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

EZEKIEL WALKER sits straight up in his bed, almost banging his head on the brass cross hanging above the headboard. He is covered in sweat and bears a striking resemblance to the man in his dream.

EZEKIEL  
Please Father, not again.

EXT. DELAWARE HOME - DAY

INSERT GRFX: THURSDAY, JUNE 9, 2022

JAMES COOPER (40's) packs an old, beat-up SUV with boxes of padded envelopes, baseball cards, rolled up sports posters.

MARIA COOPER (mid-30's) buckles 4-year old blonde LIZA into her carseat. She's unusually quiet for a 4-year old.

Maria walks back into the house.

James slams the back of the SUV closed, once, twice, before it shuts completely, then climbs into the driver's seat and buckles his seat belt, impatiently waiting.

Next to him in the passenger seat are boxes labelled, "Rare Collectibles"

Maria comes out of the house with a picnic basket. She tries to look in the back window for room. No joy there. She finally climbs into the back seat of the SUV, and wedges the basket between the front two seats, giving James an annoyed look.

SERIES OF SHOTS

-- SUV driving up and down the winding roads

-- Maria stares off into space rather than engaging James

-- SUV passes a sign: "Welcome to Pennsylvania"

INT. SUV - MOMENTS LATER

JAMES

This will be nice. Getting into the country, away from the city -- the crowds.

He looks up into the rear view mirror, trying to catch Maria's eye. She looks unconvinced, but merely sighs to herself, not willing to start the argument again.

MARIA

Yes, Jimmy. The change will do all of us good.

JAMES

New town, new job -- I think someone up there's telling us something.

MARIA

Someone--

JAMES

God always has something better,  
right?

She's not warming up.

Long beat.

JAMES (CONT'D)

It's a perfect day for a move.

(Beat)

And since most of our stuff was sent  
ahead, I can get an early start  
arranging the furniture. I know just--

Finally she can't resist.

MARIA

Are you kidding me? No, the first  
thing you're gonna do, my dear, is  
get that stove hooked up, so we can  
eat a our first hot meal in our new  
home tonight.

Looking down at the picnic basket.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I'm about done with peanut butter  
and tuna fish.

JAMES

Fine, honey. But I was kinda growing  
fond of tuna smeared with peanut  
butter.

Maria finally laughs.

MARIA

You know what I mean, Mister!

Maria winks at Liza.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Maybe when Daddy falls asleep after  
playing with the furniture, we can  
sneak around and put everything back  
so he can do it all over again.

JAMES

I heard that!

EXT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

A rumble of thunder echoes through the air.

They drive past a sign that reads "The Chamber of Commerce Welcomes You to Walkers Vale. A Community That's Safe for the Whole Family"

The SUV pulls up to a stop at the one traffic light in town.

EXT. WALKERS VALE TOWN CENTER

From the outside, Walkers Vale looks like a typical, small Midwest town.

Maple trees line both sides of the streets. A used book store is sandwiched between two antique stores. Down a side street is a Civil War historical site, complete with two old, cement-plugged Union cannons.

A pair of horse-drawn carriages sit at a hitching post, next to the rustic city hall.

"Zelinski's," a small, family-owned diner, sits across from the tiny post office, itself nestled between a drugstore and an old-fashioned German bakery.

The light changes and the SUV turns right.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

On the passenger seat, James' CELL PHONE vibrates. Maria reaches for it.

MARIA

It's your sister: "Start a new verse for better or worse."

JAMES

What does *that* mean?

She shrugs.

MARIA

Who knows? She means well, and she's having fun with it.

Maria drops the phone back onto the seat and reaches to turn up the AC.

James reaches down and turns it down right before her hand connects.

JAMES

I suppose. It's just - since mom died she feels this need to be, I don't know, the 'voice of inspiration.'

MARIA

So let her. It makes her feel needed.

JAMES

Weird little Scripture meets American folk lore mash-ups.

(Beat)

*Turkey* Soup for the Soul. Oprah? Dr. Phil?

They drive in silence for a long moment. Too long for James.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Dr. Seuss -- on weed.

Maria rolls her eyes.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That giant old weeping willow tree should be coming up soon, I think. Right over that hill. Just minutes to the house.

MARIA

I wonder how Liza will adjust? It's a big change.

James nods, sneaking a glance back at Liza before responding.

JAMES

Yeah, that was the point, remember? The country. Away from the city. And the crowds.

He gets annoyed, realizing he's repeating himself.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm doing everything I can.

Off his look...

MARIA

It's not your fault, Jimmy. It's okay to ask for help. You can't control everything, you know.

He looks at her in the rear view mirror. He can sure try.

EXT. WALKERS VALE MEADOW - CONTINUOUS

Just past the shadow of the weeping willow tree sits the old, dilapidated church building from Ezekiel Walker's dream.

As the Cooper's beat up old blue SUV crests the hill, the doors open and several people filter out into the meadow,

followed by the Reverend himself, dressed all in black, complete with a fedora.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

As the SUV rounds the corner and begins descending the hill, Liza begins excitedly clapping and waving.

JAMES	MARIA
Someone's excited to be here!	Every once in a while, she surprises us.

James smiles broadly at his little girl.

Maria follows Liza's eyes out the window.

	MARIA (CONT'D)
Weird.	

	JAMES
What?	

	MARIA
That church. The one we thought was abandoned?	

	JAMES
Yeah?	

	MARIA
There's people coming out.	

	JAMES
At	

He glances at the dashboard clock.

	JAMES (CONT'D)
Eleven-thirty on a Thursday?	

	MARIA
Maybe they were having a meeting or a service or something.	

	JAMES
Eleven-thirty. On a <i>Thursday</i> .	

EXT. WALKERS VALE MEADOW - CONTINUOUS

Reverend Walker looks up at the SUV, shades his eyes, then, pulling the brim of his hat lower, raises his hand in a wave.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

JAMES

It feels like he's staring right through us.

When Maria doesn't immediately respond, he looks back at her, concerned.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Sweetheart, did you see that guy? Looks like he's right out of some silent movie. You'll be scared to death by "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari!"

MARIA

Don't you think it's a little early to be making preconceived notions about the people here already?

JAMES

I was just kidding around, geez.

MARIA

It's probably just a funeral or something like that.

EXT. WALKERS VALE MEADOW - CONTINUOUS

As the SUV turns onto Lincoln Drive, Reverend Walker's gaze follows it, the sun to his back. When it finally disappears down the hill, he turns back to the parishioners on the lawn.

EZEKIEL

Simmons! Find out who moved into the vacant house on Lincoln Drive. Good to know who our neighbors are.

INT. SUV - MOMENTS LATER

James yanks up the parking brake, then hops out. He goes around to the passenger side of the SUV and opens Maria's door with a flourish. As she climbs out, he pecks her on the cheek.

She makes a poor attempt to hide her giggle.

MARIA

What was that for?

JAMES

I guess I'm just that funny, huh?



MARIA

No, Jimmy, it's just. That's something you used to do when we were dating.

She smiles at him softly, fiddling with the top button on her blouse.

JAMES

I'm sorry. I know I'm-- I probably should say more--

He reaches over and gently caresses her cheek. She unconsciously bites her lip.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That's another reason I want this to be a whole new chapter. For Liza, for my business, and especially for us.

They come together for a long kiss.

MARIA

Mm, I guess after eleven years together, you've made some progress.

James goes in for another kiss, but Maria gently stops him.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Plenty of time for that later, Hun. Don't you think we should get all this - including our daughter - unloaded first?

JAMES

I suppose. I was just --

MARIA

I know.

She puts her hand on his chest, lingering as she smiles warmly.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I know. But--

He throws up his hands.

JAMES

Fine. Alright.

James holds her in an angry look, then blows a raspberry at her. She just grins.

MARIA

I prayed that God would lead us in  
the right direction and here we are.  
Even with you behind the wheel.

Maria takes his hand in hers and squeezes it tightly.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I'm slowly getting you whipped into  
shape.

A thump, thump from the backseat breaks them out of their  
reverie.

JAMES

Looks like somebody's ready to see  
our new house.

EXT. COOPER HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The grassy lawn looks like it's been a couple of months since  
it's felt the slice of a lawnmower blade. A couple of maple  
trees provide plenty of shade and a frayed rope dangling off  
one branch serves as a reminder of the swing that once hung  
there.

James sets Liza down and she runs around, from tree to tree  
to porch and back again, spending the pent up energy of the  
long drive in a festive repeating triangular pattern.

James and Maria stand watching her for a moment, lost in their  
thoughts.

INT. PEDIATRICIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

James and Maria wait in a typical doctor's office. Animals  
and scenes from Noah's ark decorate the otherwise sterile  
walls.

Maria is holding 18-month old Liza in her arms, rocking her  
to sleep.

James has gotten up and is pacing for the third time in the  
last half hour when the door opens and the DOCTOR comes in.

He closes the door behind himself and sits down, rolling his  
stool into position before the worried couple.

JAMES

She's okay, right, Doc? Just a little  
behind. A late bloomer. Nothing to  
worry about, right?

DOCTOR  
Mr. and Mrs. Cooper; are you familiar  
with the term 'autism'?

JAMES  
Sure, I mean, I've heard it before,  
in a movie or on television.

He turns to Maria

DOCTOR  
How about apraxia of speech?

MARIA  
Doctor, what are you trying to say?

DOCTOR  
I'm sorry to have to be the one to  
tell you this, but there is a  
possibility that Liza may never speak.  
These things are hard to judge at  
this age, and she may show signs of  
improvement--

EXT. COOPER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Maria comes up behind James, wrapping him in a hug.

MARIA  
One day--

Sliding around in front of him, she stares deep into his eyes,  
by force of her will, reminding him of the hope she clings so  
tightly to.

MARIA (CONT'D)  
God always has something better.

She smiles again as a single tear slides down her cheek. James  
nods, and they turn together towards the house, their hands  
not quite coming together.

INT. COOPER HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

From above, the floor plan is open and sizable, but the floor  
is littered with hundreds of boxes.

MARIA  
I can't believe all of this stuff is  
ours. I never realized how much of a  
pack rat I am.

JAMES  
Well...