

rites of men

by

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EXT. CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - NIGHT

From a distance, under a moonlit glow, TWO DARK FIGURES hunker down on a wide, flat clearing. One figure larger than the other. They're laughing, whispering.

BOY

Just one more. This one.

MAN

Uh, oh. That's a biggie. Get ready, Sport.

A tiny FLAME flickers, the figures scamper away, and *FSSSHHHHHHHH*-- a FIREWORK launches into the sky, EXPLODING OVERHEAD with a deafening BOOM.

The LAUGHTER and SHOUTS of the DARK FIGURES, one large, one small, disappearing into the darkness.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. THE HILLS OF PASO - DAY

A bright red F-750 with a towing rig winds through the rural greenish-brown HILLS: farm houses, border fencing, water towers, random livestock wandering under the white-blue sky.

TITLE BURN: *PASO ROBLES, CENTRAL COAST, CALIFORNIA*

The truck bangs a right, thrums over the grid of a cattle guard, and climbs a steep, gravelly drive.

EXT. HILLTOP HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

TWO MEN stand next to each other, hands in their pockets, staring at a dusty, boxy, faded-yellow 1994 HONDA CIVIC.

The younger of the two is RETT JAMESON, 37, tall and rangy, close-cropped black hair, big hands, lively gunmetal eyes.

The elder is BAIRD, 60s, far shorter, his skinny limbs at odds with a big round gut, smoking a brown cigarette.

BAIRD

Seen better days. Few clicks and clacks. Nothin you can't handle, Rett.

Rett steps toward the Civic, runs his hand along the roof.

RETT

I think we're good, Mr. Baird.

Baird looks at the ground, nods, tries to hide his relief.

BAIRD

This kinda business. Some men might make it humiliating. Prove some damn point. But you're a gracious man, Rett. God bless you.

Rett grins, shakes his head, slaps the old man on the back.

RETT

Let's not get misty, sir.

EXT. PASO - DAY

Rett's truck cruises out of the hills toward the flats of the city, towing the yellow Civic behind.

EXT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - DAY

A four-bay GARAGE on El Camino Real, three of the bays containing cars up on lifts, three MECHANICS at work.

The yellow Civic is parked off to the side.

Inside the OFFICE, Rett sits at the cluttered desk, paging through a thick LEDGER.

A young Latino, MOY, 23, his arms and neck a tapestry of tattoos-- some mural-style, others prison-primitive-- pokes his head in.

MOY

Piss-yellow Civic in the yard,
Boss.

Rett finds an ENTRY in the ledger, marks it PAID.

RETT

Needs a new clutch. Rear axles.
And the tires are shit.

Moy frowns, shakes his head.

MOY

That old *pandejo* owe thirty-five hundred alone for that tractor job in the Spring.

RETT

I've known that *pandejo* my whole life, Moy.

MOY

That's the problem, yo. You know too many people your whole life.

EXT. RANCH-STYLE HOUSE - EVENING - TWO WEEKS LATER

Rett jogs up the front steps, carrying a gift-wrapped BOX.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

On the couch, a curly-haired, slightly-built, blue-eyed BOY is sprawled, watching *Taxi Driver*. This is BILLY JAMESON, looking considerably younger than his 16 years.

Rett comes through the door, drops the box on Billy's lap.

RETT

Get off your ass, Sport.

Billy smiles shyly, starts opening it, slowly, carefully, not ripping any of the paper, because he's that type of kid.

RETT

Jesus. Getting old and dying here.

BILLY

Ha, ha. Shut up.

Billy finally gets the box open, and pulls out a black leather jacket. His eyes widen with appreciation.

BILLY

Whoa, Pop. (beat) Cool.

RETT

Takin you out for a nice big steak. Go on and get yourself pretty. Drag a comb through that mop.

INT. STEAK HOUSE - NIGHT

Rett and Billy tear into their steaks, both wearing jeans and black leather jackets.

Rett swigs a bottle of beer, taps it against Billy's Sprite.

RETT
Your mother call you today?

Billy nods, chews, visibly disappointed.

BILLY
She said they're not gonna come up
for Thanksgiving. They're all
going to Hawaii or something.

Rett grits his teeth, pushes a smile through.

RETT
Hawaii blows, Sport. The food's
terrible and it rains all day long.
(beat) Seriously, Fuck Hawaii.

Billy tries his best not to smile.

BILLY
Jesus, Pop. Family restaurant?

Rett laughs, raises his beer.

RETT
A toast to my favorite little shit-
head. In a world of boys, a man.
And in a world of men, a soldier.

Billy raises his glass of soda.

BILLY
And to Grandpa Tommy, too.

Rett nods, clenches his jaw, touched.

RETT
Grandpa Tommy.

They clink glasses.

INT. RETT'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Rett and Billy ride along.

BILLY
Thought we were going home. I
wanna finish that movie.

RETT
One stop, Sport.

EXT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - NIGHT

Rett and Billy stand before the yellow CIVIC, cleaned up nice, with shiny new tires.

BILLY
Isn't that thing Mr. Baird's?

Rett pulls a set of KEYS out of his pocket.

RETT
That is incorrect, shithead. This fine automobile, or, "thing", as you call it, is now the property of Mr. William Everett Jameson.

Billy gapes at his father.

RETT
Put out your hand, soldier.

Billy obeys, speechless. Rett drops the keys into his hand.

BILLY
Holy *shit*, Pop.

Billy stares at the car, touches it, then grabs Rett in a furious, unexpectedly tight embrace.

RETT
(exaggerated groan)
And there goes my spleen.

EXT. RETT'S HOUSE - EVENING

The season has turned colder, and the trees are getting bare.

TITLE BURN: **TWO MONTHS LATER.**

The F-750 pulls into the driveway, alongside the Civic. Rett jumps out, carrying a bag from Blockbuster.

He goes inside, down the hall to Billy's room, knocks.

RETT
You in there, Sport? I got a pile of DVD's here.

No answer, so he opens the door, finds the room empty.

He plods to the kitchen, opens the fridge, pulls out a beer, sets the Blockbuster bag on the kitchen table.

RETT
Graphic violence and nudity. Your
favorite kinda shit.

On the table, he finds a neatly-organized tableau: a pile of BILLS, his CHECKBOOK, some STAMPS. And a POST-IT NOTE, scrawled: *PLEASE PAY THESE*.

Rett smirks, chuckles softly, guiltily.

INT. RETT'S TRUCK - AFTERNOON

Rett is cruising through town along El Camino Real, and pulls up in front of a hardware store.

He hops out, and notices something across the street, in front of a COFFEE SHOP:

It's BILLY, in the midst of a heated discussion with a tall, raven-haired, Goth-looking GIRL, 17ish.

Rett raises his hand, is about to call out to him, but then decides against it. He'd rather just watch.

RETT
(to himself)
Say, Billy, who's the Filly?

Billy gesticulates wildly. The raven-haired Girl turns away, but Billy reaches out, pulls her back. He speaks intensely to her. She seems to soften, pecks him on the cheek.

RETT
I'll be damned.

Rett watches Billy and the Girl walk to a crappy little '88 WHITE TERCEL HATCHBACK parked at the curb. The Girl hops behind the wheel, Billy climbs in shotgun, and they zip away.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rett is sprawled on the couch, watching Sportscenter, drinking a beer. Three empties sit on the coffee table, alongside an empty Hungry Man frozen dinner.

Billy comes through the door, looking distracted, preoccupied. His hair is now shorn into a severe BUZZ CUT.

RETT
Sit down, Shithead.

BILLY
Got stuff to do, Pop.

RETT
Siddown, or I'm gonna snap your
skinny little neck.

Billy huffs, plops down on the couch. Rett stares at him quizzically.

RETT
The hell happened to your head?

Billy just shrugs.

RETT
I liked your curly hair.

BILLY
It'll grow back.

Rett frowns, troubled, tries another tack.

RETT
We haven't had dinner together in
weeks, Sport.

BILLY
Sorry. Been real busy.

RETT
You're sixteen years old. The fuck
you know about busy?

Billy turns to face Rett, his expression defiant.

BILLY
Why'd you buy a zip-saw two weeks
ago instead of paying the Edison
bill? I saw it in the garage. You
haven't even *opened the box*.

Rett looks at Billy, stung, embarrassed.

RETT
Jesus, B.J. Just tryin to have a
conversation here. Remember when
we used to have those?

Billy lets out an elongated, exasperated, adolescent sigh.

RETT

Yeah, I get it. I'm boring the
shit out of you. (beat) I know
this is what happens. Just thought
maybe I had a little more time.

BILLY

Time before what.

Rett drinks his beer, looking defeated.

RETT

Before you got sick of hangin
around a tired old asshole like me,
found some greener pastures.

Billy softens, moves a little closer on the couch.

BILLY

Pop, come on.

RETT

Yeah, what.

BILLY

I still like hanging around a tired
old asshole like you.

Rett smiles sadly, rubs his hand over Billy's fuzzy head.

RETT

Smartass.

Billy playfully bats his hand away.

BILLY

Get off.

RETT

Try and make me, punk. (beat) So
what's her name?

BILLY

Huh?

RETT

Don't play stupid with me. You got
yourself a girlfriend.

Billy squirms, turns red.

BILLY

She's not my girlfriend really.

RETT
 Uh huh. (beat) What's her name?

BILLY
 Jessica. (beat) Jess.

RETT
 She the one who shaved your melon?

Billy nods, smiling, guilty.

RETT
 You know about rubbers, right?

BILLY
 Oh my God, please shut up.

INT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - DAY

Rett sits at his desk, frustrated, crunching some numbers.

RETT
 What is it, Moy.

Because Moy is standing in the doorway, holding a thick white envelope, looking grim.

MOY
 This came in the mail. (beat)
 It's from the I.R.S.

Rett grits his teeth, closes his eyes.

RETT
Shit.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

This time, Rett carries a Baja Fresh takeout bag. There's a small CHRISTMAS TREE over in the corner, and various LIGHTS and DECORATIONS pinned up in hasty, half-assed fashion.

Rett knocks on Billy's door, walks right on in, finding Billy at his computer, in the midst of an AIM session.

Sensing Rett's presence, Billy immediately SIGNS OFF.

RETT
 You hungry? I got burritos here.

Billy shakes his head. His face looks drawn, pinched.

RETT
What's wrong, Sport?

Billy stares at the floor before deciding to answer.

BILLY
Jess took off.

RETT
You mean like, ran away?

BILLY
Nobody knows where she is.

Rett furrows his brow, sits on the bed.

RETT
Well that's just awful. Something
goin on at home?

Billy clams up, shrugs. Annoyed by Rett's proximity.

RETT
Jesus. Her poor folks. Must be
worried half to death.

Billy moves his miserable stare out the window.

RETT
She'll be back, buddy. Most of the
time, they come right back home.

Rett slings an arm across boy's narrow shoulders. Billy's eyes flare, and he pushes Rett's arm right off.

BILLY
That's bullshit. Why do you always
act like you know everything? You
don't know her. You don't even
know how to pay a bill.

RETT
Aw, come on, that's not fair--

Billy angrily shoves Rett away, or at least...he tries.

BILLY
Why do you always wanna talk to me
about everything? Don't you have
any fucking friends of your own?

Rett absorbs this with a visible wince.

RETT
Jesus, Beej. What's the matter
with you?

BILLY
Whatever, okay? Just whatever.

Billy bangs out the door, leaving Rett in the small bedroom,
confused, alarmed, disheartened.

RETT'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Rett slumps, semi-awake, semi-watching late-night TV.

Billy enters from the hallway, sits on the La-Z-Boy next to
the couch. Rett nods to the boy, semi-smiles.

BILLY
Hey. (beat) Sorry.

RETT
I'm sorry about your friend.
(beat) You can tell me anything,
Sport. You know that, right?

Billy nods, hugs his arms across his chest.

RETT
I realize I'm not always one to be
givin advice. And all that shit.
But time to time, I actually do
know what I'm talkin about.

Billy looks at Rett pensively.

BILLY
When I go to Mom's, for Christmas?
I don't wanna stay the whole week.
She wants me to, but I just. I
wanna come back home sooner.

RETT
I'm sure that can be arranged.
I'll talk to her.

Billy allows himself a small smile of gratitude.

BILLY
On New Year's. Maybe we could go
up to Chalk Mountain, blow shit up?

Rett nods, smiles, unexpectedly moved.

RETT
We could absolutely do that.

EXT. RETT'S HOUSE - MORNING

Rett follows Billy out to the driveway, lugging a suitcase. Billy, face pinched, already seems far, far away, and he constantly checks his phone for texts.

Rett places the suitcase in the back, shuts the door, notices Billy peering intently at his phone.

RETT
Put that thing away.

Billy relents, and Rett hugs him, squeezing him extra hard.

RETT
Stay under 65. Lotta boneheads on
the freeway. (beat) Love you,
little fucker.

Rett relinquishes Billy, who gets in, starts her up. Rett pushes some folded-up twenties into Billy's coat pocket.

RETT
Walkin around money.

Billy looks at Rett, his eyes full of...something. Like he wants to say something important. But he can't muster it.

RETT
Call me when you get down there or
you're a dead man.

Rett slaps the roof of the Civic as it drives off.

He wears a bittersweet smile as the Civic takes a left turn, RATTLING as it goes around the corner, and disappears.

INT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - AFTERNOON

Rett wanders out of the office into the nearly-empty garage, where Moy has a Volvo up on a lift.

MOY
Everything okay, Boss? I mean,
like, around here?

Rett absently runs his hand along the Volvo's tire.

RETT
 Won't be long til you're a daddy,
 huh? Bout a month?

MOY
 Six weeks, yo. I'm trippin.

RETT
 How bout you cut out early. Go be
 with your *familia*.

MOY
 No shit?

RETT
 No shit. *Feliz Navidad*, Moy.

Moy wipes his hands, troubled, as he walks out.

MOY
 Aight. (beat) Thanks I guess.

Rett heads back to his desk, notices his CELL lying amongst
 all the papers. There's a MISSED CALL and a VOICEMAIL.

He dials into his VOICEMAIL, which PLAYS OVER:

EXT. EL CAMINO REAL - AFTERNOON

Rett's truck cruises along.

VOICEMAIL (O.S.)
You have one. Unheard. Message.

INT. BLOCKBUSTER - AFTERNOON

Rett peruses the shelves. Picks up a DVD, reads the back.

BILLY'S VOICE (V.O.)
*Hey, Pop. Just callin to say. I'm
 here. I mean I'm almost here.*

INT. LIQUOR STORE - A BIT LATER

Rett pulls a bottle of champagne out of the glass fridge.

BILLY'S VOICE (V.O.)
*Don't get too lonely up there
 without me. Just kidding.*

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - EVENING

Rett pops open the champagne. Pours it into a tall beer mug.

BILLY'S VOICE (V.O.)
Anyway, yeah. Talk to you soon.
(beat) Love ya, Pop.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - LATER

Rett is fully sprawled on the couch, watching *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*. His eyes are bleary, half-lidded.

VOICEMAIL (V.O.)
End of message.

Rett's eyes flutter closed. On the TV screen, Eastwood stumbles through the merciless desert, his face and lips horribly blistered, ravaged by the sun--

CUT TO BLACK.

Hold the BLACK.

In SLOW-MOTION, a FIREWORK LAUNCHES into the sky, and silently EXPLODES into fiery ribbons, the sparks softly tumbling downward--

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Rett SNAPS AWAKE on the couch, and it takes him a second to realize that the PHONE IS RINGING.

He rubs his face vigorously, searches for the phone, finally finds it, picks it up.

RETT
 Hello? (beat) Linda? The hell
 time is it?

He squints his eyes at the CLOCK on the cable box, which says it's 12:47 a.m.

RETT
 Whadaya mean is he here? Course
 he's not here. He left this
 morning. (beat) Hold on a minute.
 Calm down. (beat) He called from
 the road, he said--

Rett's expression darkens.

RETT

Look. Relax. He's fine. Maybe
he's visiting a friend or... (beat)
Just sit tight, I'm gonna. (beat)
I'll call you right back.

Rett hangs up the phone. Immediately dials Billy's cell. It goes straight to VOICEMAIL. He leaves a message:

RETT

You better have an amazing goddamn
reason for not being where you're
supposed to be right now. So
wherever the fuck you are, please
know your mother is having a
stroke. (beat) Sport, just call
me. Like right now.

Rett stands up. Realizes he's begun to sweat. He dials again. VOICEMAIL. He hangs up. Starts to pace.

RETT

You little asshole. You don't do
this. *God damnit.*

He dials the phone again. Now his hands are shaking.

RETT

Linda. (beat) I don't know.
(beat) I don't fucking know.

EXT. RETT'S HOUSE - MORNING

TWO POLICE CARS are parked beside Rett's truck, one a regulation Cruiser, the other an unmarked Crown Vic.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rett sits on the couch, ashen, dark patches under his eyes.

Across from him sit TWO MEN, who are both COPS, though you wouldn't necessarily know from their hastily thrown-on street clothes. It is, after all, Christmas Morning.

One is CAPTAIN DEX BALLARD, 60, white hair, white moustache, well-fed, hands the size of catcher's mitts. The other is DETECTIVE ERIK JORGENSEN, 35, quite tall, shaved head, blond moustache, armor-piercing stare.

The cops scribble notes onto pads as they gently pepper Rett with questions.

BALLARD
Plates on the Civic, 4-9-2-7-G-C-L.

RETT
G-C-H.

JORGENSEN
That voicemail he sent you--

BALLARD
Now, was he callin from a pay phone, or a cell phone?

RETT
I don't know--

JORGENSEN
Gonna need some pictures of Billy. Clear ones, like a school portrait--

RETT
Do me a favor, Jorgensen, shut the fuck up about school portraits.

Rett starts to shiver, so he stands up, walks to the window, clenches his jaw tightly. He's keeping it together only by an act of will.

BALLARD
Any chance maybe he stopped on the way down? Got tired, had some car trouble, something?

But it's like Rett can't even hear him. Like his mind is filling with white noise, growing steadily louder.

RETT
(to himself, to nobody)
*God damn car. I never should've.
Billy. Making me feel so sick.*

Ballard and Jorgensen exchange grim, uncomfortable looks.

JORGENSEN
(to Ballard)
Gonna head to the station. Rustle some leaves down in Ventura County. Get this thing rolling.

Ballard nods discreetly, and Jorgensen heads out the door.

BALLARD

Everett.

The old man approaches Rett, and slowly, gently puts his hands on Rett's shoulders.

RETT

Something's bad, Dex. Something's fuckin' wrong.

BALLARD

I've known you your whole life.
You're a soldier. Strong as an ox.
And that boy of yours, smart as a goddamn whip. Times like this, a man gotta rise to the occasion. Just like you did over in Kuwait. Stay on the positive side of things. We'll figure this out.

Rett stands there, struggling, clenched like a statue.

RETT

Just wanna know. Where he is.
Swear to God. Never let him out of my sight again.

Dread washes over Rett's face, swims through his eyes.

INT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - DAY

Rett sits, staring at his desk, looking like utter hell.

TITLE BURN: **THREE DAYS LATER.**

He's wearing the same clothes we last saw him in. It's abundantly clear he's had no rest, no relief, no reprieve.

MOY (O.S.)

Boss. You don't gotta be here.

Rett doesn't turn to Moy, who stands behind him, stricken.

RETT

(hoarse, blank)
Yeah.

MOY

You gotta sleep, man.

RETT

Okay.

But Rett doesn't move an inch, just stares.

Moy wishes he knew how to be, how to act, but he doesn't.

EXT. FIELD - CALABASAS - DAY

Two long-haired 15-year old BOYS are stumbling across a barren, rocky FIELD, passing a joint.

In the distance, the 101 Freeway hums and drones, endlessly.

BOY 1
So fuckin faded.

BOY 2
Flying.

They walk, in a dewy-eyed daze, toward a copse of small trees and thick brush. The joint gets passed again.

BOY 1
Fuck is that. You see that?

The boy's eyes are fixed on SOMETHING on the ground, just hidden behind the trees. A dark, tangled LUMP.

BOY 2
(creeped)
Yeah. I see it.

They pick their way closer--

EXT. RETT'S HOUSE - EVENING

Rett's truck pulls up the drive. A Cruiser is already parked there, and Ballard is standing beside it.

Ballard stands erect, but his face is a crumpled misery.

Rett steps out of the truck. Ballard slowly removes his hat.

RETT
Put your hat back on, Dex.

Ballard kicks the dirt. Takes a deep breath.

BALLARD
Everett. There's something--

RETT
Put your fuckin hat back on, Dex.

Ballard slowly approaches Rett.

BALLARD

Everett.

Rett backs up against his truck. Catches a GLIMPSE of himself in the side-mirror.

And abruptly SMASHES the side-mirror RIGHT OFF THE TRUCK, with FOUR QUICK BLOWS of his forearm.

Ballard's eyes drop to the ground.

We pull back, far away. Because like Rett, we don't want to see. We don't want to hear.

CUT TO:

INT. MORGUE - STOPPED TIME

A cold, stark, pale-green-lit ROOM.

A GURNEY sits in the middle of the room. A SHEET-COVERED LUMP lies on the gurney.

Standing behind the gurney, waiting, is Ballard, and a white-coat-clad MEDICAL EXAMINER.

Rett's face is a rictus of horror and incomprehension.

BALLARD

I'm so sorry, Everett. But we have to do this. (beat) It's just gotta be done.

Rett shifts closer, on feet made of stone.

The Medical Examiner pulls back the sheet.

Rett's face. His EYES.

Whatever light, whatever hope was left inside them-- is snuffed out, in this exact, crystalline moment.

INT. SHERIFFS STATION - BALLARD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Rett sits, strangely erect, glassy-eyed, in an orange vinyl armchair, across from Ballard's desk.

Ballard silently fills a coffee mug from a bottle of Bushmills, hands it to Rett.

Rett holds the mug, doesn't drink.

BALLARD

I know there ain't anything I can say that'll give you comfort. I won't insult you by trying.

Rett slowly nods, stares into the mug.

BALLARD

He didn't suffer, Everett. Just once through the heart. It was over quick. Wasn't no pain.

Rett dips his finger into the brown booze, swirls it around, brings the finger to his lips, sucks it absently.

BALLARD

I've spoken to Linda. She'll be comin on up tomorrow.

Rett lets out a small groan, takes a big gulp from the mug, spilling a good portion down the front of his shirt.

BALLARD

Don't be worrying yourself about...
(beat) The arrangements. We'll take care of all that. Up Pine Lawns. Right beside your Old Man.

Rett MUMBLES something, wiping blankly at his shirt.

BALLARD

I didn't catch that, son.

Rett just stares back at him. Death-numb.

RETT

I said you can bury me too.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. PINE LAWNS MEMORIAL PARK - DAY

A windy, white, heartlessly cold morning.

A small GROUP gathers loosely around an OPEN GRAVE, a shiny green CASKET perched above it on straps. Some folks we've seen before, like Ballard, and Moy, and some we haven't.

An auburn-haired WOMAN, 36, pretty but grief-wracked, stands unsteadily by the grave, surrounded by three YOUNG GIRLS, aged 3-8, who cry softly, simply because their mother cries.

This is LINDA, Rett's ex, in the arms of her new HUSBAND.

Rett stands slightly apart from the group, in a somewhat ill-fitting dark suit, expressionless.

A MINISTER drones, but most of his words are lost in the wind. Words like *tragedy* and *so young* and *such promise*.

Rett's eyes wander over the surrounding terrain, the bleak rolling hills, the many trees and headstones.

His eyes land on a huge, stark ELM a few hundred yards away--

Where a LONE FEMALE FIGURE stands half-hidden. Even though it's so far away, it looks like she is...*watching*.

He turns back to the hole in the ground. The casket begins to slowly descend. Rett suddenly SITS DOWN on the grass, folding his legs Indian-style.

HANDS reach down to him, and he brushes them away like flies.

EXT. ELM TREE - PINE LAWNS - CONTINUOUS

The same tree Rett was just staring at. Standing next to it is the same tall, Goth-looking YOUNG WOMAN we've seen once before, talking to Billy outside the coffee shop.

This is JESS, hair now PLATINUM, shivering against the cold, face drawn, her eyes filled with regret, misery. Shame.

JESS
So sorry, Billy. Fuck I'm so sorry
I'm so sorry--

A sob catches in her throat. She covers her face, shakes.

She starts to walk away. Until she starts RUNNING.

And that fucking wind blows--

CUT TO BLACK.

HOLD THE BLACK.

JORGENSEN'S VOICE (O.S.)
*You gotta sleep, Jameson. This
 ain't good for a person.*

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Rett lies on the carpet, eyes closed.

Behind him, the TV plays football, the sound OFF.

RETT'S VOICE (V.O.)
*Sometimes I try. Close my eyes and
 lay there.*

RETT'S HOUSE - FRACTURED TIME

Rett methodically takes down all the DECORATIONS. He does not put them into a box. Instead, they go into a trash bag.

RETT'S VOICE (V.O.)
*Sleep won't come. Most of the time
 I'm just. Halfway in between.*

CUT TO:

INT. SHERIFFS STATION - JORGENSEN'S OFFICE

Rett slumps in a chair across from Jorgensen's desk.

JORGENSEN
 We got bulletins out, up and down
 the state. No sign of the Civic,
 but we're not quitting. Bound to
 turn up sometime.

Rett nods, vacantly.

RETT
 And the girl.

Jorgensen rifles through some papers, finds one.

JORGENSEN
 Jessica Koons. Ran away from home
 about three weeks ago. She's still
 AWOL. Her mother's been...less
 than helpful. She's all fucked up.
 (MORE)

JORGENSEN (cont'd)
 Combative. Anyway we've been
 canvassing the neighborhood. The
 high school. Classmates, teachers.

Jorgensen sighs, scratches at his moustache.

JORGENSEN
 Ain't gonna lie, we haven't turned
 up much. Billy, he was. (beat)
 He was a quiet kid. That's what
 folks keep saying. Over and over.

Rett stands up, wipes his hands on his pants.

RETT
 Gonna go now.

JORGENSEN
 Rett, hey. I'm sorry, I don't--

RETT
 Don't need to be here, listening to
 how much you don't know.

JORGENSEN
 It's just the beginning, Rett.
 Sometimes things come fast, other
 times, it's slow. Point is you
 gotta stay strong.

Rett stands by the door, stares blankly at the Detective.

RETT
 You got a kid, Jorgensen?

Jorgensen looks away, shakes his head.

RETT
 Maybe put your own child in a hole
 sometime. Throw a little dirt on
 top. See how strong it makes you.

Jorgensen remains silent, stung. Rett walks out the door.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rett wanders through the house, drinking from a tall glass of
 vodka. On the TV, there's live coverage of New Year's Eve.

He plods down the hallway to Billy's room, opens the door.
 Inside, everything is unchanged. Shelves full of books. His
 posters of *The Outlaw Josie Wales* and *Dirty Harry*.

Rett walks to the bookshelf, pulls out a thick hardcover:
The Red Badge of Courage.

RETT

Yeah.

Rett replaces the book in the shelf. Walks to the bed.
Smooths the bedsheets, the blankets. Fluffs the pillow.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATER

Rett is screwing a hinge-lock onto Billy's door. When he's done, he attaches a fat Master PADLOCK, snaps it shut.

He won't be going back in there anytime soon.

RETT'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

The TV flickers. The COUNTDOWN to the New Year has begun.

TV ANNOUNCER

*And here we go, folks! Are you
ready? 10! 9! 8! 7!*

The TV is on, but nobody is home. Rett is somewhere else.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - MIDNIGHT

Rett is hunched over in the darkness, shivering against the cold. Tears and snot leak freely from his face.

He jams a FIREWORK into the hard, chalky earth.

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

6! 5! 4!

With shaking hands, Rett flicks a lighter to life. Lights the fuse, scuttles backward.

RETT

It's a biggie, Sport. Get ready.

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

3! 2! 1!

FSSSHHHHHHHH--

The firework LAUNCHES into the sky, and EXPLODES overhead--

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Happy New Year, everybody!

Rett stares up at the falling, shimmering embers. One by one, the sparks fade as they fall, until they're ashes.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE BURN OVER BLACK:

TEN MONTHS LATER.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Rett lies flat on his back, eyes open, staring half-lidded at the ceiling. He looks about 10 years older. His hair is shaggy, and he's got a thick, unruly beard.

His CLOCK RADIO ALARM blares to life. He lets it blare.

Like he needs the alarm anyway.

Like he ever gets a decent night's sleep.

EXT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - DAY

Rett sits at his desk, which is piled high with unopened letters, many of them featuring angry, hostile text:

URGENT and *PAST DUE* and *PENALTY* and *OPEN IMMEDIATELY*.

He rises from the desk, walks zombie-like into the garage, where he finds Moy, the lone employee, sweeping up.

RETT
 Go talk to Tomlinson like I said?

Moy crosses his arms, shakes his head.

MOY
This where I work.

Rett puts his hands on Moy's shoulders, looks him in the eye.

RETT
 Gotta listen to me, *cabron*. We're stretched out on a rail here. Few weeks, a month, these doors are closin.

MOY
Mother fuck.

RETT
Tomlinson's a good man. And you're already saltier than his best guy. Quit worryin about me. Keep your arms around your little *nina*. Keep her safe. You understand me?

Moy stares at the floor, pissed off, sad, resistant.

INT. SHAY'S BAR - NIGHT

The place is only about half full, mostly blue collar types, baseball hats, facial hair, thick forearms, calloused hands.

Rett bellies up to the bar, signals the BARTENDER, a 50-year-old dyed-redhead named BETHANY, who approaches.

BETHANY
How's tricks, Rett?

RETT
I'd like six of the Cuervo. All in a little row. And one for yourself, sweetheart, if you wouldn't mind joining in.

Bethany's eyes flicker with uncertainty, but only for an instant. She smiles, nods, pulls the bottle.

As she pours the shots, Rett's eyes wander down the bar to where a spiffy-dressed JORGENSEN is laughing it up with a pair of UNIFORMS, Deputies MILLER and CZERNY.

Rett stares at them, until Jorgensen notices him, nods in greeting, smile fading. Rett lifts a shot in toast.

RETT
To the Paso Sheriffs Department.
Best in the god-damn business.

Jorgensen chuckles uncomfortably, wanders over, followed by Miller and Czerny.

JORGENSEN
Hey there, Jameson.

RETT
Officers. Lookin pretty dapper, Detective. You got a date?

JORGENSEN

No, these are just my work clothes.
All those shots for you?

RETT

Got myself a little theory why you
dress all fancy like that.

JORGENSEN

Do you now.

Rett downs another shot.

RETT

I do indeed. It's so you can
remind the rest of them dumb-ass
bulls that you're the one with the
college *ed-u-cation*.

Jorgensen snorts, while the Deputies clearly bristle.

CZERNY

Why you gotta be an asshole your
whole life, Jameson?

Rett raises shot #3, grins blankly at Czerny.

RETT

And here's to your sister, Czerny.
That time she let me and three
other guys fuck her in your
basement, back in 9th grade.

Czerny turns lobster-red. Rett downs the shot.

CZERNY

You're a piece of shit.

BETHANY

Come on now, boys.

JORGENSEN

How long you gonna keep this up,
huh? Antagonizing everybody?

RETT

Depends. How long you gonna keep
pretending you're actually a cop?

Jorgensen bends low, gets right in Rett's face, all business.

JORGENSEN

I get it. You gotta blame somebody. Like I didn't turn over every rock in this county. Like I didn't work this case for half a year without sleeping a wink.

RETT

Lose some beauty sleep, did you? That why you gave up on Billy, you spit-shined donkey-boy?

JORGENSEN

Fuck you I gave up. There's nothing, Jameson. Nada. No car. No witnesses. Colder than a goddamn ice cube. When you gonna understand that?

Rett stares at the remaining shots in front of him. He picks one up, downs it, eyes bleary, far away. Jorgensen softens.

JORGENSEN

I won't ever give up, okay? That isn't just a promise. It's my job. It's who I am. There's things I can do for you. I can help you.

Rett glares coldly at Jorgensen.

RETT

Help me? You probably couldn't help an old lady cross the goddamn fuckin street.

Jorgensen nods grimly.

JORGENSEN

That's real nice, Jameson. But I'm not your enemy. No matter how hard you try to make me one.

Jorgensen walks away, followed by the Deputies. Rett stares at the remaining shots, jaw clenched. He quickly downs them, one after the other.

He gets up, wobbles over, and TACKLES JORGENSEN to the floor.

Before anyone can even react, Rett lets loose a FLURRY of hard PUNCHES to Jorgensen's face.

MILLER

God damnit, Jameson!

The two Deputies SWARM over Rett, haul him off Jorgensen, but Rett sends a quick, sharp ELBOW to Miller's TEMPLE, sending him FLYING backwards, knocking over some bar stools.

Czerny busts his NIGHTSTICK out, gives Rett a hard THWACK across the backs of his knees--

Rett CRUMPLES to the floor, but still manages to turn his body and SWEEP Czerny's LEGS out from under him--

And then Rett LEAPS onto a dazed Czerny, and proceeds to BEAT the living PISS out of his FACE, all while wearing a strange, blank GRIN of drunken oblivion.

RETT
 (with each punch)
*Fuck your sister. Fuck your
 sister. Fuck that bitch--*

THWACK. Miller CLOCKS Rett across the back of the head with his NIGHTSTICK, and Rett goes LIMP, slides to the floor.

And good night.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. PASO ROBLES SHERIFFS STATION - (DAWN)

A UNIFORM leads a weary, banged-up Rett out of the Drunk Tank, down a fluorescent hallway.

Rett shuffles along, holding his jeans up, sans belt.

They come upon BALLARD, eyes like granite, in street clothes, white-whiskered. He hands Rett his belt.

BALLARD
 Just can't get out of your own way,
 can you.

Rett can't bring himself to look the old man in the eyes.

BALLARD
 This here's the last time you're
 gonna skate. Gotta stop takin
 advantage of a man's good will.

Rett still won't look at him, as he threads his belt.

RETT
 Yessir. I promise to be good--

Ballard grabs a handful of Rett's shirt and SHOVES him up against the wall.

BALLARD

We've been down this road too many times, son. God knows you've suffered a blow no man should ever suffer. But there's limits.

Ballard releases Rett, smooths his crumpled shirt.

BALLARD

Can't keep worrying about you. Gettin too goddamn old. You understand what I'm saying?

Rett sighs miserably.

RETT

I understand. (beat) I wanna go home. Please can I go home.

Ballard puts his huge hand on Rett's shoulder. Pats it.

BALLARD

There's good people in the world, Everett. You look hard enough.

Rett stares at him, blank, as if he just spoke in Latin.

EXT. PASO ROBLES STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Rett shuffles along as morning traffic rumbles around him.

He walks out onto an OVERPASS which spans the 101 Freeway. Watches the cars and trucks rumble by below.

He turns away, shuffles further along the overpass. And that's when a PISS-YELLOW CIVIC cruises past him.

Rett stops, FROZEN, follows the car with saucer-wide eyes.

RETT

Gotta be. (beat) Kiddin me.

He starts to walk after the car, which is now approaching the Southbound on-ramp. Within seconds, he's SPRINTING.

RETT

(breathless)
Stop. Hey. STOP.

The car RATTLES as it takes a left onto the on-ramp. Rett sprints after it, but then he TRIPS, pitches forward onto the sidewalk, SPLAYS hard and ugly.

RETT

FUCK!

He crawls to the edge of the overpass, panting, and peers over the railing, just in time to see the Civic slide into Southbound 101 traffic, and disappear.

He looks at his WATCH: it's just past 7:30 am.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rett stands in the living room, making a phone call.

RETT

Moy. Might be a little late getting in tomorrow, so go ahead and open up. (beat) No, it's fine. Just got a thing.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

The CLOCK RADIO blares on, and it's 6:00 am.

Rett's already awake. He springs out of bed.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAWN

Fully dressed, Rett pours a pot of coffee into a tall thermos. When he's done, he grabs his keys.

EXT. ACCESS ROAD - MORNING

Rett sits in his truck on the roadside, sipping his coffee, eyes alert, staring out the windshield, radio playing low.

Up ahead, the ACCESS ROAD merges into the OVERPASS. From this spot, Rett has a perfect view of all the vehicles getting on the Southbound ramp.

He checks his watch. 7:18 am.

He continues his vigil. Picks up a pair of binoculars, scans the cars waiting at the on-ramp.

He's so fixated on that particular ramp, he DOESN'T SEE the YELLOW CIVIC approaching from the OPPOSITE direction, heading up the OFF-RAMP from the NORTHBOUND side of the 101.

It's just outside his field of vision. ZIPPING past--

Rett SEES the Civic just in time, as it's disappearing around a sharp CURVE. The thermos goes FLYING as he scrambles to start the truck, jams it into Drive--

INT/EXT. PASO ROBLES BACK ROADS - MORNING

Rett's fingers drum anxiously on the wheel as he FOLLOWS at a discreet distance.

Up ahead, the Civic turns into the wide, crowded driveway of EAST PASO HIGH SCHOOL.

Rett pulls up at the sidewalk opposite the drive.

He watches the Civic pull up to the front entrance of the school. The passenger door opens, and a short, dark-haired BOY hops out, about 15, carrying a backpack.

Rett watches the BOY plod, slump-shouldered, toward the school doors, quickly ABSORBED into the CROWD of KIDS.

INT./EXT. - RETT'S TRUCK - MORNING

Rett follows the Civic across the OVERPASS, and onto the Southbound 101 on-ramp.

He maintains his position, a few cars behind the Civic. His eyes fierce, alert, pure focus. ALIVE.

His fingers drum the wheel.

INT./EXT. - 101 FREEWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Civic heads for the exit marked TEMPLETON.

A few moments later, Rett's truck takes the same exit.

EXT. TEMPLETON HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Rett follows the Civic into the parking lot of a modest-sized HOSPITAL, where the Civic slides into a spot.

Rett idles at a distance, watching intently.

The Civic's door pops open, and a TALL, DARK-HAIRED WOMAN emerges, mid-30s, wearing PINK NURSE SCRUBS.

As the WOMAN walks toward the hospital entrance, she pins her long, black hair into a tight bun.

When she walks, it's fluid, feminine-- almost a sashay. Even in the scrubs, no doubt, she's a *looker*.

RETT

My goodness.

She disappears into the hospital.

He hops out of his truck, carrying a small bag of TOOLS.

He slowly approaches the Civic, runs his hand along the roof, entranced. He assesses the various dings, chips, dents.

He whispers softly to the car, like a lover.

RETT

*Knew it was you. Ugly yellow
fucker. Knew it was you.*

His eyes search the parking lot, sees there's nobody around.

He pulls a SLIM JIM from his bag and POPS the lock in seconds. He slips quickly inside, pops the trunk, climbs out again, opens the trunk, peers down into the guts of the car.

RETT

And here we go.

CUT TO:

INT. RETT'S TRUCK - EVENING

The truck is parked on the street outside the hospital lot. The interior is littered with empty soda cans and wrappers.

The sun hangs low in the sky. He's clearly been sitting there for hours and hours.

He hops out of the truck, stretches his aching limbs, rolls his neck, grunting with the satisfying pops and clicks.

Then he catches sight of HER across the lot, pulling the pins from her hair as she sashays, her dark tresses cascading--

EXT. TEMPLETON - EL CAMINO REAL - CONTINUOUS

The yellow Civic zips down the thoroughfare. Suddenly, it LURCHES, and SMOKE starts to waft from under the hood.

The sound of GEARS GRINDING as the Civic slows down, LURCHES again, COUGHS, and limps over to the curb.

The WOMAN emerges from the Civic, looking distraught. She shivers against the evening chill as traffic whizzes past.

WOMAN

Piece of shit. Piece of shit.

She digs her cell phone out of her purse, and a bright red F-750 pulls to the side of the road, just in front of her.

A smiling Rett hops out, ambles over.

RETT

Evening, ma'am. Looks like you've got some trouble.

The woman eyes him warily. He looks pretty scraggly.

WOMAN

You noticed that, huh.

RETT

I can take a look, if that's okay.

She cocks her head, sizing him up some more.

RETT

Don't worry. I am, in fact, a professional. That's me.

He gestures toward his truck, where *JAMESON & SON AUTO* is emblazoned on the TAILGATE.

She glances at the tailgate, back at him, finally shrugs.

RETT

Great. Pop the hood for me?

Looking at him askance, she slides into the car, pops it.

Rett rolls up his sleeves, props open the hood, starts poking around inside. Black SMOKE still curls from within.

RETT

Hmm. (beat) Well.

She appears next to him, staring into the guts of the car, clueless, exasperated.

WOMAN
Don't even tell me.

RETT
You don't want me to tell you?

WOMAN
Just don't tell me it's bad.

Rett rises from the hood, wipes his hands on his pants.

RETT
Gotta breach in the oil line. Your clutch is drowning in oil. That's why it won't catch.

WOMAN
So what's that mean. Fix the hole, wash off the clutch and it's okay?

Rett grits his teeth, sucks air in.

RETT
You can't wash off the clutch. The clutch is done. It's toast.

The woman starts to pace around, her eyes a bit wild.

WOMAN
That's expensive, isn't it? Shit. Actually don't tell me. I don't wanna know. Jesus Christ.

Rett lays a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

RETT
Hey...

She immediately SWATS his hand away.

WOMAN
Don't touch me. Did you just touch me? Fuck is wrong with you?

Rett backs up, holds up both his hands in surrender.

RETT
Whoa, now. This ain't anything like that. I sure didn't mean--

WOMAN

Can't go around putting your
goddamn hands on people.

Rett has backed up all the way to his truck, hands up.

RETT

I can assure you, ma'am, that I
never meant to offend.

The woman stares hard at Rett, sees the earnestness, the sad
blue truth in his eyes. She softens.

WOMAN

Okay. (beat) Sometimes I don't
handle bad news too well.

INT. RETT'S TRUCK - EVENING

Rett drives with the woman riding shotgun, the Civic TOWING
behind them.

WOMAN

So are you Jameson, or the Son?

RETT

I'm both, actually. Name's Rett.
How bout you.

It takes a few seconds before she decides to answer.

WOMAN

Carla.

He nods, smiles. They drive on in silence. He sneaks a look
at her. A few seconds later, she sneaks a look back.

EXT. PHEASANT RUN MOBILE HOME COMMUNITY - NIGHT

Rett's truck, towing the Civic, pulls up outside of a modest,
well-kept double-wide. Rett and Carla climb out.

RETT

I could bring her back, bout this
time tomorrow. That okay?

CARLA

I don't have a lot of money.

RETT
Already told you, that's not gonna
be a problem.

The sound of a DOOR CREAKING OPEN, and both turn to see the
small, dark-haired BOY emerging from the house.

Carla lights up like a Christmas tree.

CARLA
Hey, baby. How was school?

The boy just stands there, staring at Rett.

CARLA
Mama's car shit the bed,
sweetheart. This nice man is gonna
fix it for us. His name's Rett.

Rett gives the boy a little salute.

RETT
Howdy.

The boy says nothing, just stares, unreadable.

CARLA
That's just Alfonso being
talkative. Don't take it personal.

Rett looks at the boy curiously. Then hands Carla a card.

RETT
Number of my shop is there, and my
cellular. If you need to find me.

Carla looks at the card, looks up at Rett, quizzical.

There's something about him. Something she trusts.

CARLA
See you tomorrow, then.

RETT
Yes, ma'am.

CARLA
Sure are polite, aren't you.

Rett makes an exaggerated show of tipping his baseball cap,
and Carla lets out a little LAUGH-- bubbly, girlish. Nice.

RETT
Evenin, Carla. Alfonso.

Carla walks over to Alfonso, hugs him, kisses him, while the boy's eyes follow Rett's truck, as it slowly drives away.

INT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - DAY

Rett and Moy stand in the bay, staring down at the yellow Civic, hood popped open. Moy is wide-eyed, amped.

MOY
Holy shit, yo.

They continue to stare at the vehicle.

MOY
The fuck you gonna do now?

RETT
Throw in a new clutch. Replace that hose I poked a hole in.

MOY
I mean what are you gonna do after that, dude? Who is this bitch?

Rett shrugs, shakes his head.

MOY
This is the whip, yo. Shouldn't you call the cops, something?

Rett gives Moy a good hard look.

RETT
Since when are you so tight with the *po-po*, Moy? Wanna take a nice walk down memory lane?

Moy sighs, leans against the car, gazes into the guts.

MOY
Put a madre. (beat) Don't have to be a dick about it, Boss.

Rett slaps him on the back, walks out to the street.

Moy frowns, picks up a transformer, pushes a button, and the Civic begins to RAISE UP on a lift--

CUT TO:

EXT. PINE LAWNS MEMORIAL PARK - DAY

Rett's truck pulls into the parking lot. There's only one other car there-- an '88 WHITE TERCEL HATCHBACK.

Rett walks over to the Tercel, stares at it, brow furrowed. Something about that car. He checks the license plate.

RETT

Seen you before, haven't I?

He stares at the car. Whatever it is, it's not clicking.

EXT. PINE LAWNS MEMORIAL PARK - CONTINUOUS

Rett trudges up a a steep path, lined on both sides by HEADSTONES laid flush into the grass, like place mats.

His eyes wander across the hill, about a hundred yards away, where a tall GIRL is descending in the opposite direction.

Wrapped in a black overcoat, her hair a WHITE-BLONDE shock.

Rett squints at her. Something familiar, strange. He WAVES.

The girl FREEZES. Swaying in the wind. Then she continues down the hill, much more rapidly. Rett watches, head cocked, as she hurries to the PARKING LOT.

Rett continues on up the hill, crouches down beside Billy's HEADSTONE, and frowns.

Because there's a small bouquet of WHITE FLOWERS sitting there. So fresh and perfectly white, they've clearly only been sitting there a short while.

He picks up the flowers. On the wrapping, it says: *McCardle Bros. Florist, Cambria.*

Rett peers back down the hill toward the PARKING LOT--

The little white HATCHBACK zips out of the entrance, and DISAPPEARS into the woods beyond.

Rett stares, befuddled, then turns back to Billy's stone, lays the palm of his hand flat on the granite.

RETT

Hey, Sport. (beat) I like it when it's just you and me. (beat) Hey, did someone come and see you?

Rett reclines on the grass, keeping his palm on the stone.

RETT

You don't have to tell me if you
don't wanna. I know you enjoy your
privacy, little fucker.

Rett's cell chirps in his pocket. He fishes it out, checks
the number, flips it open.

RETT

What's up, Moy.

MOY'S VOICE

Fuckin Civic. You gotta come see.

INT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - LATER

Rett and Moy are staring up into the undercarriage of the
lifted Civic.

RETT

The hell is that thing.

MOY

Dunno, man.

RETT

Just get it out.

INT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - MINUTES LATER

Rett and Moy stand at a work bench, staring at the
RECTANGULAR STEEL BOX sitting upon it. About 3 feet long, 1
foot wide, and 8 inches thick.

RETT

How long you think it's been stuck
up in there?

MOY

Dunno. Totally flush, hidden by
the rear axle. It'd be easy to
miss. (beat) Maybe that's the
point, yo.

RETT

Whadaya mean.

MOY
I mean I've seen shit like this
before. (beat) Transpo.

Moy unclasps a HINGE at one end of the box, swings open a PANEL. Reaches in, fishes around inside, pulls out his hand, revealing some dirty, white SMUDGES on his fingers.

RETT
The fuck is transpo.

MOY
Someone tricked the Civic to move
shit around.

Rett goes a little pale. Doesn't like this news.

RETT
Move shit around.

Moy touches his tongue to the white on his finger. Grimaces, spits on the ground, wipes his hand on his pants.

MOY
It's glass. Tina. The badness.

Rett stares at Moy like he's speaking Greek.

MOY
Crystal.

Rett's troubled eyes shift to the BOX.

RETT
When I got that car, there was no
box. I would've seen this goddamn
box, Moy. I would've seen it.

MOY
No doubt, boss.

Rett paces around, drags his fingers through his hair.

RETT
This is all wrong. There's no way
in hell Billy was doing that.

MOY
What about that bitch, yo? What's
her name?

BEAT.

RETT

Carla.

MOY

Well maybe fuckin Carla knows about the box. (beat) Bitches always know somethin, man.

Rett continues to pace. He stops. Remembers something.

RETT

Shit. (beat) You still got a cousin at the DMV?

MOY

Marisol. She my second cousin.

Rett grabs a piece of paper, starts writing something down.

RETT

See if you can run something for me. White Tercel hatchback. I think it's an '88. These are the tags here.

He hands the paper to a Moy, who stares at it, confounded.

MOY

What's this shit?

Rett walks off.

RETT

Bitch who might know something.

EXT. 101 FREEWAY - EVENING

Rett's truck cruises Southbound, towing the Civic behind.

EXT. PHEASANT RUN - CARLA'S HOME - EVENING

In Carla's driveway, Rett unhitches the Civic, while Carla watches nearby, in her pink scrubs, arms crossed.

CARLA

So it's all good now?

Rett finishes up, wipes his hands on his jeans.

RETT

Yes indeed. Good to go.

CARLA
I knew it was shady. Knew
something would go wrong.

RETT
Where'd you find this heap anyway?

BEAT.

CARLA
Used car lot. I was in a hurry.
(beat) Scumbag kinda place.
Fuckin stupid.

Rett nods, absorbing this.

RETT
Gotta be careful. Places like
that.

CARLA
You gotta let me pay you something.

Rett smiles, shakes his head.

RETT
Might as well stop saying that,
because it ain't gonna happen.

CARLA
Okay. Jeez. (beat) Can I at
least give you a cup of coffee?

Rett looks at her, shrugs.

RETT
I could live with that.

INT. CARLA'S DOUBLE-WIDE - LATER

Rett and Carla sit at a small dinette table, with mugs.

CARLA
It tastes like shit. I'm sorry.

Rett sips politely, smiles.

RETT
I can assure you, I've had far
worse.

CARLA

I don't even like coffee. Makes me pee too much. (beat) I got no idea why I just told you that.

RETT

It's fine.

CARLA

I'm a little crazy. In case you didn't notice.

RETT

Seem pretty normal to me.

She smiles, a little bit shy, turns away. Then she looks back at him. He looks at her, his gaze steady.

Rett notices ALFONSO standing in the hallway, staring at him. He gives the boy a salute.

Carla turns, beams at her son.

CARLA

Hey, baby. Wanna come sit down?

Alfonso slowly shakes his head.

CARLA

You remember Rett. He fixed the car. Say thank you.

Alfonso narrows his eyes, ever so slightly.

RETT

He doesn't have to thank me.

CARLA

Alfonso, don't be rude.

The boy turns around and disappears down the hall. Carla closes her eyes, sighs.

CARLA

Jesus Christ.

RETT

It's fine. I wouldn't like a strange man in my house either.

CARLA

No. It's not right. He's not...

Carla suddenly looks pretty miserable. Close to tears.

RETT

Hey. I'm sorry. I'm causing a problem here.

Carla shakes her head, gathers herself.

CARLA

Believe me. It's not you. He's been. (beat) It's been going on awhile now. He used to be such a happy kid. And now. I dunno.

RETT

Well it's never easy. Boy his age.

CARLA

You got kids?

Rett frowns, grits his teeth. Caught off guard.

RETT

No. (beat) I mean. Yes I did. I had a son. (beat) He died. Almost a year ago.

Carla looks stricken.

CARLA

Oh my God. I'm so sorry, Rett. (beat) Jesus, I'm an asshole.

RETT

You're not an asshole.

Carla starts to cry.

CARLA

Oh wow. I can't. I couldn't even.

RETT

It's okay.

CARLA

What happened?

Rett breathes through his nose. Looks out the window. Finally looks back at her.

RETT

Car accident.

Carla wipes away her tears, shakes her head.

CARLA

I would just. I would die. I would just wanna die.

RETT

Yep. That's about right.

She puts her hand on top of his. She takes a trembling sip of coffee, grimaces.

CARLA

Jesus Christ this tastes like shit.

RETT

Yeah. It's fucking brutal. I was just being nice before.

Carla can't help it, she laughs through her tears.

CARLA

God. See I told you I was crazy.

RETT

I don't mind a little crazy.

Carla laughs again, tries to pull herself together.

CARLA

Let me cook dinner for you tomorrow night. I make an amazing taco casserole. I promise it'll taste better than the coffee.

Rett looks at her. This lovely, strange creature.

RETT

That sounds just fine.

INT/EXT - RETT'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Rett drives home on the 101. He clenches his jaw, suddenly overcome. He tries to shake it off, but it won't shake.

He pulls over into the breakdown lane, screeches to a halt.

And he bursts into tears. Messy, shaking, ugly sobs.

But it only lasts a few seconds. He beats his fists against the steering wheel, willing himself to pull it together.

RETT
Easy. Easy now. (beat) Fuck.

He wipes away the tears and the snot.

RETT
*What the fuck, Rett. Where'd that
 come from. What.*

And pulls back onto the freeway.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

Rett lies in bed, staring at the ceiling, exhausted. The PHONE rings, and he answers, voice full of gravel.

RETT
 Hello.

MOY'S VOICE
Yo. Talked to Marisol.

RETT
 (bleary)
 What?

MOY'S VOICE
Fuckin Tercel. You okay, Boss?

INT/EXT - RETT'S TRUCK - - DAY

The truck winds Westward along Route 46, through rolling white-green hills and canopies of trees.

MOY'S VOICE
Got an address over in Cambria.

INT/EXT - CAMBRIA - VARIOUS - DAY

Rett cruises through downtown Cambria, past upscale shops and restaurants, coffee houses, expensive hillside homes.

MOY'S VOICE
Guess you rollin in late again.

RETT'S VOICE
You're a good man, chief.

Now through the outskirts of town, small row houses, modest apartments, a working-class neighborhood.

MOY'S VOICE

Yeah whatever. Maybe one of these days you tell me what the fuck.

Rett pulls onto a cracked and weedy side road, kicks up a cloud of dust and disappears into it.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

A tall, narrow, paint-peeling old Victorian that has seen better days, sliced up into several small apartments.

A side door opens, and THE GIRL emerges, lanky, cropped white-blond hair, dark makeup encircling her haunted eyes.

This is JESS KOONS, looking well beyond her 18 years.

She gives a little GASP when she sees RETT leaning up against her white Tercel hatchback. Tries to recover, plays it cool.

JESS

Can I help you?

Rett scrutinizes her, head cocked.

RETT

Lemme guess. You don't have the faintest idea who I am.

JESS

Should I?

RETT

So it's gonna go that way.

Jess fidgets, her eyes dart. She's not a great liar.

JESS

Gonna be late for work.

RETT

Yes. That's true. You are.

Jess lowers her hand into her purse. Her voice edges.

JESS

I have pepper spray in here. And maybe I'll scream.

Rett nods, shrugs, unmoved.

JESS
I could call the cops.

RETT
You sure could. Wanna use mine?

He pulls his cell out of his pocket, holds it out to her. She stares, eyes flickering.

JESS
What do you want.

RETT
Just wanna talk to you.

Jess clutches her purse, looks back at the house.

JESS
I really don't know anything.

RETT
You don't know anything about *what*,
Jessica? Jessica Koons?

She starts to breathe heavily. Close to freaking out.

JESS
I swear to God I'm gonna start
screaming right now.

RETT
Let me make this easy for you,
Jessica. Talk to me, and nobody
has to know anything. I'll go away
it'll be like we never saw each
other. You can go right on hiding.

Jess stares at him, trembling.

RETT
That doesn't sound so bad, does it?

She wraps her arms around herself, her eyes get wet.

JESS
It's Jess. (beat) God.

EXT. OVERLOOK - CONTINUOUS

Rett and Jess sit at a rotting picnic table in a clearing, overlooking the surrounding mountains and the town far below.

Jess chain-smokes, fidgets, uncomfortable.

JESS

At first I only did it a couple times a month. After I got my drivers license? I was a greenie. That's how it works. You get more runs when the Ropes move on. The Older kids. Because when you turn 18, they don't want you anymore. They only want minors.

RETT

You still haven't told me who "they" are.

Jess stands up, mashes out her smoke, lights another.

JESS

You never know who they are. You only know the kid ahead of you. That's your Rope. Later on, you become the Rope. That's how the rules get passed down. From kid to kid. We never knew who ended up with the stuff, where the money came from. All we did was pony.

Rett nods, stares at the table.

RETT

So you roped Billy. Taught him to be a pony, too.

Jess shakes her head furiously.

JESS

No, no. Wasn't like that. He found me. I blew him off a bunch of times. But he kept asking. He was real... (beat) Persistent.

Rett gazes off at the hills. Not easy hearing this.

RETT

So you put the box under his car.

JESS

We don't trick the rides ourselves. They do that somewhere else. At the Farm I guess.

RETT
Where's the Farm.

Jess slides into the picnic table again, slumps.

JESS
Nobody ever sees the Farm. We just wait in the spot, like we're supposed to. They come and take the ride away, and when they bring it back, it's loaded for transpo.

Rett stands up, stretches, wanders to the edge of the vista.

RETT
Where do you bring the load.

JESS
It's always motels. At both ends. Down there, it's usually somewhere north of L.A. Thousand Oaks, Pacoima, Valencia, like that.

RETT
You must mark the cars somehow. So they know which ones to pick up.

Jess looks at him, her expression quizzical.

JESS
Why are you asking me this shit?
(beat) What are you gonna do?

Rett turns to her, considers the question, doesn't answer.

JESS
(panicked)
All that stuff I told you. I'm not. I'm never supposed to tell anybody. They can't know where I am. If they know where I am then--

RETT
Is that why you ran away? Because you were scared?

JESS
I didn't wanna pony anymore. And they weren't gonna let me stop.

Rett moves closer to her.

RETT
Is that why they killed Billy?
Because he wanted to stop?

JESS
I don't know. (beat) He must've
done something.

Jess starts to cry, softly, helplessly.

JESS
Oh God. You gotta promise you
won't tell them where I am.

Rett gets very close to her, speaks low.

RETT
You won't need to hide anymore.
That's a promise.

She looks at him, searches his eyes.

RETT
Tell me for Billy. (beat) I've
seen your flowers, Jess.

Jess weeps miserably, holding herself tightly.

JESS
I miss him. (beat) I never meant.
For any of this to happen.

Rett nods. Puts his hand on hers.

INT/EXT - RETT'S TRUCK - ROUTE 1 - AFTERNOON

As Rett cruises back home through the rolling slopes, his eyes glint with a new determination and focus.

JESS' VOICE (O.S.)
*It's a sticker, on the rear bumper.
The left side. Three little stars.*

Rett steps on the gas, picks up speed.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - EVENING

Rett stands shirtless in front of the mirror, staring at his scraggly-bearded reflection.

He digs around through the medicine cabinet, and finds something he hasn't used in quite some time. A RAZOR.

EXT. CARLA'S PLACE - NIGHT

Carla opens the door to find Rett on her porch, holding a bottle of wine, smiling sheepishly. He's now clean-shaven, with a few nicks and dings scattered across his face.

She nods in appreciation.

CARLA

Wow. You clean up pretty good.

He admires her fitted jeans and flattering scoop-necked top, her hair falling past her shoulders.

RETT

You look real nice, too.

They both seem slightly embarrassed. Like maybe they tried a bit too hard, and aren't sure why.

CUT TO:

CARLA'S PLACE - DINETTE - LATER

Carla, Rett, and a sullen-looking Alfonso are finishing up their plates of casserole.

RETT

It was my Pop's garage, and my Grandpa before him. Started workin there right after I shipped back from Kuwait.

CARLA

I wish I knew about cars. I look under the hood and it's like I'm retarded or something.

RETT

Yeah, well. I wish I knew how to sew people back together.

CARLA

It's not that romantic, really. Just sticking folks with needles, cleaning up a lot of mess.

RETT

Still. I bet you're good at it.

They smiles at each other. Alfonso stares at Rett, wipes his mouth with a napkin. Actually decides to speak.

And when he does, its the thin, somewhat strained tone of a voice rarely used.

ALFONSO

Did you ever kill anybody?

Carla looks at him, taken aback.

CARLA

Alfonso.

But the boy keeps staring at Rett, waiting for an answer.

RETT

You mean, while I was in the Service?

CARLA

(to Alfonso)

Why would you ask something like that? That's not right.

RETT

No, it's okay. It's a fair question.

CARLA

It is not a fair question.

Rett looks at Alfonso openly.

RETT

I saw some scary stuff, Alfonso. Seen people hurt real bad. Sometimes they died. (beat) But the answer to your question is no. I never killed anybody.

Alfonso nods, as if satisfied. Drinks his soda. Carla sighs in exasperation, shakes her head.

CARLA

He sure can pick his moments.

Rett waves it off, keeps looking at Alfonso.

RETT

Anytime you wanna ask me something,
you just go right on ahead. Okay?

Alfonso nods. Even manages a hint of a smile.

RETT

We got a deal then. Good.

Carla watches the two guys interact. It's been awhile since she saw her boy smile. She looks happy about it.

EXT. CARLA'S DRIVEWAY - LATER

Carla and Rett stand by his truck, in the dark.

RETT

No, I liked it. It was nice.

They look at each other. Both unsure, but beguiled.

CARLA

You must've been real young. When
you became a Daddy.

RETT

Yep. Barely nineteen.

CARLA

I was eighteen.

RETT

Babies making babies.

She nods, smiles sadly.

CARLA

Gotta give Fonso a little time. He
already likes you. I can tell.
It's just, he has...troubles
sometimes. (beat) His father.
(beat) He's not a good man. We
don't talk anymore.

Rett nods, smiles earnestly.

RETT

I like Alfonso, too.

CARLA

He's a good fucking kid. I just wish I knew what went on inside his little head. Drives me crazy.

RETT

I know exactly what you mean.

She surprises him with a kiss on the lips, which lingers for just a second or two, before she pulls away, and trots back to the house. Rett stares after her, wide-eyed.

She turns back, looks at him with a sly, guilty smile.

CARLA

Sorry.
(points at herself)
Crazy.

She disappears into the house. Rett stands there.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rett stands outside of BILLY'S DOOR, holding a small KEY. He reaches for the PADLOCK, unlocks it, pops open the hinge.

He takes a deep breath, opens the door.

He walks inside. Flips on the light. Breathes in the stale air. He walks to the desk. Starts going through the drawers. Carefully at first.

But pretty soon he's RANSACKING the room. Pulling books off their shelves. Flipping the mattress.

He moves to the CLOSET. Flings aside clothes. Kneels on the floor and digs through the shoes.

He goes further into the closet, feels around, pulls up a small RUG and finds several LOOSE FLOORBOARDS.

Sweating, he PRIES the boards upwards, revealing a HOLE underneath, containing THREE CIGAR BOXES, all in a row.

He pauses, breathing hard, stares at the boxes. He slowly reaches in, takes one out, opens it.

Inside, tight, rubber-banded BUNDLES OF CASH. All of them TWENTIES and FIFTIES. He stares at the cash, agape.

RETT

Jesus Christ.

He reaches in and opens the other boxes. All of them literally STUFFED with cash. *Thousands* of dollars.

RETT
(hoarse)
What were you doing, Sport.

INT/EXT - RETT'S TRUCK - EAST PASO HIGH - DAY

Rett rolls very slowly through the STUDENT PARKING LOT of East Paso High School.

He's checking the rear bumpers of every single car in the packed lot. It's slow going. There are hundreds of cars.

Suddenly, he STOPS. Leans out the window, eyes fixed on a RED JETTA. On the left side of the rear bumper-- a small, round STICKER, with THREE BLACK STARS, all in a row.

Rett throws the truck into park, grabs a FLASHLIGHT.

He lowers himself to the pavement between the Jetta and a neighboring car, and SCOTCHES himself under.

SHINES the flashlight up into the UNDERCARRIAGE of the Jetta:

POV: a familiar-looking RECTANGULAR STEEL BOX.

RETT
Gotcha.

Rett flicks off the flashlight, shimmies out from under--

VOICE (O.S.)
Help you with something, sir?

Still on the ground, Rett looks up to see a thickly-built, dull-eyed 20-something SCHOOL SECURITY GUARD staring at him.

Rett hops to his feet, grins amiably.

RETT
No, no, fine. Just dropped something.

Rett holds up the flashlight, grins cheerfully.

RETT
Found it.

The Guard gives him a funny look.

GUARD

This is a private student lot, sir.
For the high school?

Rett slowly makes his way over to the truck.

RETT

Yes, and thank you. You're doing a
bang-up job here. Keeping the
young folks safe, and such.

The Guard frowns, unsure if Rett's taking the piss, or not.

GUARD

Um.

EXT. PASO ROBLES SIDE STREET - AFTERNOON

Rett sits in his truck, parked at the side of the road, a few
hundred yards away from the High School driveway.

School has let out, and cars are now POURING out of the lot.

His cell phone rings, he checks the call, opens it.

RETT

What's up, Moy.

MOY'S VOICE

That dude Ruttledge called again.

He's trying to clock all the cars that emerge up ahead.

RETT

Okay. (beat) Anything else?

MOY'S VOICE

*You're not gonna sell to that
fuckin asshole are you?*

And that's when he sees the RED JETTA zipping out of the lot
and disappearing in the opposite direction.

RETT

Gotta call you back, *cabron*.

Rett snaps the phone shut, tosses it on the seat, TAKES OFF
up the street after the Jetta.

EXT. RED ROOF INN - DAY

The red Jetta pulls into the parking lot of a rundown Red Roof Inn right off the freeway, slides into a spot.

Rett's truck cruises past the entrance, and heads into the adjacent TACO BELL parking lot.

INT. RETT'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Rett WATCHES the Jetta in the adjacent lot.

A tall, lanky YOUNG MAN, 17-ish, wearing a black skullcap, emerges from the Jetta. His eyes dart around, sketchy.

He shoves a set of KEYS on the right rear TIRE. He shoulders a backpack, trots over to the motel, climbs a set of stairs, and disappears into ROOM 207.

Suddenly, in Rett's MIND'S EYE, he SEES THE FOLLOWING:

--The YELLOW CIVIC in the parking lot. BILLY emerging from the Civic, wearing a backpack, putting the KEYS on the TIRE.

--Then BILLY jogs toward the motel, heads up the stairs, opens a door, and disappears inside, and the DOOR SLAMS SHUT--

EXT. RED ROOF INN - MINUTES LATER

A BLACK EL CAMINO with a jacked-up suspension and mag wheels rumbles into the Red Roof lot.

Rett slides lower into his seat.

The Camino cruises to the end of the lot, stops behind the Jetta. The passenger door opens, and a tall, sinewy DUDE with a blond Mohawk emerges. Tight jeans and a stained thermal top, black shit-kicker boots. Call him MILK.

Casual as can be, Milk grabs the keys off the Jetta's wheel, climbs in behind the wheel, and exits the lot, followed closely by the black Camino.

INT/EXT - RETT'S TRUCK - VARIOUS - DAY

The Jetta and the Camino cruise eastward along Route 46. Several hundred yards behind, Rett's truck pursues.

The populated city area soon gives way to rural wilderness. The winter sun blasts a cold, blinding glare.

They pass by some ramshackle homesteads, small farms, rusted cars up on blocks, trailers, skinny dogs.

This part of California is hard country, both in geography and attitude. This ain't L.A. It's more like TEXAS.

The Jetta/Camino caravan pulls off the main road onto a winding, rutted two-lane blacktop.

INT. RETT'S TRUCK - A BIT LATER

Rett cruises along the winding, desolate road, and slows down when he sees the Jetta/Camino caravan just up ahead, pulling off the two-lane onto a DIRT ROAD that crosses a CATTLE GUARD before butting up against a large IRON GATE.

Rett pulls his cap low, and DRIVES PAST the dirt road, catching a quick glimpse of MILK UNLOCKING the GATE--

He keeps right on going, and checks his REAR-VIEW, where he sees the Camino and the Jetta passing through the GATE.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - AFTERNOON

Rett is crouched, hidden in the brush, on a small rise overlooking the spread of hills.

He peers through his BINOCULARS at a dried-up RANCH in the near distance. A couple of TRAILERS, several large corrugated-metal STRUCTURES, a tall, rotting WATER TOWER.

Welcome to THE FARM.

Rett spies several tricked-out yet dusty VEHICLES, including the black El Camino.

Every few seconds, a flurry of distant DOG BARKS.

There's some MOVEMENT down there, and Rett focuses in on the red JETTA as it slowly rolls into a giant OPENING in one of the corrugated-metal STRUCTURES.

Once the Jetta is inside, a huge metal DOOR slides shut.

Rett's CELL PHONE rings, he sets down the Binocs, digs the phone out of his pocket.

RETT
Gotta get back to ya, Moy.

CARLA'S VOICE (O.S.)
What? It's Carla. What's a moy?

Rett brightens when he hears her voice.

RETT
Oh, hey. Thought you were my mechanic.

CARLA'S VOICE (O.S.)
Sorry to be calling like. I was hoping. (beat) It's about Fonso.

EXT. RETT'S TRUCK - TACO BELL PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

Rett sits watching the Red Roof Inn, sipping on a big soda.

He slides low into his seat when the JETTA cruises into the Red Roof lot, followed by the black EL CAMINO.

The LOADED JETTA slides into its former spot, a scowling MILK hops out, lays the keys on the tire, climbs into the Camino.

The Camino HONKS THREE TIMES, then cruises out of the lot.

Rett's eyes shift up to ROOM 207 in the motel.

Sure enough, a few seconds later, the tall BOY with the black skullcap emerges from Room 207.

The boy's eyes dart around the lot as he makes his way down to the Jetta. He feels for the keys, GRABS THEM.

QUICK FLASH:

Rett's MIND'S EYE.

--BILLY trots over to his CIVIC, finds the KEYS ON THE TIRE, and JUMPS IN--

Back to REALITY. Rett grits his teeth.

RETT
Alright, Pony boy, let's go.

The loaded Jetta starts to pull out of the lot.

Rett starts up his truck.

VOICE (O.S.)
Look who found himself a razor.

Rett's head jerks to the right, and he sees JORGENSEN standing in the passenger window, head cocked, smirking.

RETT
 Jesus. Sneak up on a guy.

Jorgensen walks closer, leans into the window.

JORGENSEN
 You got a minute, handsome?

Rett's eyes dart to the Jetta, now CRUISING UP THE STREET.

JORGENSEN
 Promise it'll only take a minute.

RETT
 How bout we do this later.

JORGENSEN
 How bout you turn off the fuckin ignition, Cochise.

Rett checks for the Jetta again. It's GONE. He closes his eyes, sighs, turns off the engine.

RETT
Fuck.

JORGENSEN
 There's a good boy. (beat) So, Everett, mind telling me what you were doing loitering around East Paso High earlier today?

Rett smiles at him, eyes twinkling.

RETT
 Oh that? Just a little job interview. Thinkin of becoming a history teacher.

JORGENSEN
 Really. Wow. That's impressive.

RETT
 Thank you.

Jorgensen leans in closer, his lip curls as he grins.

JORGENSEN

I would strongly suggest staying
off my bad side, Jameson.

Rett shrugs, innocent as can be.

RETT

Just minding my own business here.
You're the one gettin all *flirty*.

Jorgensen slowly nods, eyes steely.

JORGENSEN

So goddamn clever. But the thing
is, I *know* you're into something.
Because I see through you like a
fuckin *candy wrapper*, asshole.

RETT

Congratulations. Now, if you have
no intention of arresting me for
something, I'm gonna split.

Rett turns on the ignition. Jorgensen, quietly seething,
backs away from the window, taps his own forehead.

JORGENSEN

Be seeing you soon, pal.

INT. RETT'S TRUCK - MINUTES LATER

Rett tries to maneuver through the dense traffic, searching
for any sign of the Jetta.

But it's clearly a lost cause. The Jetta is long gone.

Rett pounds the wheel in frustration.

RETT

SHITBAG.

EXT. CARLA'S PLACE - PORCH - EVENING

Alfonso opens the front door to find Rett standing there,
holding a bag of Koo Koo Roo.

RETT

So your mom's workin a double
tonight, huh. You hungry?

Alfonso looks at him, eventually nods.

RETT

I could come inside if you want.
Help you eat all this food. (beat)
Or, I could just put it down here.
And slowly back away.

Rett puts the bag on the doormat, and creeps slowly backward, with an exaggerated, bug-eyed expression.

RETT

I'm still backing away here.

Alfonso can't help smiling.

INT. CARLA'S PLACE - DINETTE - NIGHT

The detritus of dinner is scattered about the table.

RETT

I think I ate too much.

They sit quietly.

ALFONSO

You like my mom, right.

Rett laughs, a bit taken aback.

RETT

Does it bug you that I like her?

Alfonso looks at him. Shakes his head.

RETT

That's good. For the record, I
think you're pretty cool, too.

Alfonso looks at the table, smiles inward.

ALFONSO

Okay.

EXT. RED ROOF INN - GLORIOUS SUNSHINE

Rett sits in his truck, spying on the YELLOW CIVIC.

BILLY comes trotting over to the car, wearing his backpack.

RETT

There's my boy.

Rett grins, tries to TOOT his horn, but NO SOUND comes out. Billy grabs the KEYS from the TIRE.

RETT

B.J.!

Billy turns toward Rett, flashes a grin, and *salutes*.

Rett tries to open his door. It won't open. He starts to panic. He tries the passenger door, but it also won't open.

RETT

Wait. Just please wait.

Billy climbs into the car, reverses out of the spot.

RETT

God damnit! You little fuck--

Rett THRASHES wildly in his truck, unable to escape, unable to break free, SMASHING helplessly against the WINDOWS--

RETT

JUST TELL ME--

Billy's car DISSOLVES into passing traffic, as Rett SCREAMS--

RETT

OH GOD TELL ME WHERE YOU'RE GOING--

SMASH TO:

INT. CARLA'S PLACE - LIVING ROOM - LATE

Rett SNAPS AWAKE on Carla's couch, with the TV on.

And then he sees a sweaty, pale-faced ALFONSO standing at the foot of the couch, staring at him with haunted eyes.

Rett sits up, rubbing his face vigorously.

RETT

Whoa. Hey. (beat) You okay, Fonso? What time is it?

Alfonso just stands there, erect, looking freaked.

RETT

You have a bad dream?

Alfonso nods.

RETT
 They're a bitch, aren't they?
 (beat) Get on over here.

Alfonso pads over, sits on the couch beside Rett.

RETT
 Wanna tell me about it?

The boy stares at the TV, his eyes full of dread.

ALFONSO
 It's always the same. (beat) I do
 something bad. I don't wanna do it
 but I can't stop.

RETT
 What's the bad thing.

Alfonso's voice falls to a whisper.

ALFONSO
*I don't know but it's really,
 really, really bad.*

Rett reaches for Alfonso, pulls him closer on the couch.
 Puts his arm around him. At first the boy resists, but
 eventually gives in, rests against Rett's shoulder.

RETT
 Dreams don't play fair, Sport.
 They kick you when you're down.
 But they ain't nothin but smoke.

Alfonso settles himself more tightly against Rett. His eyes
 still open, glassy, scared.

INT. CARLA'S PLACE - LIVING ROOM - 5AM

Carla quietly enters through the front door. By the light of
 the flickering TV, she sees Rett and Alfonso asleep on the
 couch together, Rett's arm slung protectively over her boy.

She stands there looking at them, her tired eyes growing wet.
 Tides of conflicting emotion sweep across her face.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. PINE LAWNS MEMORIAL PARK - MORNING

Rett crouches beside Billy's stone.

RETT

I'm a little pissed off here. If you're in some kinda trouble, you gotta tell me. How else am I supposed to know? How else am I supposed to protect you, god damnit?

He brushes aside some dead leaves and wilted flowers.

RETT

Now I'm gonna have to go and do something really...stupid. (beat) Because I got no other choice.

Rett stands up, rolls his neck, squints at the morning sun.

RETT

I'll be back, Sport. You're not out of the dog house yet.

INT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - DAY

Rett enters the garage, carrying a bowling ball bag, stops beside Moy, who is crouched beside an old Yamaha motorcycle.

RETT

Cabron.

Moy grunts, surly, keeping his eyes on the bike's engine.

RETT

Leave that. Gotta talk to you.

MOY

Always talk when you wanna talk.

RETT

Moy.

Moy rolls his eyes, lets his tools clatter, stands up.

MOY

Somethin about Billy, right.

Rett looks at him, surprised.

MOY

Why you think I'm stupid? You're all fucked up. Ever since that bitch show up with the Civic.

RETT
It's not about Carla, Moy.

MOY
Did you fuck her?

RETT
What? No. Jesus.

Rett frowns, turns away. Sets the bowling bag on the table.
Moy glances at the bag.

MOY
What's in the bag.

Rett fixes Moy with an all-business stare.

RETT
What's in the bag doesn't matter.
What matters is nobody knows about
the bag, except you and me.

Moy loses his scowl, his eyes widen.

MOY
You know I'm tight.

RETT
Going on a little errand today.
Not really sure how it's gonna go.
(beat) If it goes shit side up, I
want you to take the bag. Take
your family. Start over somewhere.
Far away from here.

MOY
(grave)
The fuck you talkin about, Boss.

RETT
Ain't on parole anymore, *esse*. You
can go wherever the hell you want.

Moy shoves his hands in his pockets, juts out his chin.

MOY
I'll come with you.

RETT
Not gonna happen.

MOY
Everybody needs backup, yo.

RETT

Like your wife. And your *bambina*.
This isn't open for discussion.

Moy scowls, finally nods. Puts his hand on the bag.

MOY

Putta madre.

INT. RETT'S TRUCK - BACK ROADS - DAY

Rett cruises through the rolling, desolate terrain.

His fingers drum the wheel.

His eyes laser-focused on the road ahead.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DAY

Rett's truck is parked in the same hidden spot on a rise overlooking THE FARM.

He peers through his binoculars. No movement at all down there. Sleepy as a retirement home.

He tosses the binocs into the truck, pulls a TIRE IRON out of the bed, jams it down the back of his jeans.

He empties his pockets, removes his wristwatch, places everything carefully in the glove compartment.

He tightens his belt, fastened by a heavy, thick cowboy-style BRASS BUCKLE about 4 inches wide.

He sets off walking down the hill, toward the Farm.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Rett CLIMBS to the top of the black iron GATE, quick and agile, maneuvers himself over the top, and DROPS to the dirt road beyond. He sticks the landing, proceeds up the road.

Up ahead, the black silhouette of the WATER TOWER looms over the sunblasted, deathly quiet spread of buildings.

EXT. THE FARM - CONTINUOUS

The dirt road ends at a dusty, wide-open LOT containing all the shitty buildings.

There doesn't seem to be a soul around. Only the wind, and a few quick DOG BARKS punching through the silence.

Rett slowly approaches the closest TRAILER, knocks tentatively on the door. There's no answer.

His eyes dart around. The hairs on his neck stand up.

He reaches for the door handle, twists it, and whadaya know, it's UNLOCKED.

He pulls open the door.

From inside, a quick, SILENT FLASH of MOVEMENT--

A rust-colored PIT BULL LAUNCHES OUT OF THE TRAILER--

And SIXTY POUNDS of pure canine muscle COLLIDES with Rett, PLOWING him off the steps, into the DIRT--

Rett ROLLS quickly, yanking the TIRE IRON from his jeans, and just as the PIT LUNGES for his THROAT, he SWINGS HARD, catching the dog square in the SKULL.

The Pit YELPS, the tire iron FLIES out of Rett's hands, and the dog SKITTERS across the dirt, DAZED--

Rett, eyes BUGGED with adrenaline, leaps to his feet, as the Pit RUSHES HIM AGAIN with terrifying speed--

Rett throws his arms out and CATCHES the dog in MID-AIR, his hands CLAMPED around the dog's thick, sinewy THROAT.

The Pit's limbs FLAIL wildly, CLAWING at Rett's torso, its huge jaws SNAPPING mere INCHES from his FACE--

With a superhuman GRUNT, Rett HURLS the squirming animal through the OPEN TRAILER DOOR, and KICKS IT SHUT.

A series of hard THUMPS, as the Pit HURLS its bulk against the door, over and over, the trailer SHAKING with each blow.

Rett crouches, gasping for breath, eyes wide--

VOICE (O.S.)
Ain't that some shit.

Rett wheels around, sees a tall, rail-thin BLACK MAN, his bare arms laced with RAISED SCARS, pointing a SAWED-OFF.

This is TELLY, could be 25, could be 45, hasn't slept in a year, and that's just how he likes it.

TELLY
No doubt. Shit was *real*.

Rett raises his hands, palms out.

RETT
Don't gotta be pointing that thing
at me, friend.

TELLY
Ain't your *friend*, muhfuck.

RETT
Just wanna talk to the man in
charge around here.

TELLY
Bitch-ass trick. Why you think I
ain't the one?

Rett squints, sizing up this freak.

RETT
Because you're not.

Telly mad-dogs him, spits on the ground.

TELLY
Stand the fuck up.

Rett stands up, still showing his hands.

There's a CLANG off to his left, and Rett turns to see THREE
DUDES emerging from one of the corrugated-metal BUILDINGS.

All of them dirty, strung-out, HARD-LOOKING FUCKS. Rotten
teeth, patchy beards, cold eyes, full sleeves of ugly INK.

Rett turns back to Telly, who grins a mouthful of GOLD.

TELLY
Yeah, you scared now. Piss your
little white panties.

One of the Fucks, whom we remember as MILK, 28, steps up--
dirty jeans, shirtless, a grotesque display of sexualized
violence INKED across his chest.

MILK
You're one stupid motherfucker,
showin up here, no invitation.

Rett eyeballs the guy, taking his time.

RETT

Seen you before. You're just the
pick-up boy. Wanna see the Boss.

Milk stalks forward, his face inches away from Rett's.

MILK

Fuck you say, faggot?

Rett wrinkles his nose.

RETT

God damn. Your breath stinks like
two-week-old *baby-diaper* shit.

Milk narrows his eyes, then PUNCHES RETT HARD IN THE BALLS.

Rett GASPS, crumples to the ground, curls into a ball.

Telly and the other Fucks, BRADY (acne-scarred) and SCOTCH
(whiteblond, translucent-pale) LAUGH their fuckin ASSES off.

TELLY

Ho, shit.

Milk hawks up a loog, DROOLS it down onto Rett's HEAD.

MILK

How's that feel, cunt?

Milk lifts his leg and proceeds to RUB the sticky phlegm into
Rett's hair with the bottom of his BOOT--

Which makes it all-too-easy for Rett to SWEEP MILK'S OTHER
LEG out from UNDER HIM--

As Milk CRUMPLES to the ground, Rett's back on his feet, and
he KICKS Milk straight in the FACE, while simultaneously
UNHOOKING his belt, SLIPPING it out through the loops--

BRADY RUSHES Rett, throwing HAYMAKER PUNCHES, and Rett draws
back an SWINGS THE BELT--

The thick, heavy BRASS BUCKLE WHISTLES through the air and
CLOCKS BRADY in the JAW, drawing BLOOD--

Rett gets in a few more good hard LICKS with the belt before
he's OVERWHELMED by a bleeding Milk, Scotch and Brady, who
TOPPLE him in a FLURRY of KICKS and PUNCHES--

TELLY

HOLD that muhfuck--

They PIN Rett to the ground, KNEELING on his ARMS and LEGS.

Telly stands over a dazed Rett, JAMMING the SAWED-OFF BARRELS against Rett's THROAT.

TELLY

Wanna get feisty? Wanna fuck,
nigga? Gonna squeeze this shit and
you be all *done*, boy--

Telly's eyes are BUGGED, veins POPPING, and he's about to SQUEEZE THAT SHIT--

VOICE (O.S.)

Ease off that now, sweetness.

Telly pulls the gauge away from Rett's throat, steps back.

Rett, bloody, battered, cranes his neck to see a thickly-built MAN approaching. 40-ish, greasy, thinning orange hair, sunglasses, long orange BEARD chopped square at the bottom.

He pushes his shades up onto his sun-scorched scalp, revealing the tiny, pinned DOTS of his anthracite-black eyes.

There's no doubt who's in charge around here. It's LANDER.

LANDER

Stand him up.

Brady and Scotch drag Rett to his feet. He stands propped between them, sagging, bleeding, dazed.

Lander walks over. Studies Rett. Reaches out, strokes Rett's face, with a tenderness both sweet and alarming.

LANDER

Got yourself all banged up, huh?
Real sorry about that.

Rett coughs, sniffles, spits some blood to the side.

RETT

You're the boss. Good.

LANDER

That's right, sugar. I'm Lander.
Were you lookin for me?

Rett nods.

LANDER

There's ways to reach me, you know. Proper channels and such. Flaming hoops. Bells and whistles. That's what you gotta do, you wanna see my face. (beat) I just can't imagine how or why you thought this was gonna work out for you.

TELLY

Because he the stupidest faggot muhfucker ever walked the Earth.

Lander responds, without looking away from Rett's eyes.

LANDER

Telly, do me a favor, shut your fat greasy nigger lips? This cowboy and me, we're sharing a moment.

Telly looks away, shamed, lip curled.

LANDER

You obviously ain't a cop. Cops don't show this sorta bad judgement. And that's a shame. Because nobody knows you're here, do they. All by your lonesome.

Rett looks Lander in the eyes, tries his best to sound calm.

RETT

Just wanna talk to you.

LANDER

About what, sweetheart?

RETT

Ponies.

Lander giggles, creepily, studies Rett some more.

LANDER

Did you just say *ponies*? You mean those cute little baby horsies?

RETT

Talkin about the high school kids who run your shit south.

Lander's smile falters just a bit. He leans close.

LANDER

Alright. I get it. You think you know some things about some things.
(beat) It's gonna be a real special day for you, cowpoke.

Lander pulls out a dirty, stinking black HOOD.

Rett starts to STRUGGLE, so Telly RAMS him in the gut with the stock of his sawed-off bitch.

Rett GASPS, crumples, as the HOOD SLIDES OVER HIS HEAD--

And EVERYTHING GOES BLACK.

And we HOLD THE BLACK.

SOUNDS of STRUGGLING. GRUNTING. FEET DRAGGING ALONG DIRT.

HOLD THE BLACK.

A DOG is BARKING LIKE CRAZY. TWO dogs. Maybe THREE.

The CLANG of a METAL DOOR SLAMMING.

The SOUND of DUCT TAPE-- UNROLLING and RIPPING.

The HOOD is YANKED OFF and LIGHT FLOODS BACK, BLINDING--

Rett BLINKS away the glare, eyes DARTING to his SURROUNDINGS--

He's inside one of the CORRUGATED METAL STRUCTURES.

STRIPPED to his UNDERWEAR.

DUCT-TAPED to a metal folding chair.

Racks of high-powered HALOGENS in the RAFTERS make the room BRIGHT as the peak of summertime.

And all of his friends are there-- LANDER, TELLY, BRADY, SCOTCH, and a black-and-blue MILK.

Oh yeah, and SIX MUZZLED PIT BITCHES, straining and grunting against their wall-bolted CHAINS.

Rett's glassy eyes roam to the huge WORKSTATION that occupies half the interior: Chemical tanks. Tubes. Beakers. Burners. Plastic vats. Gallons of solvent.

All the necessary accoutrements of a large-scale METH LAB.

Lander crouches in front of him, smiles wide.

LANDER

Well hey now, sunshine! Welcome to my kitchen. This is a real special privilege for you. Only folks ever seen my kitchen are my cousins. And my pretty girls over there.

Rett's eyes flash to the densely-muscled BITCHES, all SIX standing poised, alert, staring right back at him.

LANDER

Clearly you've done some homework. Or you never woulda found us, all the way out here. Middle of goddamn nowhere. So if you don't mind, you're gonna tell me exactly what you think you know.

Rett's eyes flick around to the rest of the FUCKS, who watch, wearing jittery, tweaked-out smiles.

Lander pulls out a long, thin, serrated HUNTING KNIFE.

RETT

Wait. Just wait--

LANDER

Shhhhh.

Lander gently places the TIP against Rett's solar plexus, slowly drags it across his chest, just scraping the surface of the skin, stopping at his left nipple.

LANDER

Now start talking before I apply just a *little* more pressure here, and I feed your nipple to Lacey and her sisters.

RETT

The kid waits in the motel. The vehicle gets brought here. That's when it gets retrofitted, unless it already is. After it's loaded, you drop it back at the motel. Then it's south.

Lander nods, whistles, impressed.

LANDER

So you been watching. Analyzing. Assimilating. Like a cop would. Except you're not a cop.

(MORE)

LANDER (cont'd)
 Which makes me think you're here
 for one of two reasons. One,
 you're tryin to poke me into a
 corner. You want somethin in
 exchange for keeping my kitchen in
 the dark. But you don't *seem* the
 extortin' type.

RETT
 I don't want your money.

LANDER
(as if Rett said nothing)
 Reason number two is you got some
 kinda vested interest.

Rett's eyes twitch.

LANDER
 Yeah. Think I hit on it. This
 shit's *personal*. Except I ain't
 ever seen you before. Can't
 imagine why you'd jump my fence,
 beat up my dog, then ask me to
 dance. Why you wanna dance,
 cowboy? You wanna fuck, too?

Rett stares at Lander with undisguised contempt.

RETT
 My son was one of those kids. In
 your piece-of-shit Pony Express.
 And someone killed him.

Lander nods, takes this in.

LANDER
 Well that's a real shame. Boy got
 his-self killed. (beat) Must've
 been even dumber than you.

With that, all four of the FUCKS start LAUGHING THEIR ASSES
 OFF. Like it's the funniest thing they ever heard.

Rett goes RIGID.

His EYES FLICK over each one of them as they laugh: TELLY,
 BRADY, SCOTCH, MILK. Like he's filing it away.

LANDER
 You think it was me. Oh,
 sweetheart. I almost wish it was
 me who killed your boy.

(MORE)

LANDER (cont'd)
Least we both woulda had the
satisfaction of meeting each other.
But that just ain't in the cards.
Not today. Because I got other
plans for you.

Rett's eyes FLASH as the adrenaline begins to SURGE.

RETT
Tell me who your Boss is. Tell me
where the shit goes.

LANDER
You don't give up. I respect that,
kinda tenacity. Maybe you'll last
a little longer than I thought.

Rett's lips curl into a desperate snarl.

RETT
Just tell me where it goes.

Lander turns and addresses his henchmen.

LANDER
Scotch, Milk, do me a favor, take
the girls next door. Don't forget
the plastic.

Scotch and Milk smile greasily. They walk over to the
muzzled canines, UNHOOK the chains from the wall, and lead
them out the door, into the daylight.

LANDER
You ever play Gladiator, sugar?

But before Rett can answer, the BLACK HOOD is slipped over
his head once again.

SMASH TO:

INT. METAL SHED - CONTINUOUS

The HOOD comes off, and Rett squints into the new interior--
a CORRUGATED SHED about half the size of the Lab.

He's KNEELING on the floor, which is covered in PLASTIC
SHEETING. Hands DUCT-TAPED behind his back. Telly stands
behind him, pointing the gauge at his head.

Four of the Pit Bitches are muzzled and chained to the wall.

The other TWO BITCHES-- one WHITE, one BROWN-- are being held at bay by MILK and SCOTCH, at opposite ends of the shed. BRADY stands off to the side, grinning in anticipation.

Lander walks into view, holding a LOADED HYPODERMIC NEEDLE up to the light, tapping out the air bubbles.

LANDER

We don't get cable up here. So the cousins...they've been a little starved for entertainment.

Rett struggles, tries to stand, until Telly jams the SAWED-OFF against his EAR.

LANDER

So we're gonna play us some Gladiator.

Lander walks closer with the SYRINGE.

LANDER

Rules are real simple. Lacey and Tulip, they're gonna try to make friends, give you kisses and such. And you're gonna try not to bleed to death. Sounds like fun, right?

Rett starts to hyper-ventilate. His eyes go hazy.

LANDER

Just to make things fair, I'm gonna glass you up. Gonna make you feel like Superman with a hard-on.

RETT

Don't--

But it's too late. Because Lander's already SLID THE NEEDLE INTO RETT'S NECK. Right into the CARTOID.

RETT

Ahhhh--

LANDER

Oh, sweetness. Don't fight it.

Lander DEPRESSES THE PLUNGER.

Rett GASPS, goes RIGID, his pupils shrink to PIN-PRICKS.

Brady and Telly drag him to the middle of the plastic-sheeted floor. They REMOVE the TAPE from his hands.

The SYRINGE STILL DANGLES from his NECK like a DART--

They LEAVE him there, on his hands and knees, in his underwear, his eyes like GOLF BALLS--

RETT

Oh my God. My god. MY GOD.

He takes in enormous GULPS of breath, the Crank COURSING through his body like a LOCOMOTIVE--

RETT'S POV: Everything GLOWING brightly, sounds distilled, crystalline, time seeming to SLOW DOWN--

Milk and Scotch are REMOVING the MUZZLES from their dogs--

LANDER

And it's SHOWTIME!

Milk and Scotch RELEASE THE BITCHES--

They SCRABBLE across the plastic, quick as LIGHTNING--

Rett takes in a huge, ECSTATIC BREATH--

The WHITE dog LEAPS toward him, and Rett SWINGS HIS FIST, SMASHING into the bitch's MUZZLE--

Just as the BROWN bitch CLAMPS DOWN on Rett's LEFT BICEP, teeth sinking in, and Rett DOESN'T EVEN FEEL IT--

Rett LEAPS TO HIS FEET, the bitch STILL HANGING from his left arm. He SPITS into his hand, and RAMS TWO FINGERS straight up the dog's ASSHOLE--

The dog RELEASES its jaws, drops to the floor--

Rett HOWLS like a FUCKING ANIMAL, and he SCOOPS UP the stunned WHITE dog with both hands and--

RETT

YOU.

CHUCKS IT TEN FEET, right at TELLY'S FACE--

Telly's EYES BUG OUT--

TELLY

MOTHERF--

The dog COLLIDES with TELLY, he's knocked sideways into BRADY, inadvertently PULLING THE TRIGGER--

The SHOTGUN goes BOO-YAH--

And HALF OF BRADY'S HEAD EXPLODES.

The FOUR CHAINED-UP BITCHES are GOING FUCKING NUTS--

Telly STARES at his DEAD FRIEND on the floor, confused--

Until the BROWN DOG LEAPS UP and CLAMPS onto Telly's THROAT, DRAGGING him to the ground, blood SPRAYING--

Rett HOWLS again, YANKS the SYRINGE from his neck, and RUNS STRAIGHT FOR SCOTCH, who BACKS UP, totally FREAKED--

RETT

YOU.

But Rett's not stopping, and he OVERTAKES SCOTCH, and STABS the NEEDLE into his FACE, AGAIN and AGAIN until the NEEDLE BREAKS OFF in Scotch's EYE SOCKET--

Rett actually LAUGHS OUT LOUD, as he grabs Scotch by the head and SMASHES IT INTO THE WALL. AGAIN and AGAIN.

Scotch COLLAPSES, bleeding, eyes rolled back--

Suddenly LANDER pops out and SMASHES A BASEBALL BAT across Rett's BACK, sending him SPRAWLING--

But Rett just ROLLS with it, SLIDING across the blood-smeared FLOOR PLASTIC, too cranked-up to feel a thing--

He slides right over to where the FOUR BITCHES are chained up, grunting, going crazy, and he PULLS OFF THEIR MUZZLES.

Their JAWS SNAP inches from his face, but he scoots out of the way, LEAPS to his feet and runs straight for MILK, who's suddenly pointing a 9MM PISTOL right at him--

MILK

FUCKING DIE YOU FUCK.

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM-- Milk squeezes off FOUR WILD SHOTS, and one of them CATCHES RETT in his LEFT EAR--

Rett's ear DANGLES, half-SEVERED, but he KEEPS COMING, and SWATS the pistol away--

RETT

AND YOU.

Rett HEAD-BUTTS MILK in the center of his FACE with a sickening CRUNCH--

Milk DROPS to the floor, dazed, his nose DESTROYED--

The two UNCHAINED BITCHES trot over, GROWL at Rett. He LOCKS EYES with them, leans forward, shows his OWN TEETH.

The dogs LOWER THEIR HEADS, whine, lick the BLOOD that drips from their chops.

Rett picks up the PISTOL, sticks it into the rear waistband of his underwear, and staggers slowly across the room, to where LANDER is crouched by the doorway.

RETT

And YOU.

Lander gapes up at Rett, who is covered in BLOOD-- it STREAMS down his bitten ARM, DRIPS from his half-severed EAR, LEAKS from the puncture in his NECK.

LANDER

You don't want me. I ain't the one you want. You know that.

Rett crouches down, vibrating and pulsing with sickening pleasure. *He barely looks human.*

RETT

I can feel it. My blood. I can feel it MOVING INSIDE ME.

Lander trembles, terrified. He's seen a lot of shit in his life, but he's never witnessed anything like what just occurred in this blood-soaked room.

LANDER

I ain't the one.

Rett picks up the roll of DUCT TAPE. Starts TYING LANDER'S HANDS TOGETHER. Then his FEET.

Lander, believing he's in the presence of the Devil himself, just sits there, lets it happen.

LANDER

You want Cesar. I can tell you where he is. I can help you. I can point the way.

Butt Rett's already too far gone to truly absorb what Lander is saying. He reaches for Lander, curiously, like a child, wiping BLOOD across his face.

RETT
*I can feel your fear. I can taste
 it. Like copper.*

LANDER
 It was Cesar. Please.

RETT
 (like the word means
 nothing)
Cesar...

LANDER
 I'll tell you where to find him.
 Please don't hurt me.

RETT
 I won't hurt you.

Rett stands up. Walks toward the back of the room, where the
 FOUR OTHER DOGS are chained to the wall.

LANDER
 I'll tell you everything. I'm
 sorry. It wasn't right what I did.

The dogs BOW their heads, suppliant, as Rett approaches.

LANDER
 There's money. You can have it.
 You can have it all just don't hurt
 me. I'll take you to Cesar.

One by one, Rett unhooks the Bitches from their chains.

Across the room, Lander starts to WRIGGLE MADLY. His eyes
 flooded with PANIC.

LANDER
 SAID YOU WOULDN'T. SAID YOU
 WOULDN'T HURT ME. YOU SAID.

Rett walks over to Milk's moaning, semi-conscious body, grabs
 him by the legs, and starts DRAGGING him toward the door.

RETT
 Ain't gonna hurt you. Your girls
 will make you feel better. Give
 you kisses. And such. *Sugar*.

Rett opens the door, DRAGS Milk outside, into the late
 afternoon glare, and closes the door behind him.

Lander looks up to see ALL SIX BITCHES padding toward him.

LANDER
 (mind-snapped)
 Lacey. Tulip. Ella. You're my
 girls. You're my good girls.
 PLEASE BE MY GOOD GIRLS.

The dogs pad closer, leaving behind a TRAIL of BLOODY
 PAWPRINTS across the plastic sheeting.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. THE FARM - MOMENTS LATER

MILK lies in the dirt, bleeding, moaning, while Rett binds
 his hands and feet with duct tape.

MILK
 Ohhhh. (beat) Oh.

From inside the METAL SHED behind them, there are muffled,
 terrible, HIGH-PITCHED SHRIEKS OF PAIN emanating from within.

Hearing this, Milk WEEPS pathetically, sniffing BLOOD
 through his destroyed nose.

MILK
 (miserable)
 Oh Jesus. Oh fuck.

Rett finishes with the duct tape, pats Milk sweetly on the
 forehead. He SINGS a few lines of a children's song:

RETT
*It's alright to cry...crying gets
 the sad out of you...*

Rett walks over to the larger metal Structure. Goes inside,
 finds his CLOTHES scattered on the floor, scoops them up with
 his hands, which are now SHAKING uncontrollably.

But he keeps on SINGING.

RETT
*Raindrops from your eyes...washing
 all the mad out of you...*

A CRAMP suddenly doubles him over, but he recovers, staggers
 over to the METH KITCHEN.

There's a large metal cabinet, secured by a PADLOCK.

Dazed, an automaton, Rett pulls out the PISTOL, aims it at the lock, and BLAM-BLAM, he SHOOTS it off.

He swings open the door. And stares blankly at the CONTENTS:
TWO HUNDRED BRICKS of NEWSPAPER-WRAPPED JUNK.
PILES and PILES of rubber-banded CASH.

EXT. THE FARM - MINUTES LATER

Rett emerges from the Kitchen Building, now in his street clothes, lugging TWO BULGING GARBAGE BAGS over his shoulders.

He walks over to Milk, sets down the garbage bags, and crouches next to the ugly, duct-taped Fuck, who has curled into a fetal ball, his blood leaking into the dirt.

Rett digs a piece of PAPER from his pocket, where some WORDS are scrawled. But we cannot see what is written.

RETT

Gonna go now. Taking your shit
with me. And your money.

Milk MOANS pathetically.

RETT

Don't worry. You'll get free
sooner or later. And when you do,
you can call the Boss. Not the one
in the shed, getting eaten. I mean
the Boss on the other end. Cesar.

Rett lays the paper in the dirt beside Milk. Rett WINCES,
seized by another awful CRAMP.

RETT

(gritted teeth)
You tell him. He wants what's his,
he can come on up and get it.
Everything he needs to know. Right
there on that piece of paper.
(beat) Tell me you understand.

Milk spits blood into the dirt.

MILK

(a croak)
Fuck you.

RETT
Good enough.

Rett heaves the bags over his shoulders, sets off down the dirt track, toward the road.

Starts to SHIVER, and STAGGERS, unable to catch his breath. But he keeps on walking. Doesn't look back.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - SUNSET

Rett sits behind the wheel of his truck. Shaking so hard, it's like he's having a seizure.

He looks at himself in the rear view. His eyes. Red-rimmed, chemical-blasted, feral. A *monster* he doesn't recognize.

RETT
Oh God Fuck--

He opens the door, staggers out, falls to his hands and knees, and PUKES explosively. Over and over. Heaving, GASPING, tears streaming down his bloodied face.

RETT
Oh God Billy--

SMASH TO:

EXT. CARLA'S PLACE - PORCH - NIGHT

Carla opens the door, and her eyes go WIDE--

CARLA
Holy shit--

RETT is slumped in the doorframe, ghostly-white, sweating, SHAKING, and BLEEDING through his clothes.

RETT
I'm. F-f-fucked up. C-C-Carlaaa.

Like a flipped switch, Carla goes INSTANTLY into business mode. She pulls him gently but firmly inside.

CARLA
It's okay. I got you. I got you.

ALFONSO is standing inside, looking absolutely FREAKED.

CARLA

Get my bag, baby. Get it QUICK--

Rett's bloodshot eyes land on the boy, and he tries to smile.

RETT

Fonso...hey...Sport...

Rett's eyes roll back and he CRUMPLES to the carpet.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. LONESOME ROADWAY - NIGHT

Through the coal-black DARKNESS, the tiny dots of HEADLIGHTS approach from far, far away.

They come closer, closer, until their glow FILLS THE SCREEN with LIGHT, and as they PASS BY--

The SOUND of a MAN SIGHING, deeply, with satisfaction, like the weight of the world has been LIFTED--

And then the HEADLIGHTS have PASSED, and the light FADES quickly, the blackness steadily encroaching, until everything is BLACK again, dense and impenetrable--

INT. CARLA'S PLACE - LIVING ROOM - SOME UNGODLY HOUR

Rett lies on the couch unconscious, sweating. His HEAD is BANDAGED, as well as his ARM, and a square of GAUZE covers the puncture in his NECK.

Rett's eyes slowly OPEN. He STIRS.

Carla rises from the armchair, crouches beside him.

He stares at her SHAPE. Slowly, she comes into FOCUS.

RETT

(a croak)

It's you. Carla.

Gently, carefully, she checks his bandages.

CARLA

Expecting someone else?

RETT

Look pretty.

Carla smiles ruefully, shakes her head.

CARLA

Yeah. I'm a goddamn beauty queen.

RETT

Fonso.

CARLA

He's sleeping. Finally.

RETT

Sorry. (beat) What time is it.

CARLA

Don't worry about that.

Rettt stares at her dreamily as she tends to him.

RETT

Did you. Fix me.

Carla regards him, tenderly strokes his hair.

CARLA

Cleaned you up. Pumped you full of antibiotics, because, you know. Better safe than sorry. (beat) Sewing your ear back together, that was interesting. First time for me. But I do enjoy a challenge.

He reaches for her hand. Gently engulfs her small, delicate fingers within his large, meaty paw.

RETT

Angel.

She looks into his eyes. A cloud passes over her expression.

CARLA

I'm not. You don't know.

RETT

I know what I know.

She moves closer to him.

CARLA

What happened to you? Who *did* this to you?

RETT

It was just. Just business.

CARLA

Your arm. (beat) I know what dog bites look like, Rett.

Rett closes his eyes. Shivers a bit.

CARLA

Tell me what happened.

RETT

Bad doggies.

Tears spill from Carla's eyes.

CARLA

When you came to the door. Your eyes. There was death in your eyes and I got so scared. I didn't want you to die.

He pulls her toward him. Their faces are now so close, they can taste each other's breath.

RETT

Wouldn't mind dying. Right here, Carla. Just like this.

CARLA

Don't even know you hardly at all, Rett. Why does it kill me so much when you say my name?

RETT

Because.

They kiss. Softly at first, then with more urgency.

He kisses his way down her neck. His hands find her breasts. She moans, losing herself in it. Their breath quickens.

She pulls back, her eyes swimming with desire.

CARLA

Not here.

She takes his hand, gingerly helps him off the couch.

INT. CARLA'S PLACE - BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

As light creeps into the sky outside, Carla and Rett make love. She moves gracefully astride him, careful to mind his wounds and bruises. Their eyes locked together.

It's obvious neither has felt this kind of pleasure in years and years. Perhaps even their whole lives.

She grinds down onto him, and he momentarily WINCES, half pain, half pleasure--

CARLA

Sorry--

RETT

No, it's good. It's good--

He pulls her down, kisses her. She clings to him. Their movements increase in intensity. They don't stop kissing.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. CARLA'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Rett watches Carla sleep.

He cups one of her breasts, puts his mouth over her nipple.

She stirs, opens her eyes, smiles at him. Her fingers run up his chest, tease the edges of his head bandage.

CARLA

Hi.

RETT

Howdy.

As he stares at her, his expression becomes serious.

RETT

Wanna tell you something. Just something I gotta say and I don't know how it's gonna come out.

CARLA

Okay.

BEAT.

RETT

My son Billy. He didn't die in a car accident. (beat) He was murdered.

Carla reacts, her eyes widen, glisten.

CARLA

Oh. (beat) That's...

RETT

They investigated. The cops. And nothing. They don't know how it happened. They don't know why either. They gave up.

Carla gathers the sheets around herself, stunned.

RETT

But now I know a few things the cops don't know. And I'm not gonna tell 'em, either.

CARLA

What kind of things.

Rett's eyes blaze as he speaks. Everything he's kept inside far too long.

RETT

Billy was involved in something. Bad stuff. Running garbage. With his car. I gave him a car, for his birthday. Because that's what you do. But the trouble got worse. I don't know what happened. He went to visit his mother. It was Christmas. Last year. He never got there, Carla. He never got there because someone killed him. Shot him through the heart. And then took his car. And left him in a field off the 101 freeway.

Carla is now sitting up in bed, staring at him with wide, haunted eyes, as tears fall down her cheeks.

CARLA

Why didn't you tell me before?

RETT
 Because. (beat) Because the car
 you're driving. (beat) It's
 Billy's car, Carla.

She just stares at him.

CARLA
 What?

RETT
 I didn't wanna say. Didn't wanna
 spook you. I had to know. (beat)
 Wherever you picked up that car.
 The used lot or whatever. Those
 people never knew they were selling
 a murdered boy's car.

Slowly, she rises from the bed, wraps the sheet around
 herself, stares out the window.

CARLA
 What happened to you yesterday,
 Rett? Did you meet the people
 responsible for Billy? They the
 ones that messed you up so bad?

RETT
 No. They were just scumbags.
 Animals and errand boys. I had to
 do something crazy. So I did.
 Shook that tree so hard, the Boss
 ain't gonna have a choice but to
 come on up and settle his tab.
 (beat) With me.

CARLA
 What did you do.

Rett climbs out of bed, starts pulling on his clothes.

RETT
 That ain't anything you need to
 know. (beat) We oughtta stay
 clear of each other a couple days.

CARLA
 Don't do this. I can't sew you
 back together again. Fuck that.

Rett comes up behind her, kisses her neck. She flinches.

RETT
Hey. Come on.

CARLA
Something bad's gonna happen.
Please don't do it.

He turns her around, so he can look at her face.

RETT
Carla. This is happening. Cesar's
coming and it's too late to stop
it. You gotta listen to me. This
has nothing to do with you or
Fonso. I won't let it. I'll never
let anyone hurt either of you.

She stares at him. Her eyes are filled with fear.

CARLA
Rett.

He kisses her softly.

RETT
You gotta trust me.

He kisses her again. She stands there, lets him. Doesn't
kiss him back.

He walks silently out of the room.

Carla stands there. Closes her eyes. Doesn't breathe.

INT. JAMESON & SON AUTO - DAY

A bandaged Rett is in the office with a tall, SILVER-HAIRED
MAN, 59, going over a thick set of DOCUMENTS.

With a melancholy but resigned expression, Rett signs his
name, again and again.

He looks up and sees MOY standing in the doorway, having just
arrived for the day. He holds the BOWLING BAG, jaw clenched.

RETT
Hey, Moy. This here's Jerry
Ruttledge. Jerry, this is Moy.
Best mechanic on the Central Coast.

RUTTLEDGE
Pleased to meetcha, Moy.

Moy glares at Ruttledge. Then turns back to Rett.

MOY
Fuck you, Boss.

He drops the bowling bag on the ground. Spits to the side. Then walks out without saying another word.

Ruttledge frowns, taken aback. Rett just looks terribly sad.

EXT. CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - NIGHT

Rett's truck is parked deep in the brush of the abandoned park, the HEADLIGHTS illuminating a small clearing at the base of a mottled Evergreen.

Rett is in the clearing, with a shovel, digging a 4-foot-wide HOLE in the cold, hard ground.

INT. CARLA'S PLACE - NIGHT

Carla paces around her place, wringing her hands, looking harried and overwrought.

She lights a cigarette, smokes over the sink.

CUT TO BLACK.

EXT. CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - NIGHT

The abandoned park is dark as a mine shaft. No stars, no moon to cast a light.

Only the looming shadows of the surrounding hills, and the sound of WIND through the trees.

A pair of HEADLIGHTS approach in the distance. Slowly reveal the shape of a BLACK ESCALADE bumping along the rutted TRACK that weaves through the vast, empty ACREAGE of the park.

The Escalade stops at a rotting wooden FENCE, where the track abruptly ends, and spreads into network of TRAILS that weave through the hills and dense trees.

The doors POP OPEN, and TWO DUDES emerge from the Escalade, pulling up the collars of their coats against the cold.

Both of them thickly-built LATINs, early 30s, one with a SHAVED HEAD, the other with PIERCED LIPS and EYEBROWS.

They trudge past the fence and down the rocky trail, eyeing their surroundings, which is impossible, because everything is a blanket of DARKNESS.

And then, a VOICE from the darkness.

RETT'S VOICE (O.S.)
You can stop right there, fellas.

The two dudes STOP, instinctively reach into their COATS, eyes DARTING, but the blackness is disorienting, difficult to tell where the voice came from.

RETT'S VOICE (O.S.)
Whatever you're reaching for, I'd suggest you toss that shit.

The dudes each pull out a thick, chunky GLOCK, but they don't toss them. They let them dangle, twitching, itchy.

SHAVED calls out to the darkness.

SHAVED
Why you gotta hide like a bitch?

Rett's VOICE from the darkness again, from a DIFFERENT spot.

RETT'S VOICE (O.S.)
I won't ask again.

PIERCED turns to SHAVED, whispers low.

PIERCED
Don't do it. He ain't got shit--

BLAM! BLAM! FLASHES from the DARKNESS--

TWO ROUNDS BLAST INTO THE DIRT, INCHES from their FEET.

SHAVED
FUCK! Wait. Hold up, yo.

The dudes toss their Glocks into the woods.

RETT'S VOICE (O.S.)
Thank you kindly.

THUNK. A thick roll of DUCT TAPE arcs out of the darkness and lands at their feet. The guys stare at it, jittery.

RETT'S VOICE (O.S.)
*You. With the metal in your face?
 Do me a favor and tape Cue-ball's
 hands together.*

Pierced does as he's told.

RETT'S VOICE (O.S.)
*Get him on his belly. Then you can
 go ahead and tape his ankles.*

Pierced obeys, goes to work on Shaved's ankles.

Only when Pierced is finished does Rett finally EMERGE from the DARKNESS, pointing MILK'S 9MM.

RETT
 (to Pierced)
 Now you. Get on your knees.

PIERCED
 Where's all the shit.

RETT
 It's close by. Get on your knees.

PIERCED
 I wanna see it.

RETT
 You won't see a goddamn thing until
 I see Cesar's face.

PIERCED
 The fuck you know I ain't him?

With one swift movement, Rett KICKS Pierced's legs out from under him-- Pierced CRUMPLES onto his BACK-- and in a split second Rett's got his KNEE in his CHEST, shoving the 9MM's MUZZLE into his NOSTRILS.

RETT
 Because you got no brains. Got no heart. Because if you were him, you wouldn't toss your shit like a *chico*. You'd stand your ground like a man. Stop wasting my time and tell me where the fuck he is.

PIERCED
 Okay, yo. Okay. Let's just cool this shit down...

Rett starts BINDING his HANDS and FEET with the duct tape.

PIERCED

Supposed to call. When I seen the
shit.

Rett drags Pierced over next to Shaved, flips him over onto
his stomach, and starts taping the two men TOGETHER.

SHAVED

This ain't necessary, bra.

Rett digs through Pierced's coat until he finds a CELL PHONE.

RETT

I'm guessing you got this asshole
on speed dial.

But then ANOTHER CELL PHONE starts ringing. Coming from
inside Rett's COAT.

Rett frowns, walks a distance away down the trail, jams
Pierced's phone into his pocket, pulls out his own cell.

On the DISPLAY, it says CARLA.

RETT

Carla? What's going--

Carla's VOICE is FRANTIC, PANICKED, and INSANE--

CARLA'S VOICE

*Oh my God Rett please help me, it's
Alfonso, I think he took something,
he won't wake up--*

RETT

Wait. Hold on. Slow down, what
about Fons--

CARLA'S VOICE

*He won't BREATHE. Oh my god he's
BLUE. PLEASE HELP ME RETT. Oh my
FUCKING GOD PLEASE HELP ME.*

Rett PACES, drags a shaking hand through his hair--

RETT

Shit. Fuck. Did you call 911--

CARLA'S VOICE

*Fucking CALLED THEM but they're NOT
HERE oh my GOD he won't BREATHE--*

Rett starts RUNNING up the trail.

RETT

Listen to me. It's gonna be okay.
I'll be there in five minutes. You
can help him. You know what to do.

CARLA'S VOICE

*I DON'T FUCKING KNOW WHAT TO DO.
OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD.*

Rett SPRINTS PAST the TWO BOUND MEN on the TRAIL--

SHAVED

The fuck, yo?! Where you goin?

PIERCED

Fuckin COLD out in this bitch--

But Rett doesn't even hear them, just keeps RUNNING--

INT./EXT. CARLA'S DOUBLE-WIDE - NIGHT

Rett's truck SCREECHES to a halt outside, he jumps out,
sprints up the stairs to the porch, YANKS open the DOOR--

He rushes inside, sees Carla sitting at the dinette, with a
blank, strange look on her face.

RETT

Where is he? Where's Alfonso?

Carla looks at him, her face WHITE, silently opens her mouth.

RETT

Carla. Where is he.

Carla stares at him with a hollowed-out expression.

She MOUTHS the words...*I'm Sorry*.

On instinct alone, Rett REACHES INTO HIS COAT FOR HIS PIECE--

And that's when a STUN GUN is JAMMED into his LOWER BACK--

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZT.

700,000 VOLTS SURGE THROUGH RETT'S BODY. He CRUMPLES to the
floor, DAZED, FLOPPING and SEIZING.

RETT

Fonso.

A deep, soft, BUTTERY VOICE comes from O.S.--

VOICE

Do him again.

The STUN GUN is jammed into Rett's ABDOMEN.

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZT.

Rett FLOPS and SCREAMS, spit FROTHS from his mouth.

Finally he's RELEASED, and he curls into a ball, gasping from the assault, eyes twitching.

His eyes flick to the LIVING ROOM, where a tall, elegantly-dressed, OLIVE-SKINNED MAN is standing. CESAR.

About 45 years old. Close-cropped, ink-black hair. Full beard, flecked with silver. Arm draped around the shoulder of ALFONSO, who stares at Rett with wide, terrified eyes.

CESAR

Look at your man, Carla. Pissed himself like a shorty.

Indeed, a dark STAIN spreads over the front of Rett's jeans.

CESAR

(to Rett)

Hope you don't mind my asking. But how long you been fucking my wife?

The STUN GUN SPARKS, inches from Rett's face. His eyes follow the stun gun, to the HUGE MAN holding it:

DOSA is about 300 pounds, ugly as fuck, acne-scarred face, dead-black pinprick eyes.

DOSA

He ask you a question, booka.

Rett tries to catch his breath. Notices that he's BLEEDING through his bandages, a result of the violent shocks.

RETT

(to Alfonso)

You okay, buddy?

Alfonso shakes his head NO. Cesar's expression goes dark.

CESAR

Please don't speak to my son.

Rett ignores Cesar, tries to give Alfonso a smile.

RETT
Gonna be alright. Don't be scared.

Cesar strides over and KICKS RETT IN THE GUT. And AGAIN.

CARLA
STOP IT.

THREE TIMES. FOUR TIMES. But even through the pain, Rett GRINS DEFIANTLY at Cesar, his teeth full of BLOOD.

RETT
CAN'T HURT ME YOU GREASY FUCK.

Cesar stares at Rett, can't help being a little impressed.

He crouches beside him, speaks softly.

CESAR
It's like Karen Carpenter said,
amigo. We've only just begun.

INT. SILVER SUBURBAN - NIGHT

The huge Suburban rumbles smoothly through the night.

DOSA is behind the wheel, Cesar rides shotgun, and a blank-looking ALFONSO is sandwiched between them.

In the back seat, CARLA sits beside another THUG, a baby-faced TURKISH guy named KAAAN, who keeps watch over RETT, who is BOUND in the TAILGATE.

A weeping Carla leans over the seat into the tailgate, tries to make eye contact with Rett, but he doesn't want any part of it, stares out the window.

CARLA
Rett. Look at me.

He won't look at her.

RETT
You're really some actress.

CARLA
I had to do it. Didn't have a
choice. I was afraid.

RETT
Afraid of what? *Me?*

CARLA
I had to protect. Alfonso.

RETT
Congratulations. You did a bang-up job with that shit. Now the Devil's got him.

Carla weeps, shudders, a total mess.

CARLA
You don't understand. I couldn't let you--

RETT
Just shut up. I don't care.

CARLA
I didn't. I didn't know. I didn't want you to hurt him--

RETT
What difference does it make? How stupid are you? They're gonna kill me and they're probably gonna make you watch.

Carla is crying so hard she can hardly breathe. Drool spills from her lip like she's an infant.

CARLA
You. Would've. Hurt. (beat)
Alfonso.

Rett stares at her, disturbed, nauseous.

RETT
The fuck are you saying. I love that kid. Would never hurt him. Would never.

CARLA
You don't know. You *don't know*.

The Suburban LURCHES to a stop.

KAAN leans over the seat, smiles at Rett, and WINKS.

KAAN
This your stop, jigga.

EXT. CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - NIGHT

Everyone is gathered in the clearing of the abandoned park.

PIERCED and SHAVED have been freed, and they're in the midst of DIGGING in the hard dirt with shovels, while KAAN and DOSA illuminate their progress with powerful FLASHLIGHTS.

Carla and Alfonso huddle together nearby, shivering in the cold. Alfonso looks totally BLANK, like he's left his body.

RETT lies on his side, watching the digging take place. CESAR is crouched next to him, holding a PISTOL.

CESAR

Any idea how long it takes, find a cook good as Lander? Now I gotta go back into recruit mode. (beat) But I gotta say, hermano. You can make a mess. Another life, coulda used a salty motherfucker like you.

Rett just lies there, half-lidded. Already given up. Just waiting for the end.

CESAR

Why's it always a bitch? I swear to God. Someone should do a study or something. A bitch will always fuck your game. (beat) It was a bitch got your boy killed, Rett. Did you know that?

Rett looks at him, says nothing.

CESAR

You didn't know, did you. Damn. (beat) Okay I'll fill you in. We got a few minutes. This bitch, her name was Jess. Long story short, she was stealing from me.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. PASO STREETS - LAST YEAR - EVENING

Jess is walking along an unpopulated street, carrying two bags of GROCERIES.

A WINDOWLESS VAN pulls up alongside her. The DOOR SLIDES OPEN, revealing KAAN crouched inside, GRINNING.

CESAR (O.S.)
*She stole my shit, so I stole
 something back. Her culo.*

SMASH TO:

The VAN PEELS AWAY down the street.

On the SIDEWALK, the two GROCERY BAGS are tipped over, their contents SCATTERED violently across the pavement.

RETURN TO:

EXT. CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - CONTINUOUS

Cesar continues his story while Rett listens, jaw clenched.

CESAR
 Could've just cleaned her skull
 out. Put her in a dumpster in
 Pacoima. That was my right. But I
 put the bitch to work instead.
 Busting. In the bust-house.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BUST-HOUSE - LAST YEAR - TIME UNKNOWN

A brightly-lit ROOM filled with about 10 YOUNG WOMEN, all of them TOPLESS and wearing SURGICAL MASKS.

Find JESS at a table, using a MORTAL & PESTLE to GRIND DOWN a pile of CRYSTALS. The POWDER is then SIFTED into a larger PILE, which is sectioned off and BUSTED DOWN with other powders into a less concentrated formula.

CESAR (O.S.)
*Of course, busting wasn't the only
 service she was obliged to provide.*

A large HAND lands on her shoulder. She turns, and it's KAAAN standing there, grinning. He cups one of her BREASTS.

KAAAN
 (whispers)
Come with me, little girlie.

Jess' eyes are WIDE and HELPLESS as she's led away from the table by Kaan. She searches the other GIRLS' FACES for help, but they all AVERT THEIR EYES.

Kaan leads a crying Jess through a small DOOR--

BACK TO:

CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - CONTINUOUS

Rett looks at Cesar, sickened, eyes hard.

RETT

Just a kid. Just a girl.

CESAR

You're wrong, Rett. A Girl will turn into a Bitch the second she smells your money. (beat) Anyway she must've swiped a cell. Maybe when she was sucking a dick? Either way, she got out an *S.O.S.*

Rett pales, as he realizes--

RETT

Billy.

FLASH BACK TO:

EXT. RED ROOF INN - LAST YEAR - EVENING

The LOADED CIVIC is dropped off by MILK in the parking lot of the motel.

Soon after, BILLY emerges from his room, trots over to the Civic, hops in.

CESAR (O.S.)

Yeah. Her knight in shining armor.

INT. CIVIC - LAST YEAR - FREEWAY

A tense, brave-looking BILLY drums his fingers on the steering wheel as he cruises Southbound.

EXT. MOTEL 6 - PACOIMA - LAST YEAR - LATER

Billy sits in the parking lot of the DROP-OFF MOTEL.

He gets out of the Civic. But instead of going up to his ROOM, he does something else.

He pops the TRUNK, checks to see that no one's watching, then CLIMBS INTO THE TRUNK. Folds himself up.

And PULLS THE TRUNK CLOSED over him.

EXT. STREETS - LAST YEAR - NIGHT

The CIVIC, now driven by PIERCED, zips through the night, through the dimly-lit, downtrodden grids of PACOIMA.

HOLD on the TRUNK--

BACK TO:

CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - CONTINUOUS

Rett is now listening, rapt, his eyes filled with DREAD.

CESAR

So your boy, he hitched himself a ride all the way down to my bust-house. Stayed quiet as a mouse while they removed the load. Waited til just the right time...

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. BUST-HOUSE - GARAGE - LAST YEAR - NIGHT

The CIVIC sits in the quiet, abandoned GARAGE.

The TRUNK slowly POPS OPEN. The lid RAISES.

Billy CLIMBS OUT of the trunk. Eyes darting. Gripping a heavy FLASHLIGHT.

He makes his way over to a DOOR. His hands are SHAKING.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUST-HOUSE - LAST YEAR - MINUTES LATER

Billy emerges from a side door with JESS, wrapped in a filthy BLANKET. They are about to scurry off into the night, when a DARK SHAPE LOOMS BEHIND THEM. It's DOSA.

His giant HAND GRABS BILLY by the scruff of the neck.

DOSA
Think you goin someplace--

Jess SCREAMS, and Billy suddenly SPINS and RAMS the FLASHLIGHT right into Dosa's BALLS.

Dosa GASPS in pain, doubles over, and Jess TAKES OFF RUNNING. Billy starts to follow her, but is TACKLED from behind by DOSA. He struggles, but Dosa is like a mountain of muscle, and it's IMPOSSIBLE to escape--

Jess turns back, her eyes filled with horror when she sees Billy trapped by Dosa.

Their eyes meet. Billy SCREAMS to her--

BILLY
 JUST GO. GO. RUN.

JESS
 (ashen)
 Oh no, oh no, Billy--

BILLY
 FUCKING RUN NOW--

She doesn't have a choice. She RUNS and RUNS, gasping, crying, eyes wide and blasted with adrenaline, she RUNS until the blackness of the night ENVELOPS her--

BACK TO:

CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - CONTINUOUS

Rett's eyes are closed, tears trickle down, into the dirt.

CESAR
 Yeah, I know. It's a real touching story. Your boy, he was almost a hero. (beat) Just like his daddy.

RETT
 Fuck you.

CESAR
 That's something you and your dead kid have in common. Both bit off more than you could chew. Balls before brains. (beat) My kid? Alfonso? Ain't like me at all. He soft.

(MORE)

CESAR (cont'd)
Believe me, I made an effort.
Tried to give him his nut, but he
ended up softer than before.

Rett opens his eyes, looks at Cesar.

RETT
He'll never be like you.

Cesar LAUGHS out loud, and playfully taps the muzzle of his
Glock against Rett's forehead.

CESAR
You already think you're his Daddy,
don't you. Shit is classic.

DOSA calls out from where the Thugs are digging.

DOSA
We got it, *Jefe*.

Cesar pokes Rett in the chest with the Glock.

CESAR
Alright. On your feet, Daddy.

Rett gets up, walks over to the HOLE with Cesar's pistol
jammed into his back.

Dosa is hauling the TRASH BAG out of the hole.

Kaan KICKS Rett down to his knees.

CESAR
Alfonso. Come here.

Carla CLUTCHES Alfonso more tightly to her.

CARLA
Don't do this, Cesar.

CESAR
I will cut your tits off, *puta*.

Alfonso starts to cry.

CARLA
(begging)
Leave him be. Please.

Dosa starts to RIP INTO the trash bags, inspecting--

CESAR
Get over here, boy. Right now.

Alfonso stumbles over, in tears. When he gets to Cesar, he's greeted with a hard SLAP across the face.

CESAR
STOP CRYING.

RETT
Piece of shit--

Rett tries to RISE TO HIS FEET but he's KICKED to the ground again by KAN.

Cesar grabs Alfonso by the scruff of the neck, HISSES into his terrified face--

CESAR
Time to man the fuck up, little chico. No more running away and hiding with Mami.

CARLA
LEAVE HIM ALONE YOU FUCK.

Cesar SLIDES THE GLOCK INTO ALFONSO'S LITTLE HANDS.

CESAR
It'll be easier than the last time.

Alfonso turns WHITE, his eyes go DAZED, he starts to DROOL.

ALFONSO
(trancelike)
NO. NO. NO. NO. NO. NO. NO.

Cesar GUIDES Alfonso's HANDS, pushing the GLOCK'S MUZZLE against the BASE OF RETT'S SKULL--

ALFONSO
NO. NO. NO--

CARLA
STOP.

All the THUGS are watching now, eyes WIDE with EXCITEMENT--

CESAR
Squeeze it, boy.

RETT
Oh God--

ALFONSO
NO--

And a VOICE SUDDENLY PIERCES THE DARKNESS--

VOICE (O.S.)
POLICE. NOBODY. FUCKING. MOVE.

A SILHOUETTE APPROACHES into the dimly-lit CLEARING.

All the FLASHLIGHTS SWING OVER to ILLUMINATE:

JORGENSEN, dressed in all BLACK, brandishing a big, fat, mean-looking MOSSBERG SHOTGUN.

All at once, the FOUR THUGS reach into their COATS.

JORGENSEN
SHOW ME YOUR FUCKING HANDS.

But the Thugs don't listen. They pull out their PIECES.

Jorgensen's eyes go WIDE and he DIVES to the DARKNESS outside of the FLASHLIGHT BEAMS--

And a SPLIT SECOND LATER the THUGS UNLOAD into the DARKNESS--

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM--

As the SHOTS ECHO around the park, Cesar SCOOPS UP Alfonso and TAKES OFF RUNNING down the TRAIL--

Rett quickly SCURRIES OVER to where CARLA is crouched, SCREAMING, and he COVERS her with his ARMS--

RETT
Shhhh, quiet.

The THUGS swing their FLASHLIGHTS around frantically, searching for their TARGET, but there's NOTHING THERE--

SHAVED
The hell--

Ka-BLAM. The MOSSBERG EXPLODES NEARBY--

SHAVED is THROWN BACKWARD, his CHEST a PULPED RUIN, and he's DEAD before he hits the ground.

KAAN and DOSA take off RUNNING in opposite directions. PIERCED holds his ground, FIRES at JORGENSEN--

BLAM!BLAM!BLAM!BLAM! CLICK. CLICK. CLICK--

Oh Shit. Pierced's EYES GO WIDE--

Ka-BLAM! PIERCED takes a LOAD OF SHOT to the FACE.

His BODY crumples to the dirt. Without a face.

A breathless, amped Jorgensen hurries from the shadows, crouches next to Rett and a hyper-ventilating Carla.

RETT

Jesus Christ, Jorgensen--

JORGENSEN

Knew you were into something, crazy son of a bitch.

RETT

I'm going after the kid.

JORGENSEN

You're gonna stay put til backup gets here.

RETT

When the hell is that?

Jorgensen's eyes flicker, unsure.

RETT

Fuck that.

Rett hops to his feet.

JORGENSEN

I said stay put, Jameson.

Rett puts his face close to Jorgensen's.

RETT

They killed him. You understand? It was them. *They killed Billy.*

The two men stare at each other. Finally, Jorgensen nods.

Rett TAKES OFF down the trail, into the darkness.

CUT TO:

RETT.

CREEPING along through the woods, making his way UPHILL.

In the DISTANCE, he hears a RUSTLING and a MUFFLED CRY.

He stops, LISTENS. Then gets moving again.

CUT TO:

DIRT ROAD

Jorgensen is ushering a shivering, wracked CARLA into the back seat of his UNMARKED CRUISER--

JORGENSEN

...be safe in here. Don't move--

CARLA

...don't leave me please--

JORGENSEN

Don't come out until you see the other policemen--

CARLA

Oh God please--

He SLAMS the door SHUT--

CUT TO:

RETT.

FROZEN behind a large EVERGREEN. FOOTSTEPS approach through the brush. It's KAAAN, sweating, Glock pointed outward.

Silently, Rett bends down and picks up a thick, solid BRANCH off the ground.

Kaan moves closer, amped, freaked, totally DISORIENTED.

Rett GRIPS the branch. Grits his teeth.

Kaan EDGES past the TREE--

Rett SWINGS THE BRANCH with all the FORCE he can muster--

A sickening THUNK as the BRANCH COLLIDES with KAAAN'S SKULL--

And he HITS the GROUND like a sack of nickels.

Rett drops the branch, panting, grabs Kaan's GLOCK off the ground, and SKITTERS down the hill, eyes BLAZING--

CUT TO:

JORGENSEN.

Hustling down the trail, gripping the Mossberg.

He moves off the trail, picks his way down a steep EMBANKMENT, and FREEZES when he sees a pair of SILHOUETTES hunched down next to a small, burbling CREEK.

He moves closer, his movements MUFFLED by the NOISE of the CREEK. When he's about ten feet away, he can clearly see that it's CESAR, clutching a trembling ALFONSO.

CLACK-CLACK. He RACKS the shotgun, and Cesar looks up to see the BARRELS pointed right at his face.

JORGENSEN

Kid, move away from that man.

CESAR

Please, Sir. He's my son.

JORGENSEN

I could give a shit.

Cesar's arms constrict around Alfonso's body.

CESAR

Why don't we just talk.

JORGENSEN

I will pop your head off like a fucking dandelion.

Cesar starts to PULL ALFONSO IN FRONT OF HIM, like a SHIELD.

JORGENSEN

Don't you FUCKING DO THAT.

CESAR

But I'm not doing anyth--

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

JORGENSEN takes THREE ROUNDS in his BACK. He GRUNTS, and pitches forward onto his belly, eyes GAPING, mouth BLOODY--

DOSA emerges from the WOODS behind, his pistol SMOKING--

Alfonso SCREAMS--

CUT TO:

RETT.

Hearing the ECHOES of the SHOTS and the SCREAM--

He RUSHES through the woods toward the SOUND, PANTING--

CUT TO:

CARLA.

In the UNMARKED. She also heard the ECHOES.

CARLA

Baby...?

She reaches for the DOOR HANDLE--

CUT TO:

RETT.

Comes upon the CREEK, and JORGENSEN lying face down, motionless, no sign of the shotgun.

RETT

Oh shit, Jorgensen...

He bends down to the Detective, touches the shredded fabric across his back where the ROUNDS ripped into him--

Jorgensen suddenly COUGHS and lets out a long GROAN.

JORGENSEN

Uhhhhhhhhh.

Rett quickly turns him over, opens his coat, revealing the KEVLAR VEST he's wearing underneath.

RETT

Gonna be okay, buddy.

Jorgensen swats at Rett's hands, like he's driving him away.

JORGENSEN

(gasping)

The fuck outta here. Now. Get that fuckin. Piece of shit coward.

Rett TAKES OFF up the trail, following the CREEKBED. Only the sound of his BREATHING and the WIND in the barren TREES.

Then, up ahead, he barely sees the OUTLINES of CESAR visibly DRAGGING ALFONSO behind him, they're making a break for the DIRT ROAD and the TRUCKS--

Rett picks up speed, SPRINTS toward them--

Until he's SUDDENLY TACKLED by 300 POUNDS of DOSA, and the two men SPLASH into the shallow CREEK, with Dosa on TOP--

The water's only about a FOOT DEEP but it's deep enough for Dosa to use his weight to FORCE RETT'S HEAD UNDERWATER.

Rett THRASHES, his eyes BUGGING as he struggles for AIR, and Dosa just SMILES, bears down HARDER--

Rett's HANDS SCRABBLE MADLY over Dosa's torso, trying to find purchase, something to grab onto, but his STRUGGLES are growing WEAKER by the second.

DOSA
Nighty-night time, *maricon*. You
just let it come.

Rett's hand lethargically SLIDES INSIDE DOSA'S JACKET--

And COMES OUT WITH THE STUN-GUN.

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZT-- Rett JAMS THE BUSINESS END right into DOSA'S MOUTH, SMASHING it against his TEETH--

Dosa CONVULSES, SCREAMS, and Rett receives SECONDARY SHOCKS as he claws his way from underneath the huge man's BULK--

But finally gets free and STAGGERS up the trail toward the DIRT ROAD--

Up ahead, Rett sees CESAR struggling up the path, with one hand gripping ALFONSO, and the other gripping the TRASH BAG full of CASH and JUNK.

Rett quickly CLOSES the DISTANCE between them--

Cesar suddenly SPINS and DROPS THE BAG and he's somehow got the MOSSBERG aimed at RETT--

Rett DIVES into the brush as the BITCH goes BOO-YAH, SHREDDING the ground where Rett was just standing--

Cesar grabs the TRASH BAG, continues up the path, makes it out to the DIRT ROAD, and heads straight for the SUBURBAN.

CUT TO:

RETT.

Hurries up the trail, hears the ENGINE of the SUBURBAN starting up, makes it to the DIRT ROAD--

BLAM!BLAM! *CLICK*. A frazzed-looking DOSA is emerging from the trail, BLASTING AWAY at RETT.

Rett HITS THE DECK and CRAWLS toward a STONE WALL, as Dosa STALKS CLOSER, simultaneously EJECTING A CLIP and SNAPPING IN a new one, he's almost RIGHT ON TOP OF RETT--

Dosa SMILES and TAKES DEAD AIM--

The ROAR of an ENGINE and sudden BLINDING HEADLIGHTS--

Jorgensen's UNMARKED CRUISER SLAMS FULL-SPEED INTO DOSA, driving him BACKWARDS and CRUSHING HIM up against the stone wall, with such FORCE that a thick jet of BLOOD ERUPTS from his mouth and SPRAYS the WINDSHIELD.

Stunned, Rett staggers to the Cruiser, rips open the door, finds CARLA behind the wheel, dazed, nose BROKEN and bloody.

He gently pulls her from the car. She's trembling, in SHOCK, and he CARRIES her over to a BOULDER, leans her against it.

RETT

You're all right. You're all right. It's okay.

She looks at Rett miserably, dazed, full of shame, regret.

CARLA

It's my fault. I'm sorry.

RETT

It doesn't matter.

CARLA

I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry--

WHAM! A BOOT connects with the side of Rett's HEAD--

Carla SCREAMS as CESAR continues to KICK RETT mercilessly. She ATTACKS Cesar with a flurry of PUNCHES but he BACKHANDS her to the ground, reaches into his coat, and pulls out

A BLACK 7-INCH KA-BAR COMBAT KNIFE.

He KNEELS onto Rett's chest, leans CLOSE to his face, PRESSES the edge of the blade into Rett's FOREHEAD.

CESAR
 Feel how sharp? Flick you open
 like *butter*, puta.

Rett is too dazed to struggle as the BLADE slowly SLICES DOWN HIS FACE, he just BLINKS MADLY as BLOOD FLOWS into his EYES--

CESAR
 (whispers)
Gonna make you so ugly, boy--

There's a FERAL SCREAM as ALFONSO launches himself at Cesar, BASHING him in the head with a softball-sized ROCK--

Cesar TOPPLES from Rett, the Ka-Bar SKITTERS across the DIRT--

Alfonso continues to HOWL and SMASH at Cesar with the rock, until Cesar gets ahold of the boy and PUNCHES him in the GUT.

Alfonso GASPS with the pain, doubles over, coughs, SOBS--

CARLA
 YOU DON'T TOUCH HIM--

Carla is suddenly LUNGING AT CESAR with the KA-BAR, she STABS him in the SHOULDER, YANKS it out--

CARLA
 YOU DON'T--

And STABS HIM AGAIN in the BELLY and Cesar HOWLS in AGONY--

CESAR
 Fucking WHORE--

She HAULS OUT the BLADE and BLOOD FLIES and goes to STAB HIM AGAIN but Cesar GRABS HER ARMS and they WRESTLE MADLY for the blade, KICKING and PUNCHING and GOUGING--

Rett CRAWLS toward them, teeth bared, flicking the blood from his eyes like SWEAT--

Carla and Cesar FIGHT LIKE ANIMALS, and ALFONSO WATCHES, clutching his belly, unable to speak or scream--

Cesar manages to CLAW his way on top of Carla, he grips the knife OVERHANDED, about to STAB DOWN, and he turns to lock eyes with Alfonso, grinning triumphantly.

CESAR
 YOU WATCH AND YOU SEE HOW A MAN DO.

Alfonso COVERS HIS EYES. He WILL NOT WATCH.

Rett APPEARS BEHIND CESAR. Bloody as ROAD-KILL.

His hand shoots out and GRABS CESAR'S WRIST-- and with a quick, awful CRUNCHING TWIST, he SNAPS IT BACKWARD, then FORWARD. A dozen bones, PULVERIZED in the space of a second.

Cesar's SCREAM is so high, it's a FALSETTO.

Rett YANKS Cesar off of Carla, still grasping him by his destroyed wrist, which dangles, BONELESS, like jelly--

CESAR

Please. Lo siento--

Rett FLINGS him to the ground, STRADDLES his chest--

RETT

Never pull a Ka-Bar on a Marine,
you stupid piece of garbage.

With a GRUNT, Rett PLUNGES the KA-BAR right through Cesar's SOLAR PLEXUS, all the way to the HILT.

Cesar's mouth DROPS OPEN, his breath HISSING out like air leaking from a tire, his eyes WIDE in SHOCK.

Rett leans close to him, WHISPERS into his face.

RETT

I can feel your heart stopping.

Cesar STARES at Rett. In disbelief. In awe.

And he DIES.

RETT

Balls before brains, maricon.

The sound of DISTANT SIRENS approaching.

Rett crawls over to CARLA, touches her tenderly. She tries to speak, but can only manage the tiniest WHISPER--

CARLA

Rett.

RETT

Don't talk. You're gonna be okay.
Help is coming.

She shakes her head. Tears leak from her eyes.

CARLA
You're all he has now, Rett.

RETT
 You're okay. You're here.

Rett presses his hands down her body, examining, and she WINCES. He pulls away the fabric of her shirt, sees the awful, PULSING KNIFE WOUND between her breasts.

RETT
 (pure dread)
Oh no.

He PRESSES his hand against the wound, trying to stop the blood, but it COURSES between his fingers--

Carla pulls Rett closer, whispers--

CARLA
Rett. Have to. Forgive him.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. THE BUST-HOUSE - LAST YEAR - NIGHT

BILLY is kneeling in the middle of an empty room. A HOOD covers his head. His narrow body TREMBLES.

The THUGS all stand in a semi-circle, arms crossed. KAAAN, DOSA, SHAVED and PIERCED.

Cesar gently PRODS an ashen-faced ALFONSO forward.

Alfonso is holding a .357 MAGNUM.

CESAR
 It's time, *miejo*. This is your communion.

ALFONSO
 No.

CESAR
 Squeeze it. Be a man for once in your sorry ass life.

Alfonso suddenly VOMITS down the front of his shirt.

Cesar scowls at his son, disgusted.

CESAR
Gotta *redeem* your little ass, boy.

ALFONSO
Please, Papi.

Cesar takes Alfonso's hands, AIMS the .357 at BILLY'S BACK.

CESAR
You do it or you are not my son.

Alfonso's TERRIFIED EYES.

Billy's TREMBLING, HEAVING shoulders.

Alfonso SQUEEZES HIS EYES SHUT.

HOLD on his YOUNG FACE, a RICTUS of SUFFERING and HORROR.

ALFONSO
(barely audible)
I'm sorry--

BLAM.

Hold the CLOSE-UP on Alfonso's FACE. His eyes OPEN.

His eyes are hollow. The eyes of a fallen angel.

BACK TO:

RETT.

Frozen in Carla's eyes, bending over her, stroking her hair.

The SIRENS are very close now.

She struggles for breath. Her eyes glaze.

CARLA
*I tried. Take him away. That
life. Keep him safe. From Cesar.
(beat) Now you. Keep him safe.*

RETT
Oh Jesus. Jesus. Carla.

CARLA
Keep him. (beat) Keep.

Carla's EYES keep on staring at Rett.

Even after she dies.

There's a long, low, keening MOAN, and Rett looks over to see ALFONSO, hugging his knees to his chest, rocking in the dirt.

Tears stream down the boy's face. His body SHUDDERS.

Rett stares at the boy. The boy he's grown to love.

The boy who killed his only son.

Alfonso keeps rocking, his mouth OPENS in a KEENING HOWL--

ALFONSO

MAMAAA--

SMASH TO BLACK.

HOLD the BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Rett lies in a hospital bed, his face SWOLLEN, BRUISED, and STITCHED TOGETHER. He's a MESS. But alive.

BALLARD and JORGENSEN are in there with him.

Rett's awareness fades in and out with the tides of morphine.

BALLARD

...all over now. Just rest.

RETT

(croak)

Fonso...

JORGENSEN

Ward of the State now.

BALLARD

Poor boy. Just awful to go through a thing like that.

Jorgensen walks to the edge of the bed, looks down at Rett, shakes his head, smiles dryly.

JORGENSEN

Least you can get some rest now.
Put that animal in the ground.
Fuckin Cesar. Fuckin low life.

(MORE)

JORGENSEN (cont'd)
(beat) He was the one, wasn't he,
Jameson. He was the one.

Rett stares at Jorgensen woozily. His eyes swim in his head.

RETT
Yeah. (beat) He was the one.

INT. RETT'S HOUSE - DAY

Rett wanders through the empty house. He still looks banged-up, but he's healing.

He walks into BILLY'S ROOM.

Immediately begins REMOVING all the posters from the walls. All the books from the shelves. The sheets from the bed.

CUT TO:

INT. BILLY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Drop-cloths are spread throughout the room. Rett is PAINTING THE WALLS with a fresh coat of WHITE.

He stops, wipes a drop of paint off his FACE-- across the SCAR that scores the flesh from his forehead to his cheek.

He looks at all the white, admiring his handiwork.

EXT. PASO ROBLES STREETS - DAY

Rett drives along El Camino Real in his truck.

He SLOWS as he passes by Jameson & Son Auto.

The place is DARK, the windows PAPERED from the inside.

A large BANNER is draped across the front of the building:
COMING SOON-- ANOTHER FINE RUTTLEDGE BROS. TIRE OUTLET!

Rett smiles ruefully as he passes.

Then he speeds up--

EXT. SOCIAL SERVICES - DAY

A grim, low-slung, government-style BRICK BUILDING.

Rett stands by his truck, staring at the building.

Finally, he walks inside.

INT. SOCIAL SERVICES - CONTINUOUS

Rett stands at a desk, going through a thick SHEAF of papers, on which he SIGNS and INITIALS, over and over again.

CLERK (O.S.)
*And here, sir. And here. And
 right here. (beat) And here.*

INT. - RETT'S TRUCK - DAY

Rett drives along silently. Beside him, riding shotgun, is ALFONSO.

His skinny arm drapes out the window, fingers splayed, catching the air.

Neither of them speaks.

INT. RETT'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Rett wakes up in the dark. Looks around. Sees ALFONSO standing at the edge of the bed.

Staring at him. Eyes haunted.

RETT
 Hey. What is it. What's up.

ALFONSO
 I'm scared.

RETT
 Scared of what.

Alfonso struggles to get it out.

ALFONSO
I'm scared that I'm bad.

Rett pushes back the covers. Pats the mattress.

RETT
 Get in here.

Alfonso stands there, pinched.

RETT

Come on now. Get in.

Alfonso gets under the covers. Rett puts his hand on the boy's head. Looks at him seriously.

RETT

It's just us now, Sport. There ain't nobody else. You're my blood now. And I'm yours. Nothing's ever gonna change that. There's a river of fucked up shit in this world. Both of us fell in, got soaked to the skin. (beat) Now we're Baptized. (beat) So you don't ever gotta be scared again.

Alfonso settles into the pillow. His eyes get heavy.

ALFONSO

Okay.

EXT. CHALK MOUNTAIN PARK - NIGHT

From a distance, under a moonlit glow, TWO DARK FIGURES hunker down on a wide, flat clearing.

One figure larger than the other.

Rett and Alfonso. Blowing shit up on Chalk Mountain.

RETT

That's a biggie. Get ready, Sport.

FSSSHHHHHHHH-- a FIREWORK launches into the sky, EXPLODING OVERHEAD, the bright TRAILS of sparks fading as they fall.

Until they're nothing but ash.

THE END