

"CONVENIENCE"

6/22/96

Vince Gilligan

FADE IN ON:

A CLOSE UP of trousered legs swinging back and forth. A FARMER we see only from the waist down sits on the edge of a table and slowly swings his legs. The heels of his old workboots click together as he swings them. We see nothing else as he talks. His voice is all gravel and cigarettes.

FARMER

Tobacco come in early that year.
I 'member that...come real early...

(wet cough)

Wellsir--my '69 John Deere got a torque at idle of near about 220 foot-pounds. 220'll snap a green two-by-four like a piece'a cold celery... Just go KA-CHUNK!--rip it like a matchstick. Snap it so clean, you wouldn't even have to sand down the ends--just take it straightaway and build you some furniture with it...

(wet cough)

Yessir--that's a heap of torque...

The farmer's legs swing hypnotically. We notice that--slowly but surely--his left leg is getting longer. The distance between his trouser cuff and his boot is increasing, and more and more calf-length sock is creeping into view.

FARMER

Definitely want to keep your bootlaces tied tight when you're around a PTO shaft with that kind of torque. That's a fact.

The farmer's left leg is longer yet. Suddenly--zip!--his leg from knee to boot slides out of its trouser cuff and clunks on the floor. The artificial leg stands upright briefly, then falls on its side.

INT. CREAMER'S FITTING ROOM

BOBBY CREAMER, 17, stares deadpan at the leg. He touches his hand to the side of his head like he's got a migraine. He glances left and right at his parents.

Bobby's parents stare at the leg, too. MR. CREAMER scratches his chin and thinks. MRS. CREAMER smiles sweetly and gives the grizzled farmer a shrug. Mr. and Mrs. Creamer are both

overweight and Bobby is thin, but the family resemblance is noticeable.

MR. CREAMER

Bobby, you didn't tighten the knee cup like I taught you...

Bobby gives a little shrug. The farmer scratches at his stump.

FARMER

Chafed at the top some, too, when I walked it around...

Mr. Creamer nods at the farmer. He turns to his son.

MR. CREAMER

Gotta learn to fit 'em right, son... Fitting is four-fifths of the job. And if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing right.

Mr. Creamer smiles encouragingly. The one-legged farmer smiles too, then lets out a wet cough. Mr. Creamer motions Bobby to pick up the artificial leg. Bobby stands motionless. His mom gives him a nudge.

MRS. CREAMER

C'mon, Bobby--sometime today.

Bobby gingerly picks up the artificial leg. He carries it like it was a dead raccoon. He mumbles without looking back.

BOBBY

My name's Bob, Mom.

INT. CREAMER'S SHOWROOM--AFTERNOON

Sunlight streams through the plate glass front of the showroom. Sun glints off display racks of orthopedic supplies, bedpans, and artificial limbs. Bigger items like wheelchairs and walkers are arranged near the windows.

Bobby is behind the counter with his back to the front door. He wears protective goggles and a dust mask. He stands at a bench grinder, grinding down the farmer's new leg. Plastic dust swirls. The workboot on the end of the leg is covered with a bread bag to protect it from dust.

A radio plays Percy Faith. Bobby punches the station to rock music. The rock song ends, and a short news report is heard.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
News Brief--brought to you by
Chevrolet Corvette.

Bobby's eyes flicker. He murmurs covetously.

BOBBY
Corvette...

Bobby grinds the leg, oblivious to everything--including the silhouetted figure entering the store behind him.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
The State Department of Corrections today announced plans to pursue business ties with the private sector. In a move hailed by proponents of prison reform, work-release jobs for minimum security inmates will be made available by local businesses. This story and more coming up at the five o'clock hour...

A rock music commercial comes on. Bobby suddenly looks up from his grinding. He flips off the machine and turns to face the counter, pulling down his dust mask. The blood seems to seep from his face.

ALLISON PEABO, 18, stands before the counter smiling at Bobby. We only see her from the elbows up. She is radiant, and looks like she smells of lilac. The waning sun coming through the plate glass halo-lights her hair.

ALLISON
Hi, Bobby...how you doing?
Is your Dad around?

Bobby yanks off his goggles and straightens his hair with his hand. Plastic dust gets in his eyes. He fights to keep from blinking, but his eyes water fiercely.

BOBBY
Yeah, sure...uh... Hi.
(yell)
Dad?!--

Bobby sets his goggles on the countertop while he wipes his eyes. He sets the goggles on the edge, and they fall off the counter at Allison's feet.

Allison picks up the goggles. She holds them out to Bobby, and we see her arms for the first time. The goggles dangle from a shiny steel gripper claw where her right hand should be.

Bobby stops blinking and tries painfully hard to look composed. He blushes red. He hesitates, then reaches to take the goggles from Allison's gripper claw.

Bobby pulls the goggles. The elastic strap stretches, but Allison's gripper doesn't let go. Allison flexes her upper arm, then slaps blithely at her artificial forearm.

Bobby dumbly holds the goggles, not knowing what else to do. Mr. Creamer enters from the fitting room and flips the radio from rock music back to Percy Faith. He waves at the girl.

MR. CREAMER

How'ya doing, Allison?

Allison smiles and tugs at the control cable on her forearm. Mr. Creamer finds an Allen wrench in his breast pocket and adjusts her gripper. The gripper pops open, and the goggles snap loose and slingshot out of Bobby's hand.

Mr. Creamer looks underneath the counter for a can of WD-40.

MR. CREAMER

Joint just needs some lubricating...

(spraying the arm)

Your new arm isn't in yet... I called the factory rep, and he says a whole shipment of servomotors is being held up in Taiwan pending a customs check. I'm real sorry about the wait. 'Bout a month, maybe...

Allison chews her lip and nods. Bobby stands back, fidgeting and dying, and sneaking glances at Allison whenever he can. He sneaks a hand to the radio, eases the volume on Percy Faith.

ALLISON

I just really wanted it for majorette practice...it starts this week.

MR. CREAMER

Sorry... Yeah, it'd be great for that. Oh, man--it's a beauty. Looks absolutely real. Twin servos for realistic movement, digital grip feedback... I mean, the picture you saw doesn't do it justice...

Bobby winces at his dad's enthusiasm. Mr. Creamer puts the cap back on the WD-40. He leans close to Allison's face, squinting hard into her eyes.

MR. CREAMER

Well, heck...you do have hazel eyes.
I woulda bet Bobby five bucks that
your eyes were blue, but he said,
"No, Daddy--they're hazel. With...
tiny little flecks of gold."

(nodding)

He was right...

Allison looks at Bobby, surprised. Bobby is blushed crimson, in exquisite pain.

The old farmer hobbles out of the fitting room on crutches, his empty pant leg trailing on the floor. Mrs. Creamer follows him into the showroom. The old farmer squints at Bobby.

FARMER

Gon' leave me legless, young feller?--

The farmer sways and lets out another wet cough. Mrs. Creamer steadies him and nods Bobby to get back to work. Mrs. Creamer smiles and waves to Allison. Mr. Creamer turns to his wife.

MR. CREAMER

Ruth--her eyes are hazel...

Bobby wants to find a hole to crawl into. He numbly pulls his goggles over his eyes. Through them he glances around the room at his parents, the farmer, and Allison.

Allison returns his gaze. Bobby turns his back to all and flips on the bench grinder. His face burns.

EXT. CREAMER'S STORE--LATE AFTERNOON

The sun sits on the horizon. Bobby flips the "Closed" sign, shuts the door and checks that it's locked. He sighs, and slouches toward the parking lot where his parents wait. The sign says "Creamer Prosthetic Limb & Brace".

EXT. PARKING LOT

Mr. and Mrs. Creamer sit in their lemon yellow Subaru pickup. Mrs. Creamer sits behind the wheel. The company name is painted on the doors. The truck is small, and the Creamers are big, so the only place for Bobby to ride is the cargo bed.

Bobby stares into the truck bed, shaking his head to himself. Mr. Creamer glances at him in his side-view mirror.

MR. CREAMER

Store locked up, Bobby?

Bobby sighs again. He hoists himself into the truck bed like a tired old man.

BOBBY

My name's Bob.

Bobby sits with his knees pulled up and his back braced against the back of the cab. He closes his eyes. Inside, Mr. Creamer turns to his wife and mutters.

MR. CREAMER

Name's Bobby seventeen damn years.
I don't get it...

Mrs. Creamer shrugs and puts the truck into gear. She takes off fast, racking Bobby's head off the back of the cab.

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK DRIVING

The yellow pickup cruises through a suburban stretch of fast food joints. Bobby stares glumly at young, good-looking COUPLES scattered among the stores. There seem to be an unusual number of handsome, happy couples.

A silver Corvette Stingray, top off, closes in behind the pickup. Sunken into the leather interior, an Aryan GOD and GODDESS, both in their early twenties, stare impassively at Bobby through mirrored sunglasses.

The Corvette rides the pickup's tailgate. Bobby swallows and stares at the beautiful couple, blinking fast. His cheeks get pink. Up ahead is a railroad crossing. Mrs. Creamer doesn't even take her foot off the gas.

The pickup bumps over the railroad crossing, going airborne. Artificial arms and legs--unseen by us till now--rise up into view, hang lazily in the air around Bobby's head, then fall and crash back down in the truck bed.

Bobby stares deadpan back at the Corvette. He sinks down out of sight.

EXT. PICKUP BED

We look down on Bobby, lying on his side in a fetal position and hugging his stomach tight. He is surrounded by fiberglass arms and legs. He lies in a stupor.

Bobby reaches up a hand to slide open the truck's rear window reach-through.

BOBBY

Mom...? Dad...? I quit.

INT. PICKUP CAB

Mr. Creamer stares back at Bobby. He and his wife glance at each other, surprised.

EXT. PICKUP BED

Bobby hugs his stomach. He lies on his side amidst the limbs and thinks.

EXT. DANNY'S HOUSE--SUNSET

Bobby shuffles up the lawn of a neat, upper-middle class house in a suburban neighborhood. A Volvo station wagon is prominent in the driveway. A "Fur is Murder" sticker is on the bumper.

Bobby rings the doorbell. Running footsteps are heard.

MRS. KELBICK, a pretty but pinched woman, pops open the door. She wears a big "Meat Stinks" T-shirt over an expensive dress. She frantically waves Bobby around back.

MRS. KELBICK

Danny's watering the backyard, Bobby...
I'm late for my PETA meeting. Bye--

Mrs. Kelbick shuts the door. Bobby walks around the side of the house, muttering to himself.

BOBBY

Bob. Bob, Bob, Bob....

EXT. DANNY'S BACKYARD

Bobby stands behind the house. A garden hose under his feet stretches from the leaking spigot to the distant woods. Bobby looks around. No one is in sight. Bobby follows the hose.

We track with Bobby as he walks across the backyard and into the thick woods, following the hose. Water trickles out of the brass connections every fifty feet. The hose snakes around trees and under bushes as Bobby picks his way through.

EXT. WOODED ROADSIDE

DANNY KELBICK holds the end of the hose. He squirts the spray gun nozzle at the quiet neighborhood road the woods abut upon. Bobby steps up beside him and watches as he wets down a ninety foot section of asphalt. Danny doesn't look up.

DANNY

Whatcha say, Bob?

Bobby watches absently, his hands in his pockets.

BOBBY

I quit my job with my folks.
They live to mortify me...
I will not work there one more day.

DANNY

Spo. About time, I figure...

Danny finishes wetting the asphalt and tosses the hose out of sight. Danny is Bobby's age, and heavy. He wears a shirt which says "That's Mr. Dickhead to You." He checks his watch and glances up the road.

Bobby chunks at the ground with his heel.

BOBBY

I like working, though...like having a job.
Making money's cool. You gotta have it
to go to college. You gotta have it to
move out on your own and have a life...

(mumble)

Buy a Corvette... A silver Corvette.
Or maybe black. That'd be cool...

Danny nods and grabs a furry plush toy from a bag at his feet. The stuffed animal looks a lot like a real opossum. Danny sticks a safety pin through it and ties fish line to the pin.

DANNY

Doesn't this look real? I got this
at Hallmark for like, six bucks.

Bobby nods. Danny jogs to the far side of the wet road and sets the stuffed animal in some weeds. Danny jogs back across, feeding out fish line behind him. Bobby watches.

BOBBY

(sarcastic)

I guess maybe this was funny once.

DANNY

(grin)

We're going for the record tonight.

Danny strings the nearly invisible fish line into the thick woods. He checks his watch again, then motions for Bobby to join him behind a tree. Bobby just stares at him, arms crossed. We hear a car engine start.

Danny drops out of sight behind the tree. He sticks his hand into view and frantically waves Bobby to join him. Bobby frowns and strolls behind the tree. He crouches beside Danny.

Headlights shine in the twilight, zooming closer. Mrs. Kelbick races her Volvo station wagon up the road toward them.

Just as the Volvo hits the wet patch, Danny jerks the fish line hard. The stuffed opossum zips in front of the car.

The Volvo's wheels lock, and it skids a good eighty feet on the wet asphalt, hooking its nose into the weeds on the far side of the road.

Mrs. Kelbick powers down her window and glances around for the opossum. She whistles for it weakly, like she's calling a dog. Hidden in the underbrush, Danny shakes with silent giggling. Bobby shakes his head at Danny.

Mrs. Kelbick powers up her window and pulls the Volvo back into its lane. She slowly continues down the road.

Danny comes out of hiding. He whistles like his mom did, then laughs. He rattles a can of spray paint. Bobby follows him, shaking his head.

BOBBY

She is your mom, you sick bastard.
She could've wrecked.

DANNY

She's got an airbag, alright?
Don't fudge your undies...

Danny crouches in the road where the skid marks end. He sprays a bright red mark on the edge of the asphalt to mark the spot.

Danny squints at the other dated mark on the road--the new mark is farther. Danny grins at Bobby.

DANNY

A new course record! Spo!

Bobby stares off into the woods, his mind elsewhere. Danny caps his spray can. The two stand silently in the center of the quiet road, night falling around them.

DANNY

Anyway--now that you're out of a job,
you can come work with me at Zippie's!

Bobby chews his lip and thinks. He wistfully shakes his head.

BOBBY

Naaah...

DANNY

It's a prime job. I'm my own boss--
at least when my boss isn't around...
and he's never around. He's got like,
fourteen stores to oversee...
I got flexible hours, so I can work
after school, or on weekends...

(sly grin)

I can sell myself beer...

Bobby shrugs and shakes his head. He stubs at the pavement.

BOBBY

I just...I can't see having to wear
that smock with the little Zippie heads
printed all over it. And it's got
those wide lapels...and that big,
Greg Brady-looking ring zipper...

(weak)

It looks dorky... I don't know...

DANNY

Who gives a fat rip?! What are you,
Fashion Boy? It's a prime job.

(snort)

Geez, man...if you worry that much
about looking dorky, you best not
hang out with me.

Danny is just joking, but Bobby is stone-faced. He has obviously given that much thought. Danny clears his throat.

DANNY

Allison Peabo thinks it's a prime job.
She loves a man in uniform...
No, seriously...Allison comes in pretty
often. She even got that arm of hers
hooked on the door handle the last time
she came in.

Bobby blushes pink and looks at the ground. Danny nudges him.

DANNY

Allison Peabo, man. Follow your bliss...

Bobby snorts and shakes his head.

BOBBY

I could care less.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT--DAY

We TRACK BACK from a big button that reads "Thanks for your Patience--I'm a New Employee". The button is pinned to a garish smock peppered with elf faces. The smock is worn by an uncomfortable Bobby. Beside Bobby, Danny grins big.

Bobby and Danny stand in the parking lot of a convenience store that looks much like a 7-Eleven. The boys stand next to a white Pinto, one of only two cars in the lot.

Above the boys, a sign on the gable reads "Zippie's In & Out". A fiberglass Zippie the Elf face is in the center of the sign. Zippie's huge, banjo eyes slowly tennis back and forth between "In" and "Out", the electric motor squeaking faintly. Zippie's grin is meant to be friendly, but verges on maniacal.

The Zippie's DISTRICT MANAGER stands by his Pinto, shuffling through papers. He signs something against the car's hood. The Pinto has Zippie's face on its doors.

DISTRICT MANAGER

Alright, Robert...everything looks good.
I've got your W-4 form. That'll do it.
Daniel here'll show you the ropes.
(getting into his car)
Just give me a call if you run into any
problems, and the like. Zippie's is
proud to have you aboard.

Bobby forces a smile and nods goodbye. The district manager waves. Danny watches him back away, then turns to Bobby.

DANNY

Lied and said you were 21, right?

Bobby nods, frowning down at his smock.

DANNY

Spo.

Danny nods, satisfied. He turns and heads inside the store. Bobby listlessly follows.

INT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT

Bobby and Danny settle in behind the cash register counter in the empty store. Danny notices Bobby's unhappy preoccupation with his new uniform. Bobby pulls off his "New Employee" button and stares at it.

BOBBY

I can't wear this, Danny. It's gay...

Danny shakes his head to himself. He glances out the window.

Visible through the full-length plate glass fronting the store, a car pulls up to the gas pumps outside in the parking lot. The burly DRIVER hops out and presses the intercom. His voice crackles through an inside speaker.

DRIVER (FILTER)

Couldja turn on the regular unleaded?

Danny reaches for the pump switch, then pauses. He turns to Bobby and grins.

DANNY

Watch this...

CLOSE ON the intercom switch as Danny flips it on. Smiling, he leans in close to the microphone.

EXT. GAS PUMP ISLAND

Danny's voice echoes across the empty parking lot.

DANNY (FILTER)

I'm sorry, sir--we're out of gas.

The driver stares up at the overhead loudspeaker. He stands blinking, not sure what to do. Then he scowls, slams the nozzle back in its holster, and climbs into his car.

INT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT

Through the window, we see the man drive away. Danny grins.

DANNY

We got gas. I just hate Hyundais.

Bobby stares at him. Danny takes the "New employee" button from Bobby's hand and pins it back onto Bobby's chest.

DANNY

That's why this is such a prime job. Autonomy. Power. Did you see the size of that guy? Could you have wielded that kind of power at the fake arm store, working for your folks? Hell no, I say. This is the best job you'll ever have in high school.

Bobby rubs at his nose and glances down at his uniform again. He looks up at Danny and smiles.

BOBBY

Power is good.

(mumble)

Just so long as we don't have to wear hats, I guess...

Danny grins. He swings over the counter and points to the tall cabinet that contains the cigarette cartons.

DANNY

Hey--check this out...

Danny pulls open the plexiglass cabinet door. A goofy recorded voice that sounds suspiciously like Danny's speaks loudly.

COMPUTER VOICE

Thank you for.....SMOKING!

Danny closes and opens the door, making the voice repeat its message over and over. The boys laugh.

DANNY

It said "Welcome to Zippie's" before I customized it.

BOBBY

Cool beans...

Bobby swings himself over the counter.

DANNY

Check this out--

Danny leads Bobby out of frame. CUT TO:

CLOSE ON Danny's hand twisting a key in a coinbox.

In the back corner of the store, Bobby and Danny stand in front of a video game--"NARC". The coinbox door is open, and Danny slaps the start button. The game comes to life.

DANNY

Here's a perk--we play for free.

Bobby settles at the controls, playing. Danny beams and spreads his arms to indicate the whole of the store.

DANNY

Is this not cool?! I could see being a manager after high school. Start with one store...work up to a whole chain of 'em. That's serious bucks...

Bobby machine guns the tiny drug dealers that swarm the screen.

BOBBY

I don't know, man... I gotta do something important with my life.

DANNY

What...?

BOBBY

(mumble)

I don't know yet.

An electronic chime sounds, announcing that the store's front door has been opened. Danny turns his head.

DANNY

Hey--your first customer!

Bobby abandons the game in progress. He fiddles with his big lapels as he exits frame. Danny locks the machine. CUT TO:

CLOSE ON a six-pack of beer being slid across the counter.

Bobby mans the cash register. An Aryan god and goddess--both seventeen, both wearing high school jackets--are trying to buy beer. We immediately recognize them as the couple from the Corvette. They recognize Bobby, and he recognizes them.

The god nervously fumbles out his driver's license. As Bobby frowns at it, Danny sidles up and places a pair of scissors in front of him. Danny smiles and leans close to Bobby's ear.

DANNY

You get to cut the fake ones
in half.

Bobby smiles with mean delight--Danny has made his day. As the god weakly protests, Bobby slowly snips in half his fake ID.

The couple stalks out of the store, the boy muttering "screw you" under his breath. Bobby taps a finger against his brain.

BOBBY

High school jackets--smart.

Bobby relishes the moment, spinning the scissors gunfighter-style on his finger.

DANNY

Zippie's is our little fiefdom,
right?

Both boys grin. Bobby clenches tight the pieces of fake ID.

BOBBY

I pronounce this--"cool."

EXT. HIGHWAY--NIGHT

Crickets chirp along an empty stretch of road. A rusted Pontiac Le Mans--Danny's car--speeds through the frame.

INT. DANNY'S CAR

Danny drives and Bobby rides shotgun. A Zippie air freshener dangles from the rearview mirror. Bobby sips on a beer.

DANNY

Good, huh? Beechwood aging--
that's the key.

Bobby grins and nods. He covertly winces at the taste. Danny clicks on the radio.

ANNOUNCER

...Controversial prison work-release program will begin next month. Critics of the plan contend that it is nothing but a means to reduce prison overcrowding, with little or no thought given to the safety of ordinary citizens...

Neither Bobby nor Danny pay any attention to the news report. The road is empty. Danny grins at Bobby, then jerks the steering wheel hard to the left.

EXT. HIGHWAY

The car crosses the double yellow line into the left lane.

DANNY (V.O.)

We're in England!! We're in England!!

INT. DANNY'S CAR

Bobby laughs and grabs at the wheel. Danny fights him off. He lets the car drift back into the right lane again.

ANNOUNCER

...Prison officials deny such allegations, arguing that public safety is foremost, and that candidates for work-release will go through rigorous screenings. Steve..?

D.J.

Kinda puts me in mind of a song there, Holly. Comin' at you, Southside!--

"Bad to the Bone" plays. Bobby cranks it. He grins at Danny.

BOBBY

That's us, man...bad to the bone.

DANNY

Damn straight. Born to be scooter trash.

Bobby beams and nods. He buffs the "New Employee" button on his Zippie's smock. Danny notices and smiles to himself.

Danny hums to the song. Bobby hums too, feeling pretty cool.

EXT. HIGHWAY

Danny's car speeds away into the darkness, its taillights growing small. "Bad to the Bone" fades into the night.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. STATE PRISON--MORNING

A mist hangs in the air. Red brick prison buildings sit atop bald, rolling hills surrounded by grazing cattle. Razor wire and microwave antennae glint prickly in the sun. A sign says "Goochland Correctional Facility".

EXT. MOTORPOOL ENTRANCE

A corrections department van idles, waiting. An armed DRIVER presses a button beside the big steel prison door. A loud fire bell rings, and the door clunks open.

Twelve CONVICTS shuffle through the door in a neat, single-file line, followed by a PRISON GUARD. No one talks. The men's eyes are straight ahead. The men wear dull blue issue shirts and trousers. They make a beeline for the van.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD

The van motors up and down the hilly rural roads. It passes a roadside cutting gang of twenty sweating CONVICTS and two shotgun-toting GUARDS. The van's horn honks, and the guards wave. The van continues up the hill.

EXT. CUTTING GANG

A shirtless black CONVICT swings his scythe onto his shoulder and peers at the van. The man gleams with sweat and is muscled like a panther. He has a scar across his face.

CONVICT

Sonuva...bitch.

A couple of other convicts glance up at him, then quickly return to their cutting.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF SUBURBS

From the air we look down on the prison van, following it as the scenery changes from rural to suburban.

We descend CLOSER. The van pulls into a Burger King parking lot. The van's door slides open and two convicts climb out. A WOMAN in a business suit hurries to meet them.

The van pulls out of the Burger King lot back onto the road. It drives several hundred yards, then turns into the lot of an International House of Pancakes. The same thing as before happens--two CONVICTS get out to be met by a WOMAN in a suit.

INT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT

Bobby and Danny stand behind the counter in their smocks, looking surprised. Their district manager and a WOMAN in a business suit stand before them. The store is otherwise empty.

DISTRICT MANAGER

This is sort of an honor for you two. These two men will always work your shift--2:00 to 7:00 weekdays, and 9:00 to 7:00 Saturdays... You'll be responsible for showing them the ropes, and the like...

(presenting the woman)

This is Ms. Delouche. She's helping run the program. She works for the State.

Ms. Delouche crinkles her eyes shut as she smiles at the boys.

MS. DELOUCHE

I'm a Wellness Consultant. Hi... This is a very important new program, guys... Basically, it has three goals:

Ms. Delouche slowly counts off on her fingers.

MS. DELOUCHE

One--instituting rehabilitative skills.
Two--assimilating offenders into society.
And three--making connections...
Instilling self-confidence and wellness.

Ms. Delouche nods as she talks. When she finishes, she smiles and waits for a reaction. Bobby and Danny stare at her.

BOBBY

What--you mean, we're gonna be working with, like...guys in prison..?

Bobby and Danny look nervous.

DISTRICT MANAGER

Uh, essentially. They're non-violent...

A horn honks outside--the prison van idles at the far end of the empty parking lot. Ms. Delouche heads for the door.

MS. DELOUCHE

Excuse me, guys.

Ms. Delouche hurries across the parking lot to the prison van. Bobby and Danny watch through the plate glass.

DISTRICT MANAGER

It's not just here...they'll have 'em working all over. Two men'll work the McDonald's up the road...

DANNY

Man... Food, Folks, and Scum.

DISTRICT MANAGER

Just, uh...keep an eye on 'em. Don't let them use the phone...don't let them smoke inside the store...don't let them use profanity around customers, and the like... Common sense stuff. You're their bosses when they're here.

The boys look numb. They turn their attention back outside.

Outside, as seen through the plate glass, TWO MEN duck out of the van door and drop to the pavement. They glance around the lot through disinterested eyes, exuding dangerous coolness.

The taller man is black with a big 70's Afro cut and a facial tic. The younger man looks Hispanic. He wears a hair net, which the guard yanks off his head. The Hispanic man scowls.

CLOSE ON Bobby staring out the window at the men. He looks like something's caught in his throat.

EXT. PARKING LOT (C.U. THRU WINDOW)

The Hispanic man catches Bobby staring at him from inside the store. He focuses on Bobby--returns his stare, not blinking.

INT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT

CLOSER ON Bobby. He stares, his eyes locked with the man's. He looks sort of hypnotized and his jaw slackens.

EXT. PARKING LOT (C.U. THRU WINDOW)

CLOSER ON the Hispanic convict. His stare is intense and unfriendly. It doesn't waver even as Ms. Delouche speaks directly to the man. The man answers her, still peering inside at Bobby. We don't hear what they are saying.

INT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT

Bobby finally blinks and drops his eyes. His face goes pink.

EXT. PARKING LOT (C.U. THRU WINDOW)

The Hispanic convict gives a hard little smile. He turns and nods at Ms. Delouche, listening to her as she talks.

Ms. Delouche and the two convicts walk across the lot toward the store, Ms. Delouche talking the whole way. Behind them, the prison van pulls onto the road.

INT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT

Danny and the district manager are unaware of the silent transaction that just occurred between Bobby and the convict.

The district manager turns from watching the men approach and picks up a big 100-count box of matchbooks from the countertop. He hands the box to Danny.

DISTRICT MANAGER

(low)

And, uh...one other thing.

Keep matches away from the black guy.

Danny stares at the match box in his hand. He looks at the district manager wide-eyed, as does Bobby.

BOBBY AND DANNY

Huh?--

The electronic chime sounds as the men enter the store.

DISTRICT MANAGER

(mutter)

Hide 'em--

Danny chucks the box underneath the counter. The three quickly turn and face Ms. Delouche and the two convicts. Ms. Delouche flips through notes on her clipboard. She reads from them in order to make her introductions.

MS. DELOUCHE

Robert Creamer and Daniel...Kelbick?
Did I say that right..?

Danny gives a tiny nod. The convicts glance around the store.

MS. DELOUCHE

(big smile)

I'd like to introduce Gully Smalls
and Paco... Dos...uh..?

The Hispanic convict stares at Bobby for a full beat before he answers. His accent is substantial.

HISPANIC CON

Paco...Dos Espadas.

Paco gives a hard, brief little smile. Gully--the black convict--studies the ceiling, and his face tics. Bobby swallows and looks at the floor. Danny gives the two men a half-hearted wave.

The district manager comes to life, clapping his hands together and grinning nervously at the convicts.

DISTRICT MANAGER

Gentlemen, we're proud to have you.
My name is Mr. Cuthbert, and I'm the
Goochland district manager for
Yuketsu Heavy Diesel, which licenses
the Zippie's In & Out chain of stores.
I'll be your boss here at Zippie's.
If you'll follow me to the stockroom,
we'll get you your uniform smocks
and the like...

The district manager strides a couple of steps toward the back room. The convicts stand their ground. The district manager hesitates and looks back at them, not sure what to do. Finally, they follow him sluggishly out of frame.

Bobby and Danny are left alone in the front of the store with Ms. Delouche. The woman puts down her clipboard, taps a Virginia Slims out of its pack, and flicks her lighter at it.

MS. DELOUCHE

This place is kinda empty, isn't it?

Danny gives a little shrug. Next to him, Bobby stares toward the back room, visibly shaken.

Danny glances at the floor. CLOSE ON the floor--a single book of matches lies open next to his dirty hightop sneakers.

Danny and Bobby both stare down at the book of matches. They glance at each other. Bobby picks up the matchbook and shoves it deep in his pocket. Danny eyes the back room.

EXT. PARKING LOT--LATER

The district manager and Ms. Delouche climb into the company Pinto. Their backs are to the store.

MS. DELOUCHE

I think we're off to a good start.

The district manager nods amiably, starts the car, and pulls out of frame. We see Bobby and Danny watching them forlornly from inside the store.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

Bobby and Danny are pressed to the window, staring out like orphans. Behind them, Paco and Gully come out of the back room wearing their new employee smocks.

Paco saunters to the window beside Bobby and Danny and peers outside. He rolls up his smock's sleeves to the shoulders. The boys stand still and try hard not to look uncomfortable.

Gully glances around behind the empty counter, then disappears into the back room. He reappears with an empty milk crate. He sets it on the floor behind the register and sits on it. When he sits down, we see just his hair over the counter.

Paco glances at the big button on his smock, the one that reads "Thanks for your Patience--I'm a New Employee." He snorts and plucks it off his smock. He drops it atop the newspaper rack and wanders the store.

Bobby and Danny exchange glances. They turn to Paco, looking like they really want to say something, but can't quite find the courage. Paco stands in front of the big plexiglass cigarette cabinet, studying its contents. He opens the door.

COMPUTER VOICE

Thank you for.....SMOKING!

Paco blinks. As seen over the countertop, the top of Gully's head turns slightly.

Paco bursts out laughing, startling Bobby and Danny. Paco's laughter fills the quiet store. He closes and opens the cigarette cabinet again.

COMPUTER VOICE

Thank you for.....SMOKING!

Paco laughs and continues to open and close the door. Bobby and Danny turn back to face the window. Together they look outside, silently wishing they were anywhere else in the world.

CLOSE ON the big clock on the wall--it's a couple of minutes after nine. Paco's laughter slowly FADES.

MONTAGE SET TO DOWNBEAT BLUES

A soda truck is parked outside. Bobby and Danny struggle into the Zippie's with heavy steel soft drink cannisters, dragging them through the store to the back room. They eye Paco as they stumble past the counter.

Paco lights a cigarette. He leans against the magazine rack and runs his thumb down the selection, tugging out an issue of "Guns and Ammo". He reads, ignoring Bobby and Danny as they bust their asses nearby.

Behind the counter, Gully sits on his milk crate staring up at the hot dog warmer. A heat lamp makes the rotating hot dogs sizzle. Gully stares into the heat lamp, hypnotized.

EXTRA CLOSE ON the lazily spinning hot dogs. Their deep red surfaces pucker and sweat viscous juices under the heat lamp.

Gully stares, not blinking. His face tics.

Bobby and Danny notice Gully's strange preoccupation. They glance uneasily back at Gully as they manhandle their soda cannisters into the back room.

CLOSE ON the clock on the wall. It is now twelve noon.

In the corner of the store, Paco plays a mean game of "NARC". He gets mad and whacks the machine with his fist. A CUSTOMER with an armful of burritos glances over at him. Paco sneers and turns the key in the machine, starting another game.

A short line of CONSTRUCTION WORKERS stands at the register to pay for their purchases. Bobby and Danny ring them up and distribute lottery tickets. They have to step awkwardly around Gully, the top of whose head still peeks over the counter.

Danny leans over Gully and reaches a pair of tongs into the hot dog warmer. As his tongs close around a hot dog, he glances at Gully and notices the convict is staring at him. Danny freezes, not sure what to do. He looks to Bobby for help.

CLOSE ON the clock--four o'clock.

Outside, Bobby sweeps the parking lot. Paco comes out of the store and stands in the path of Bobby's sweeping. Bobby hesitates, then swallows his pride and sweeps around the man. Paco doesn't acknowledge the boy's existence.

Paco stares thoughtfully at the woods across the road from the Zippie's store. He takes a last puff on his cigarette and flicks it where Bobby just swept. Paco absently chews a thumbnail and keeps staring at the woods.

CLOSE ON Bobby, his head down, sweeping. Anger festers in his eyes. He crushes out the cigarette and sweeps it up.

We see the Zippie's store from the parking lot. A handful of cars and pickups disappear as afternoon DISSOLVES into early evening. A blue sky moon appears behind Zippie the Elf.

CLOSE ON Zippie's eyes, clocking back and forth.

CLOSE ON the clock on the wall. The final seconds till seven o'clock tick away under the sweep hand.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

Bobby and Danny stand behind the counter at the register. Gully still sits on his milk crate, though now he is asleep and snoring softly, his head propped between his knees.

Paco sits on the back counter next to the Tsunami machine, his face buried behind a copy of "True Detective" magazine.

A pretty BLACK WOMAN--the only customer in the store--steps up to the counter with a three liter bottle of soda.

BLACK WOMAN

Hi Bobby...Danny! I didn't know
you two worked here!

Bobby and Danny force grins on their faces. They nod.

DANNY

Hi, Ms. Humphrey...

BOBBY

Hi, Ms. Humphrey...

(mumble)

If you could maybe call me Bob...

From the back counter, Paco eyes the woman and licks his lips. He mutters something in Spanish, barely audible.

Bobby shoots a nervous glance at Paco, then rings up the soda on the cash register. Ms. Humphrey is staring at the sleeping Gully, eyebrows furrowed. She turns back to the boys.

MS. HUMPHREY

(good-natured)

I hope you remember you've got a civics test Monday. I expect A's!

In the background, Paco snorts. Bobby blushes. Ms. Humphrey glances at Paco as Bobby hands her her change. Paco licks his lips at her again.

Ms. Humphrey turns back to the boys, confused. Bobby is crimson. Danny slides her bagged soda toward her and shakes his head, helpless and apologetic. There is an awkward beat.

MS. HUMPHREY

Alright, boys... See you in class.

Danny gives her a limp wave. The door chimes as she exits the store. Paco says something louder in Spanish as she departs, verbally chasing her out the door.

The store is quiet. Suddenly, Bobby whams shut the cash register, startling Danny and awakening Gully.

BOBBY

(to Paco)

DO YOU WORK HERE, OR WHAT?!--

Bobby blurts this out angrily, but with a pubescent squeak. His cheeks blush red and he lowers his eyes.

Paco lowers his magazine and stares evenly at Bobby. Gully turns on his milk crate and stares at Bobby, too. With great difficulty, Bobby forces himself to continue.

BOBBY

You've been here ten hours, and you haven't done anything. You haven't made any effort to help out at all, or do any work. Not only that, but you treat the customers like... You treat 'em bad.

(swallow)

Danny and I won't put up with that.

Bobby glances at Danny for moral support, and finds none. Danny stares at him wide-eyed.

Paco and Gully continue to stare at Bobby.

PACO

Why don't you get us fired, man?

BOBBY

We could do that. We've got seniority, and we cou...we could do that.

Paco closes his magazine and sets it beside him. He slides off the counter. He sticks his head under the Tsunami machine, flicks open the valve and drinks from the Dr. Pepper dispenser like it's a water fountain. He wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

Paco saunters across the store to join the others behind the customer counter. A faint smile is on Paco's face. He strolls right up to Bobby, who shrinks back a little.

Paco turns and points Bobby's attention to Gully. Paco's voice is quiet and his accent is thick.

PACO

I bet you wonder what he's been staring at all day... Right?

Bobby and Danny eye Gully. Danny nods.

PACO

Ask him. Ask Gully what he sees.

The boys hesitate. Paco nods them to ask.

DANNY

Um...Gully, what do you...see?

Gully's face tics. He draws his knees closer.

GULLY

Virgin Mary...

Bobby and Danny nod idiotically. Paco folds his arms.

PACO

Wherever there's a bright light, Gully sees the Virgin Mary. That's why he likes the sun, car headlights, fires... He likes fires. Used to set them all over Southside before he got caught--just to see the Virgin Mary...

Gully's face tics. Bobby and Danny shrink back. Paco smiles.

PACO

Ask me why I'm in prison, Mr. Seniority. It's pretty dramatic. It got me on "America's Most Wanted".

(sigh)

They got some gringo to play me. He wasn't half as pretty as I am.

Bobby swallows hard. Through the window we see the prison van pull into the lot. Bobby and Danny are relieved to see it.

The van's horn honks. Gully shuffles outside. Paco follows him, turning back to Bobby and Danny.

PACO

See you on Monday, high school boys.

Bobby and Danny watch numbly as the two convicts approach the van. The prison guard pats them down before they board it.

Danny turns to Bobby.

DANNY

What are you--a lunatic?

BOBBY

BITE ME! Where were you to back me up?

(sarcastic)

"I got power, autonomy," you said.

"Zippie's is our little fiefdom!"

Bobby angrily rifles around behind the counter, looking for something. Danny slumps where he stands, deflating.

DANNY

Man, let's just get out of here.
It's time to go home.

BOBBY

Not till the next shift shows.
That's the job, remember?

Bobby finds what he's looking for--a bottle of spray cleaner and paper towels. He strides to the Tsunami machine and wipes the Dr. Pepper dispenser vigorously, disinfecting all trace of where Paco touched it with his lips.

DANNY

So...what do we do now..? We can't
change shifts and still go to school.
(low)
Do we quit..?

Bobby glares at Paco's "True Detective" magazine on the counter beside him. He picks it up and lets it hang at his side.

BOBBY

I like this job--better'n artificial legs.
And I need the money for my Corvette...
This is our fiefdom, right? It's ours.
(forcing courage)
Guy's not gonna scare me into quitting.

Danny gives an unsure nod. Bobby walks to the magazine rack with the "True Detective". As he reaches to place Paco's magazine back in the rack, a second magazine falls out of the first and smacks on the floor.

Bobby picks up the previously hidden magazine. It is the current issue of "Forbes", with cover stories like "How to Make the Most of Your Tax Shelter". It looks well-thumbed.

Bobby studies the copy of "Forbes", surprised. He glances up at Danny, who is likewise intrigued by Paco's reading material.

EXT. STATE PRISON--NIGHT

A full moon hangs over the Goochland Correctional Facility. Yellow light glows from the prison's barred windows.

INT. PRISON CELL BLOCK

We track slowly down a tier of closed, barred cells. A PRISON GUARD clicks briskly down the aisle, his keys jingling.

GUARD
FORM A LINE!--

With a massive whirr-clunk, the cell doors all slide open. Dozens of CONVICTS step out of their cells, turn sideways, and form a line down the aisle.

The listless convicts wait in place, mumbling to themselves. They wear prison-issue shower robes and slippers. We track in on Paco in the middle of the line. He wears his hairnet and chews gum fast. He looks cool and cocky, and speaks to no one.

INT. PRISON SHOWERS

The men shower in a long, ugly, white tile room. Hoots and laughter echo off the tile. Steam hangs in the air.

Paco lathers under his arms and glances up at the taller men showering on either side of him. He grins.

PACO
Shit, maa-an--day work-release is a dream.
Free beer, free food, free cigarettes,
and the bitches that come in...I-yi-yi...

Paco glances at the two men to see if they're listening. They don't seem to be. He plows ahead, grinning.

PACO
I got it on, man--twice. This fine
mamasita come in to buy lottery tickets?
(nodding)
We did the wild thing...um-um-um!

Paco does a little "wild thing" dance under the shower head. The big man to his left pays no attention. Instead, the man is frowning at the tiny sliver of soap he has left in his hand.

PACO
She said she gonna tell all her friends...
Then later, I got it on with my old lady,
but that don't really count. She gonna
come by for me once every shift...

The big man drops his tiny sliver of soap and brusquely grabs Paco's full bar. Paco blinks, then tries to sound cool.

PACO
Yeah, man... Go ahead...

Paco stands absently scratching at his chest as the other man lathers. Paco stares at the wall, deflated.

The hoots and laughter in the shower die, almost like someone pulled the plug on them. Now the only sound is the whoosh of the shower nozzles. The big man next to Paco glances over his shoulder. He quickly turns back to face the wall.

Standing in the shower room entrance is a black man with a scar on his face. We immediately recognize him as being the angry convict with the scythe who was featured earlier.

The man wears a fuchsia shower robe, fancy and obviously not prison-issue, with the name "LeVon" hand-embroidered on the breast. The man, LEVON, coolly looks around. His eyes settle on Paco.

Paco is the only man under the showers not to have glanced back at LeVon. Paco swallows and stares at the tile wall, intensely aware of who is now moving to stand behind him.

LEVON

You can't shower without soap, Paco.

Paco scratches at his neck and still doesn't turn around. LeVon pulls up his sleeve, reaches to take the bar of soap from the big man, then hands it to Paco. Paco gives a little nod.

LEVON

So--how was your first day at my job?

PACO

Went good, LeVon.

LeVon slips out of his fancy robe and hands it to a nearby convict. Naked, he takes a step forward and enters the shower stream, stands six inches behind Paco. Paco tenses.

LEVON

Wrong answer.

(leaning closer)

Hold on to that soap...

Through superhuman effort, Paco sets his jaw into the cocky sneer we saw earlier. He lathers vigorously and tries hard to sound firm. We realize that his Hispanic accent has vanished.

PACO

Look, man...I'm sorry I got the job instead of you. You been here a lot longer than I have, and you deserve it. Blame it on Affirmative Action... You're black, and the demographics said they needed a Latino...

LeVon's expression darkens.

LEVON

I don't give a shit about demographics. I live to sell--be it guns or candy bars. Your job is my job--I'm next in line.

PACO

Why me? Why not Gully?--

LEVON

You look easier to scare.

The water pounds down on Paco's head. He stares at the white tile inches from his face.

PACO

It would look bad if I quit. If I see this thing through, the parole board might give me early release...

(mumble)

I want out of this dump. I won't quit.

The men in the shower room are quiet. Paco inhales and waits for something to happen.

LeVon smacks Paco in the back of the head, cracking his forehead against the tile. He grabs Paco's hair and cranks his head back so the shower is blasting him in the face. A cry of bloodlust goes up among the inmates, echoing off the tile.

PACO

GUARD!--

The inmates laugh. Paco flails his hands, not fighting back, but just trying to get LeVon to let go. LeVon grins.

LEVON

Que pasa, little man?

Paco chokes on the shower spray as he yells.

PACO

GUARD!!--

Finally, somewhere a door clunks open. LeVon lets go of Paco's hair. A GUARD sticks his head into the shower room.

GUARD

Quiet down and finish your showers!

The men turn away from Paco and shuffle back under their shower nozzles. Many snicker to themselves.

LeVon remains behind Paco. He pokes a sharp finger into the small of Paco's back.

LEVON

I don't care whether you quit, are
fired, or get run over by a beer truck.
I want my job.

LeVon turns away. Paco stands motionless under the pounding water, eyes on the floor. He closes his eyes tight.

Surrounded by the bigger, tougher inmates, Paco looks like what he is--humiliated...out of place...low man on the totem pole.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MALL DEPARTMENT STORE--DAY

CLOSE ON a socked foot being placed in a foot sizer. A man's hand dips into frame and thunks the width bar into place.

SALESMAN (O.S.)

Size...ten. All-righty...

We are in the shoe department of a J.C. Penney's. The SALESMAN stands up and disappears into the back room. Bobby immediately pulls his foot out of the sizer and slips it into his old shoe. He looks self-conscious, glances left and right for witnesses.

Bobby's mother sits down next to him. She watches, puzzled, as he ties his old shoe.

MRS. CREAMER

Why are you putting it back on?
He'll be out with the new one
in just a minute.

BOBBY

I don't like having one shoe off...
It looks retarded.

Bobby hops up and moves over a seat, creating a space between him and his mother.

BOBBY

Geez, Mom--couldn't ya'll have
just lent me the credit card?
I can shop for myself...

MRS. CREAMER

(sharp)

You could pay for it yourself, too.
You've got a job...

BOBBY

I'm saving up for a Corvette...

Bobby's dad appears from behind an orthopedic shoe display. He holds out a Keds Van--a laceless, black and white checker-board boater that went out of style in 1984.

MR. CREAMER

Bobby--um...uh. Bob...
These are only fourteen bucks.
I mean, I know you can't pump air
into 'em or anything, but...

Mr. Creamer offers Bobby the shoe. Bobby just stares up at him as if he was a Martian. Mr. Creamer puts the shoe back.

Mrs. Creamer crosses her arms tight and frowns.

MRS. CREAMER

I can't believe they'd have you
and Danny working with prisoners.
I just...something's wrong with that.

Bobby stares glumly at the floor. His dad comes over and starts to sit down in the empty chair between Bobby and his mother. Bobby glances at him and Mr. Creamer catches himself. He sighs, and sits down on the far side of his wife.

MR. CREAMER

It doesn't sound good to me either.
You can always come back to work
for us, Bob. I think you ought to...
You left us in the lurch when you quit.

BOBBY

I didn't leave you in any lurch!
You don't need three people to run
that store--there's only so many people
in Richmond missing arms and legs!

Mr. Creamer frowns off in the other direction.

MR. CREAMER

Yeah, well--more'n you think, Mister...
(puzzled)

I still can't believe you work with Danny.
You hate to be seen in public with him.

Bobby rubs at the corner of his eye and looks at the floor.
He gives a little shrug. Mrs. Creamer shakes her head and
frowns at her husband. He ignores her.

MR. CREAMER

Why will you work with Danny and not us?

Bobby stares at the floor. Mr. Creamer waits for an answer.

The salesman pops through the curtain carrying a big, colorful
shoebox. He hands the box to Bobby and smiles.

SALESMAN

All the kids are wearing these.

Bobby grins at the shoebox. CUT TO:

CLOSE ON Bobby's old sneakers being tossed into the trash can.

CLOSE ON Bobby's new shoes as he steps into frame wearing them,
checking them out in a mirror. The complex Reeboks Pumps look
like they were just driven off an automobile assembly line.

Mr. and Mrs. Creamer step forward and scrutinize their son's
new footwear. Bobby kneels and vigorously pumps the air
bladder--FOOSH--FOOSH. Bobby grins up at his parents.

BOBBY

Cool beans, huh?! I mean, I'm no
slave to fashion...just, ergonomically
speaking, these are the ones to get.

FOOSH--FOOSH--FOOSH. Mr. Creamer squints at the price tag on
the box. Mrs. Creamer reads over his shoulder and shakes her
head. Bobby vigorously pumps up the other shoe.

BOBBY

What's the uh...optimum number of pumps?

SALESMAN

Make 'em tight. Tight as you want.

(to Bobby's parents)

Funny thing--the little air bladders keep the shoes on as tight as the laces do.

So, it's the style now to pump the shoes way up, and leave the laces untied.

Bobby is listening closely.

MRS. CREAMER

Sounds dangerous...

Bob--if we're going to get these, you consider it an early Christmas present. Remember that in December.

Bobby finishes untying both shoelaces so that they hang loose. He leaps up and nods to his mom, grinning.

INT. MALL CONCOURSE

Mr. and Mrs. Creamer amble side by side through the busy mall. Bobby shuffles a pace behind them, his eyes darting left and right like he's with the Secret Service, and not his parents. His long, untied shoelaces drag the ground.

Mr. and Mrs. Creamer stop at an escalator and look back, waiting for Bobby to catch up to them. Bobby begrudgingly closes the distance. The three board the up escalator.

INT. MALL UP ESCALATOR

The Creamers ride with a handful of other PASSENGERS. Bobby's mom and dad suddenly smile big and wave.

MR. CREAMER

HEY THERE, ALLISON!--

Bobby's head swings around like it's on ball bearings.

Descending toward them on the down escalator is Allison Peabo, a personal resume held in her steel gripper claw. She smiles warmly at the family.

ALLISON

Hi!--Guess what? I just now got a job at the ear-piercing booth!

Bobby and Allison whirr past each other as she talks. Bobby nods and smiles big, his face turning pink.

MRS. CREAMER

That's great, honey!

MR. CREAMER

Hey--maybe you'll sell Bob one of those little guy earrings!--

Mr. Creamer flicks Bobby's earlobe. Bobby cringes. Allison smiles and waves. Bobby faces forward and glares daggers at his dad's back.

CLOSE ON Bobby's feet--he gives the escalator a sharp kick. The fat, untied laces of his new sneakers lie in the grooves of the escalator step.

INT. MALL ESCALATOR LANDING

Mr. and Mrs. Creamer step off the escalator. Behind them, Bobby pines back at Allison as he reaches the landing. He turns to step off and abruptly falls on his face.

Bobby sprawls across the landing, the laces of his left shoe caught in the steps. He gets jerked backward as his shoelace feeds into the machinery. The people behind him have to hop over him to avoid tripping.

CLOSE ON Bobby's shoe--the sneaker itself gets caught in the machinery. Leather squeaks as the shoe wedges tighter and tighter. The escalator shudders and slows. The overworked motor whines.

A murmur goes up from the PEOPLE gathering around the landing. No one knows what to do. Bobby flails his free leg.

Mr. and Mrs. Creamer, still walking, turn upon hearing Bobby yelp. Their eyes go wide and they rush back.

TWO MEN grab Bobby's arms, lifting him. The escalator whines. The men pull, and Bobby's foot comes out of the trapped shoe. As the men lift Bobby to his feet, the escalator grinds forward and the inflated Reeboks Pump POPS like a rifle shot.

INT. MALL LOWER LEVEL

The loud POP echoes through the mall, turning heads everywhere. Allison Peabo stops and turns back, looking for the source of the bang.

INT. MALL UPPER LEVEL

Bobby, in one shoe and one sock, stands amidst a small crowd. He and everyone else stare as what's left of his new sneaker flops back and forth on the treadmill of the escalator.

Bobby suddenly turns and notices Allison on the lower level, staring up at him. Bobby's eyes widen in horror.

EXT. CREAMER'S PICKUP TRUCK--DAY

We look straight down on the bed of the yellow pickup truck. Bobby vaults himself over the bed wall and crashes flat on his back among the scattered arms and legs. He tries to disappear. Tears sparkle in his eyes, and he shuts them.

The truck doors slam and the engine starts. The truck eases forward, giving us a view of Bobby's lower body. On his feet, Bobby wears the checkerboard Keds Vans, the ones that went out of style in 1984. The truck continues on out of frame.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK DRIVING

The Creamer's truck cruises through traffic down an endless stretch of fast food, cineplexes, and Japanese car dealerships. We can't see Bobby, pasted flat against the truck bed.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK CAB

Mrs. Creamer drives. She shakes her head.

MRS. CREAMER

Two hundred bucks down the toilet.

Mr. Creamer glances through the rear window at Bobby, then stares forward, depressed. He and his wife speak in low tones.

MR. CREAMER

Why does he get so embarrassed?--
Lately he acts like he's gonna
actually die of embarrassment...

MRS. CREAMER

It's a stage--he'll get through it.
He's very self-conscious... When he's
the center of attention, he feels like
an ant getting fried under a magnifying
glass. He told me that.

Mr. Creamer chews his lip.

MR. CREAMER

He's embarrassed by us. Me.

MRS. CREAMER

So? He's embarrassed by everything.

Don't take it personally.

(shrug)

Maybe that Zippie's job is the best thing for him... Prisoners and all.

Mr. Creamer considers this. He frowns out the side window.

EXT. RAILROAD CROSSING

The little pickup speeds toward the previously-visited railroad crossing. The brakelights don't even flash. The truck bounces over the rails, sending plastic arms and legs flying into view.

INT. PRISON COMMON ROOM--NIGHT

We track past barred windows and MUSCULAR INMATES working out with weights. We settle on Paco sitting by himself at a table, smoking and staring into a styrofoam cup filled with coffee.

Nearby, a handful of INMATES sit around a big color television, watching a ball game. The men's backs are to Paco--no one in the room pays any attention to him.

The BIGGEST MAN in front of the T.V. grabs the cable box and switches through the channels, complaining about the game. An argument ensues. Paco glances at the men. He takes a long drag off his cigarette and taps the ash into his coffee.

The biggest man holds the cable box over his head, laughing. Several inmates struggle for it. A GUARD ambles over, shaking his head. The channel winds up on C.N.N. Business News.

Paco flicks another ash into his coffee. He glances at the arguing men, then focuses on the T.V. He leans toward the screen with interest, eyes scanning back and forth.

CLOSE ON the television--we TRACK IN on the Dow Jones ticker-tape that scrolls along the bottom of the screen. The screen is occasionally obscured by the men who argue in front of it. Finally, click--the television goes dead.

Paco turns away from the T.V. The guard takes the cable box away from the big inmate and makes everyone sit down.

Paco flicks another ash in his coffee. He gulps it down in three big swallows, then examines the bottom of the cup. He rubs his belly, sighs and waits.

INT. PACO'S CELL

We pull back from the bars to find Paco sitting on his cot rubbing his belly. He leans forward and makes a gagging sound like he's about to vomit. Nothing happens. He gingerly sticks his finger down his throat, and still nothing. He's annoyed.

Paco grabs a full ashtray off the sink and stares at it. He steels himself, then puts it to his lips and inhales the ashes.

Paco sits motionless, his eyes tearing. Suddenly he explodes into coughing, ashes billowing from his mouth.

INT. PRISON CELL BLOCK

We look down the long row of barred cells. A GUARD strides down the aisle, keys jingling. Paco's horrible coughing echoes through the tier.

GUARD

LIGHTS OUT!--

Clunk--most of the overheads go out. One by one, lights go off in individual cells. Paco's coughing finally stops.

As we look down the row of darkened cells, we hear the sounds of inmates settling in for the night. The cell block is silent. Then, offscreen, Paco starts to sneeze.

Paco sneezes violently. He sneezes so loud and so often that one or two lights turn back on in individual cells.

INMATE (O.S.)

BLOW YO' DAMN NOSE, BITCH!--

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD--AFTERNOON

The cutting gang from the prison trims the roadside on a rural hilltop. The men sweat in the hot sun.

The familiar prison van motors up the hill. It approaches the road gang, and the guards wave to each other. LeVon pauses his scything and looks up at the van.

INT. BACK OF PRISON VAN

As we pass the road gang, we see LeVon through the side and back windows, glaring in at us. Paco slouches in his seat until the road gang is left far behind.

Paco and Gully sit next to each other. They wear their Zippie's smocks. Paco's nose is red from sneezing. Gully sits by the window, staring fixedly out at the sun.

Paco turns to Gully. He opens his mouth to say something, but hesitates. When he speaks, his voice is meek and accentless.

PACO

Gully--you've been around a while.
That crap about LeVon raping a guard...
I mean, what's the deal..?

Gully snickers to himself. Paco stares at the man. A beat, and Paco begins to snicker along with him.

Paco's nervous amusement soon trails off, as Gully gives no indication of whether the story is true or not. Gully just keeps snickering and staring at the sun. Paco faces forward and lapses into a deep funk.

PAN TO the sun, bright and hot through the window. The tops of pine trees sweep across the sun as the van speeds along.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD--AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON a bright fireball, flames licking up in slow motion. The fireball streaks the air as it starts to spin around.

We pull back, revealing a flaming baton and the young DRUM MAJORETTE who twirls it.

In slow motion we track down a line of MAJORETTES--all posed and twirling flaming batons. The majorettes wear shimmering blue sequins and white boots, and perform flawlessly. At the end of the line we find Allison Peabo. Allison twirls with her real arm and smiles winningly.

Out of focus in the background behind Allison, we see a boy watching her through a chain link fence.

EXT. FENCE

Bobby stands at the fence, watching. He stands in a patch of high weeds that hide his new Keds boaters. He looks entranced, but miserable.

Danny, dressed in his Zippie's smock, sidles up beside Bobby. Bobby turns away from watching Allison. Danny smoothly slides a tiny paring knife out of his breast pocket for Bobby to see.

DANNY

That little Spanish guy gets it right
in the labonza if he messes with me.

(low)

Whatcha got?

Bobby sniffs and digs in his pocket. He pulls out a roll of quarters and presents it to Danny.

DANNY

What's that for?

BOBBY

If you hold it in your fist when you
punch, it's like having brass knuckles.
It's an old Navy trick. My Dad told me...

Danny stares doubtfully at the roll of coins. Bobby slides it back in his pocket and turns to watch Allison. Danny turns and watches her, too.

DANNY

You're like, Mr. Cardiac Infarction
over this girl--admit it finally.
You want one last glimpse of her before
you and me get killed today! Admit it!

BOBBY

Bite me!-- I'm just intrigued by her,
that's all. She just interests me...

In the distance, the majorettes toss their batons and catch them. Allison's steel arm glints in the sun. Bobby stares at her, and his voice goes quiet.

BOBBY

She attracts so much attention everywhere
she goes. Everybody always looks at her...
She's like a Lamborghini with the left
headlight bashed in...

(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

And her name---Allison Peabo. That's even dorkier than Bobby Creamer. Almost. I don't know how she stands it... People always staring...I pity her.

Bobby trails off. Danny shakes his head.

DANNY

I pity you. You're wigged out.

(quiet)

C'mon--we gotta go to work, I guess.

Bobby turns away and shuffles out of frame with his hands in his pockets, eyes on the ground. Danny follows him. The boys act like they are going to their deaths. In the background, the majorettes toss their flaming batons.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT

The store sits quiet in the afternoon sun. There are no cars in the lot aside from Danny's Le Mans. We hear sweeping, and we see Gully shuffle into frame with a big push broom. Gully pauses to stare up at Zippie the Elf, then continues to sweep.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

The store is ominously quiet. We hear just the hum of the Snowjob machine. Danny stands alone behind the cash register. He cautiously eyes Paco.

Paco stands in the sundries aisle examining a bottle of cough syrup. CLOSE ON the label--"In case of accidental overdose, contact a poison control center immediately."

Paco considers. He shakes his head and slams down the bottle. He glares around the store. His Hispanic accent is strong when he speaks to Danny.

PACO

This place is dead, man! Why they even keep this store open? It's dead!

Danny swallows. He folds his arms across his chest, resting a hand on the breast pocket that contains the knife.

INT. BACK ROOM

Bobby huddles in the storage room, surrounded by cardboard boxes and soda cannisters. He has one of his new Keds in his

lap. Using a magic marker, he colors the white checkerboard squares black--his other shoe is already done.

Bobby glances up upon hearing Paco's raised voice.

PACO (O.S.)

There's no job to do here!--

DANNY (O.S.)

Business dropped off when the new bypass opened... We still get the rush hour customers...

PACO (O.S.)

You people bitch at me to work, but there's nothing to DO!--

Bobby pulls on his finished, all-black shoe. He stands up and slips his roll of quarters into his fist.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

Paco stands at the window looking out into the parking lot. Gully sweeps past outside, passing in and out of frame. Paco lights a cigarette. He looks agitated.

Bobby quietly joins Danny behind the counter. The two glance at each other, nervous.

As seen through the window, a car pulls up outside. Paco blows smoke and hurries to join Bobby and Danny behind the counter.

PACO

I'll run the damn register.

EXT. PARKING LOT

Gully sweeps the front of the store. A MAN gets out of his car and fumbles in his pockets for something.

CLOSE ON the ground at the man's feet--a single, unused wooden match falls on the pavement. The man doesn't notice, and he enters the store. Gully does notice. Gully slowly sweeps toward the match, staring intently at it.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

The lone customer heads for the back of the store. Paco, Bobby, and Danny watch the man from their spot at the register. Paco taps his cigarette ash. Bobby weakly clears his throat.

BOBBY

(low)

You're not s'posed to smoke when
you wait on a customer...

Paco takes a deep drag and grins. He blows smoke out of the side of his mouth at Bobby and Danny. Bobby's eyes glow.

EXT. PARKING LOT

His back to us, Gully sweeps in a beeline toward the gas pumps. He glances nervously over his shoulder, and we see the wooden match sticking out of his mouth like a toothpick.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

The man thunks two cans of motor oil and a packet of Nabs onto the checkout counter. Bobby and Danny watch Paco closely.

Paco picks up a can of oil and squints at it. With painful slowness he punches it in on the cash register.

EXT. GAS PUMP ISLAND

Gully lets his broom smack to the pavement. He runs a finger across the words "Premium Gas" and nods. He yanks the nozzle out of its holster and flips on the pump. Nothing happens. He flips the handle up and down.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

Paco hits the total key, and "\$857.26" appears. Paco blows smoke and scratches at the side of his mouth.

PACO

(casual)

Eight fifty-seven twenty-six...

Bobby and Danny blink. The man chuckles amiably.

MAN

Guess you pressed the wrong button, huh?

Paco picks something off the end of his tongue and examines it. He stares coldly at the customer.

PACO

Eight fifty-seven twenty-six, man.
Cash or check.

The customer is dumbfounded, as are Bobby and Danny. Bobby lets out a little squeak.

EXT. GAS PUMP ISLAND

Gully squeezes the nozzle, but nothing comes out. He studies the intercom, then reaches over and presses the buzzer.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

The buzzer buzzs faintly. Bobby, Danny, and the customer are busy arguing with Paco.

PACO

Yo, man--this is a computer, an' it say eight fifty-seven twenty-six! This jank got like, logic an' circuits an' shit--you tellin' me you know math better than a computer?!

Bobby shakes his head and reaches for the register. Paco blocks him. The customer's mouth hangs open.

MAN

I got two quarts of oil and some Nabs! How could that be eight hundred dollars? You punched it up wrong!--

PACO

(dangerously quiet)

You callin' me a liar? You callin' me a liar, Pendejo?--

BOBBY

Jesus! Calm down!--

The intercom buzzes for the third time. Through the window we can see Gully standing at the pump and pressing the button.

Danny swoops to the pump controls and flips on the power--he doesn't even look out, just keeps his eyes on Paco and the escalating argument.

DANNY

Chill out--nobody's calling you a liar!

EXT. GAS PUMP ISLAND

The premium pump hums and the counter zeroes itself. Gully pulls the hose as far as it will stretch. He squeezes the

nozzle and pours out a couple of gallons of gasoline onto the nearby asphalt. He hums a quiet tune as he works.

Gully neatly hangs up the nozzle and turns off the pump. He takes the wooden match from his mouth and runs his tongue over his lips. Staring down at the wet pavement, he strikes the match off his front teeth.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

The men argue in the foreground, and in the background, through the store window, we see Gully. A ten foot circle of orange flame silently erupts at Gully's feet. Gully stares at it.

PACO

Yo, Mr. Man--you get off on hassling
minorities? Is that your problem?!

The customer throws up his hands and looks around, exasperated. He sees the fire, and his eyes go saucer-wide.

MAN

Holy crap.

Bobby and Danny turn and look. Their eyes go wide. CLOSE ON the emergency pump shut-off as Danny slaps it down hard.

EXT. GAS PUMP ISLAND

Hot orange light flickers across Gully's face. He stares deep into the fire, and his face tics.

CLOSE ON the flames--they flicker in slow motion. We become aware of the vague outline of the Virgin Mary in the flames. Slowly, the Virgin's face becomes distinct. She smiles at us.

Gully blinks. His face breaks into a beatific smile. We hear running feet, and Gully looks up. The trance is broken.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

Bobby hotfoots it across the parking lot, a fire extinguisher banging against his thigh. Danny follows Bobby. Gully stuffs his hands in his pockets and nonchalantly strolls away, not once looking back. We watch this thru the window.

The store's sole customer follows the boys out into the parking lot to watch the action. Paco is left alone inside the store.

Paco stares out at the swirling fire. He sighs deeply and slouches against the cash register, supporting his glum face with his hand. He speaks without any trace of an accent.

PACO

Now that's how you lose a job.

Through the window we watch Bobby and Danny spray their extinguishers in a panic. Gully keeps walking to the highway. We tilt up from the swirling fire, up to the blank, blue sky.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY

A police cruiser idles on the shoulder, blue lights spinning. TWO POLICEMEN ease Gully, hands cuffed behind his back, into the car. They shut the door, leaving Gully to stare out the window at the sun. The sun reflects off the window. Gully's face tics and looks content.

The police car drives away, leaving the frame empty.

EXT. OFFICE PARK--EVENING

The district manager's Pinto is parked in front of a modern office complex. A sign says "Community Wellness Outreach".

INT. OFFICE MEETING ROOM

Bobby, Danny, and Paco wear their Zippie's smocks and sit on one side of a briefing table. Overhead, a loose fluorescent tube flickers on and off. A PRISON GUARD stands by the door.

Ms. Delouche, the Wellness Consultant, leans across the table and gives the three her crinkly-eyed smile. Mr. Cuthbert, the Zippie's district manager, sits next to her.

MS. DELOUCHE

Guys...how do we feel?

Bobby and Danny look at each other. Paco crosses his arms and stares at the tabletop.

MS. DELOUCHE

Let me expand on that... Our important new program has suffered its first major setback. What can we--all of us--do to improve this program, in light of today's unfortunate occurrence?

The three sit in silence. Danny finally stirs.

DANNY

Getting rid of that wigged-out firebug
guy would be a good start...

MS. DELOUCHE

Well, that goes without saying--
Mr. Smalls' replacement takes over
tomorrow. He's very eager to begin.

Paco closes his eyes and rubs his temples like he's in pain.
Mr. Cuthbert eyes Paco, then turns to Bobby and Danny.

MR. CUTHBERT

Are you having any problems, and the like?
Anything we should know about?

Paco gives a mirthless chuckle. Bobby glares at Paco.

BOBBY

(pointing to Paco)

Yeah--I've got a problem with him.

Danny sucks in his breath. Paco slowly raises his head from
his hands and turns to Bobby. Bobby swallows--but this time,
his eyes don't waver from Paco's.

BOBBY

This person is some kind of madman.
Today he tried to charge a guy
a thousand dollars for some Nabs.
I mean, I should explain that in context...

MR. CUTHBERT

What..?

PACO

(sly grin)

Ocho hunnert, chicken leg.
Don't 'xaggerate...

Bobby's face flushes. He leans toward his boss.

BOBBY

You told us they'd be non-violent!
This guy was on "America's Most Wanted"!

DANNY

Guy probably whacked his whole family!

Paco's cockiness evaporates. The truth is about to come out, and he knows it.

Mr. Cuthbert turns to Ms. Delouche, who is smiling and sorting through papers. Ms. Delouche crinkles her eyes at the boys.

MS. DELOUCHE

I think Mr. Dos...

(glancing at file)

Espadas has played a little prank on you guys. I have his arrest sheet here, and...basically, he's in prison for writing bad checks.

Bobby's eyes go wide, as do Danny's. The boys stare at Paco. Paco scratches at his forehead, eyes sheepishly on the table. Ms. Delouche studies the sheet.

MS. DELOUCHE

It was a first offense. Mr. Dos Espadas bought and sold real estate in Northern Virginia. He overextended himself a bit on one particularly large deal...

(thumbing thru file)

Umm... He worked as prison librarian... Commended as a model inmate...

Ms. Delouche nods at Paco, who shoots her a quick, weary smile. Bobby and Danny glance at each other, slack-jawed.

BOBBY

You almost scared us into quitting.

(voice squeaking)

Librarian? Son of a bitch!--

Paco rubs at his eyebrow with his middle finger, suavely flipping off the boys. Danny slaps his hands on the table.

DANNY

I was only scared of you 'cause I thought you were crazy!--

MS. DELOUCHE

Guys, guys!--

(soothing)

It's okay to act out--I just have to supervise it...

Bobby stands up and points a finger at Paco.

BOBBY

He should be fired!

Paco looks up hopefully at Mr. Cuthbert. A beat. Mr. Cuthbert gives a flat shake of his head.

MR. CUTHBERT

No.

Paco sags visibly, as do Bobby and Danny.

EXT. OFFICE PARK--NIGHT

Bobby, Danny, and Mr. Cuthbert stand next to the company Pinto. They watch the familiar prison van roll into the night, Paco its only passenger.

Bobby shakes his head. Danny boots at some loose gravel.

MR. CUTHBERT

I couldn't speak freely in there...
Look--I don't give a shit for convicts,
and the like. And I don't give a shit
for wellness, whatever the hell that means.
If it was up to me, you know...

Mr. Cuthbert mimes pulling the switch on the electric chair.

MR. CUTHBERT

But I'll tell you one thing--the store
where you two work wouldn't be open now
if it weren't for this pilot program.
That location hasn't turned dollar one
for Zippie's since the new bypass went in.
It's been like throwing money down a hole.
(conspiratorial)

That's why it's a perfect location for
convicts to work at--our company gets to do
a civic-minded thing, and if it flops big...
nobody knows about it.

Bobby and Danny consider this. Mr. Cuthbert unlocks his car.

MR. CUTHBERT

So...as long as the pilot program lasts,
your jobs last. If the program works,
we look good. So we gotta make do with
the guys the experts send us...
I mean, the arsonist guy was a fluke.
They can't all be that bad. Right?

Bobby and Danny are deadpan, unconvinced. Mr. Cuthbert straightens the magnetic Zippie the Elf logo on his door, then climbs into his car.

MR. CUTHBERT

Right?

BOBBY AND DANNY

Right...

INT. PRISON COMMON ROOM--NIGHT

We pan across a blank cinderblock wall until we come CLOSE ON a shirtless LeVon hanging upside-down in the frame. He wears earphones--he listens to a basic Spanish lesson on his Walkman.

INSTRUCTOR (V.O.)

¿Donde esta la tienda?....Where is the store?

LEVON

¿Donde esta la tienda?

As the lesson continues, we pull back to find LeVon in the prison weight room. He hangs from a pair of gravity boots and talks to himself in Spanish.

A GUARD walks into frame. He hands a Zippie's smock to LeVon.

GUARD

Here y'ar, Johnson.

LEVON

Gracias.

We turn upside-down with LeVon as he shrugs into his new uniform. He looks it over, smiling, and murmurs to himself.

LEVON

La tienda es mia.

EXT. BUZZ'S BARBER SHOP--DAY

The shop is old, its pea-green paint leaded and peeling. The barber pole sign turns in fits and starts.

Mr. Creamer and Danny walk into frame, Bobby dragging his feet and taking up the rear. He stops dead and pleads with his dad.

BOBBY

Why do we come here? I hate this place.

MR. CREAMER

Are you kidding? Buzz is the best.
He won the Bronze Star in Korea!
He stormed enemy pillboxes!

Bobby peers in through the glass, unimpressed. His dad frowns.

MR. CREAMER

It's either this or the Flowbee.

Mr. Creamer enters the barber shop. Bobby shakes his head and closes his eyes. He glances up the street for witnesses, then reluctantly enters the shop.

INT. BUZZ'S BARBER SHOP--LATER

Mr. Creamer thumbs through a magazine and waits on the bench. There are four barber chairs, but only TWO BARBERS--one young, and one old. The young barber works to appease a crying two year-old BOY who sits on a booster chair shaped like a horse. The boy's MOTHER hovers with a camera, flashing pictures.

Bobby slouches in the old barber's chair, a sheet tucked in his collar and an issue of Forbes in his hands. Buzz, the old barber, stands behind him dangling a buzzing razor. Buzz looks like Khrushchev. He has had a laryngectomy--he talks through an amplifier he presses to his throat.

The old barber grins and makes faces over at the little boy, trying to get him to stop crying. He presses his amplifier to his throat and says soothing things, but they come out garbled and scary. The little boy cries harder.

Bobby rolls his eyes. He stares deadpan out the window.

Looking out through the plate glass, we see a beautiful young couple stroll past on the sidewalk. The flawless blonde woman and man, deep in perfect love, move in slow motion through golden sunlight that doesn't quite penetrate the murky shop.

CLOSE ON Bobby--he is somber and quiet, a million miles away. Buzz's electric razor dangles near Bobby's ear, but Bobby doesn't notice it. Buzz continues to make faces.

Mr. Creamer lowers his magazine and addresses Bobby over the screaming and buzzing. Bobby snaps out of his trance.

MR. CREAMER

Bob--before I forget... Your Mom and I are going out of town next week. There's a brace and limb trade show in Paducah, Kentucky. We'll be gone four days...

BOBBY

Yeah? Cool beans.

Behind Bobby, Buzz is so busy helping the other barber pacify the little boy that he's not watching the razor in his hand. The razor drifts nearer Bobby's scalp, skimming off a few hairs. Bobby's eyes nervously follow the razor.

BOBBY

Buzz...?

MR. CREAMER

I was thinking--maybe you could keep the store open for us while we're gone. Just part-time hours...after school...

BOBBY

I've already got a job, Dad. Buzz?!

Bobby tentatively puts up a hand to protect his head. Buzz talks to the little boy, his box to his throat. He turns to face Bobby, and his razor mows a swath into Bobby's hair.

BOBBY

Buzz!--

Buzz and the younger barber get real quiet. They look at each other. Buzz clicks off the razor. Even the crying boy quiets down some. Mr. Creamer puts down his magazine and stares.

Bobby settles back in his seat and glares straight ahead. He works to control his breathing. Buzz leans over and runs a thick finger across the swath in Bobby's hair. He shakes his head glumly, and puts his amplifier to his throat.

BUZZ (FILTERED)

Gonna take a crew cut to fix that.
Real sorry about that...

Buzz's electronic voice is hard to decipher. Silence in the shop now. All eyes are on Bobby as he stews.

YOUNG BARBER

(quiet)

Dad says only way to fix it is a crew cut.
He apologizes... I'm sure it'll be--

BUZZ (FILTERED)

--Gratis.

The young barber looks at Buzz, confused.

BUZZ (FILTERED)

Gratis.

Gratis.

The young barber shakes his head. Buzz fiddles with the gain control on his amplifier and presses it to his throat.

BUZZ (FILTERED)

Gratis.

Gra--tis.

YOUNG BARBER

Gratis. Yeah...the haircut's free.

Bobby drops his chin to his chest. A beat of silence.

BOBBY

KILL ME ALREADY!!--

Everyone is startled. The little boy wails again.

INT. BOBBY'S BEDROOM MIRROR

Bobby kicks open the door and storms into his room. He stands before his dresser mirror, runs a hand across his boot camp haircut. He delivers a couple of savage kicks to the dresser.

As Bobby glowers at his new hair, a faint knock sounds on his open door. Bobby ignores it. Mr. Creamer shuffles into the room and stands beside Bobby.

We can see Mr. Creamer in the mirror--he has a crew cut as well. He examines his scalp, and Bobby glares at him in pregnant silence. Mr. Creamer looks at his son.

BOBBY

What's your little point?--

MR. CREAMER

(quiet)

I'd never purposely embarrass you.
Please know that.

Bobby's dad wanders out of the bedroom. Bobby sullenly watches him in the mirror as he exits. He goes back to glaring at his own haircut.

INT. PRISON CELL BLOCK

We look down rows of dull steel bars in the dreary cell block. The familiar guard strides down the aisle, his keys jingling.

GUARD
FOUR, FIVE, SIX, EIGHT, NINE, AND
FOURTEEN! FORM A LINE!--

A handful of cell doors slide open. Six inmates take a step out of their cells and turn to form a line down the aisle.

One of the inmates is Paco. Paco is dressed in his Zippie's smock. Other inmates wear uniforms for McDonald's, Long John Silver's, and Chucky Cheese. The men are sullen.

EXT. PRISON MOTOR POOL--DAY

The prison van idles in the compound near the big steel door. The van is almost full--the last two or three inmates wait in line to climb aboard. Shotgun-toting guards stand nearby.

The driver slowly walks the length of the van, running a mirror on a stick underneath the vehicle. He checks for stowaways.

INT. BACK OF PRISON VAN

Paco sits by the window in the back. A big, ugly INMATE in an IHOP uniform sits beside him on the aisle. Paco looks nervous.

LeVon appears in the van door. He works his way down the aisle to the back. He motions for the big, ugly inmate to surrender his seat. The big man does, and LeVon sits next to Paco.

LeVon wears his Zippie's uniform smock. He grins and buffs his "New Employee" badge. Paco stares at his knees and swallows hard.

LeVon finally turns and stares at Paco, no emotion showing on his face. Paco shrinks smaller.

LEVON
What's the biggest-selling Snowjob flavor?

Paco shakes his head. LeVon looks coldly disgusted.

LEVON

Cherry. Followed by cola and lemon-lime.
(growl)

It's not a trick question, bitch...

LeVon faces forward. Paco looks confused as well as scared.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S IN & OUT

The afternoon sun shines bright on the quiet store. Danny's Le Mans pulls into the lot.

Bobby and Danny climb out of the car. Bobby wears an R-Braves baseball cap over his crew cut. He slips into his uniform smock and zips it. Danny is already wearing his smock.

BOBBY

Nobody messes with us anymore.
Nobody lies to us and pushes us around
and makes us look stupid. Right?

Danny gives a firm nod and slams his car door. The boys head for the store. Danny stops.

DANNY

But...on the off-chance the new guy
is some kinda stone killer,
we're gonna just quit. Right?

Bobby holds open the door for Danny. Inside the Zippie's, two middle-aged female EMPLOYEES prepare to go off shift. Bobby nods to them, and they wave.

BOBBY

(aside to Danny)

They don't send us stone killers--
just jerk-offs who write bad checks.
Nobody's scaring us out of here.

Danny nods. He eyes Bobby's baseball cap.

DANNY

Anyway--what's with the hat?

BOBBY

Bite me.

Danny is taken aback. He and Bobby enter the store. As we watch this from the parking lot, the broad side of the prison

van pulls in, obscuring our view. The van's Department of Corrections logo fills the frame.

LeVon is first out of the van. He stands tall with the sun behind him, partially silhouetting his face. He takes a deep, satisfied breath. He looks around, smiling.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ZIPPIE'S--LATER

We follow LeVon as he peruses the aisles of the little store. Occasionally he examines an item or runs a finger over a shelf, checking for dust. This activity engrosses him.

Bobby and Danny stand behind the register. Danny keeps an eye on LeVon, the top of whose head we can see over the aisles. There are no customers in the store.

Bobby folds his arms and glares at Paco, who stands by the window and stares into the parking lot. Paco glances nervously over his shoulder at LeVon and catches Bobby glaring at him. He glares back.

PACO
(thick accent)
Don't eyeball me, chicken leg...

Bobby swallows. His glare doesn't waver.

BOBBY
Screw you, librarian.

The two glare at each other for a beat longer. Paco glances at LeVon again. Paco gives a tired sigh and goes back to looking forlornly out the window.

LeVon finishes his tour of the store and approaches Bobby and Danny at the customer counter. LeVon carries a big bag of dyed pistachios. His face goes from deadpan to friendly--he gives the two a warm smile and extends his hand to shake.

LEVON
Hi--LeVon Johnson. We'll be working together. And you are..?

The boys blink. They awkwardly shake LeVon's hand.

DANNY
D-Danny Kelbick and Bobby Creamer...

BOBBY

Bob.

Paco watches the introductions, suspicious. LeVon opens the bag of pistachios and pours them into an empty Super Tsunami cup. He drops a five dollar bill on the counter and grins.

LEVON

I'm paying for these, by the way. Um...
Could I borrow a Magic Marker and a piece
of paper...and maybe some Scotch tape?

Bobby and Danny nod, confused. Bobby rings up the pistachios. Danny finds the paper and marker pen. LeVon prints a sign.

LEVON

Fellas--I am so happy to be here.
My last employment was policing weeds
along the edge of the highway.
Honest work, but not particularly
stimulating. But now--let me tell you:
I--love--retail. I couldn't be happier.

LeVon finishes his sign and blows on the paper to dry the ink. He looks up at the boys. Enthusiasm sparkles in his eyes.

LEVON

I bet you wonder what I'm doing...

The boys nod. Bobby shoots a quick glance at Paco.

LEVON

Well--I'll tell you. I have a lot of
experience turning around unprofitable
retail operations--making them into cash
cows. Do you know what "cash cow" means?

Bobby and Danny nod. LeVon smiles and tapes his sign to the cup of pistachios. He holds it up for the boys to see.

The sign says "FREE PISTACHIOS!!--Eat all you want...drop the shells anywhere." LeVon places the cup by the front door.

LEVON

This is impromptu market research. With
this, we'll study customer traffic patterns.
Provided we have any customers, that is.
At the end of the day, the aisle littered
with the most pistachio shells denotes the
heaviest floor traffic. With that data--

Paco's interest is piqued. He nods appreciatively.

PACO

(heavy accent)

--You rearrange your stock accordingly.
Yeah...nice.

Paco trails off--all eyes are on him. LeVon stares him down.

LEVON

Yeah. Now--drop the fake accent, once
and for all. We're gonna play straight
with each other from here on in.

Paco drops his eyes to the floor. Bobby and Danny look from
one convict to the other, surprised. LeVon turns to the boys.

LEVON

Anyway--the Zippie's in downtown Beirut
turns more profit than this joint.
We can change that--we can turn it around.
(quiet)
What do you think? Sound good?

Bobby and Danny glance at each other.

BOBBY

Well...y-yeah. Yeah.

Danny nods. LeVon smiles.

LEVON

Good. We start by hooking more customers.
We offer them a special deal on their
favorite, best-selling item...
(spreading his hands)
Buy two lottery tickets, get one free.

Danny's eyebrows furrow. He shakes his head.

DANNY

Oh...I don't think we can do that.

LeVon stares blankly at Danny.

LEVON

Well anyway--I got lots of calls to make.
Is there a phone in the stockroom?

DANNY

Um...ya'll definitely aren't supposed to use the phone. That's a solid rule...

Danny and Bobby shake their heads. LeVon is deadpan. He lets out a long sigh, then addresses everyone.

LEVON

Like I said--we're gonna be straight with each other. I have to do something now to set the tone of our working relationship.

WHAM!--without warning--LeVon springs at Danny, grabbing his head and slamming him face-up on the countertop between them. Danny just has time to let out a frightened little squeak. Bobby and Paco jump.

LeVon pins Danny to the countertop. Bobby comes to life and tries to wrestle his arm off Danny, but LeVon shoves him away. LeVon lowers his mouth to Danny's face so that his lips brush the lashes of Danny's right eye. Danny struggles, helpless.

LEVON

Fat boy, I can suck your eyeball out...
Crush it in my teeth like a grape.
It won't be the first time, either.

Danny lies still. CLOSE ON his eyelashes quivering against LeVon's lips--his iris dilates wide in terror.

Paco's hand closes around a heavy Jerry's Kids jar of pennies on the counter. Bobby notices. Paco speaks without an accent.

PACO

Y-You made your point...
Let him up--he's just a high school kid. You made your point.

LeVon glances up at Paco. Slowly, he stands up straight.

LEVON

High school? He's not even old enough to work here.
(tsk-ing at the boys)
You two are breaking the law!

LeVon lets go of Danny and grins.

LEVON

I like that.

Danny backs away from LeVon. He lets out a shiver.

DANNY
SCREW THIS, MAN!-- I QUIT!--

Danny swings himself over the far counter and edges toward the door. Bobby is right behind him, eyeing LeVon in shock.

BOBBY
Me too--I quit. You're nuts.

LeVon runs a hand over his hair, looking properly repentant. He holds up his hands as if to say "Whoa".

LEVON
Okay, okay...I went too far. Sorry.
Look, I'm really a good guy to work
with. I've got great plans...

Bobby and Danny stand ready to bolt outside. They stand in the electric eye beam. The door chime beeps repeatedly.

DANNY
I'm not a fat boy--and I'm calling
Johnny Law on you, you sick SHIT!--

Danny backs through the door. LeVon calls after him.

LEVON
Your address is in the phone book, right?
I've got friends on the outside, as the
cliche goes... A posse, to be precise.
(drawl)
That's "gang" to you white folk...

Danny and Bobby freeze and glance at each other. LeVon motions for the boys to come back inside.

LEVON
I appreciate loyalty. I reward it.
I promise I'll be good to work with.
For all three of you...provided you
don't threaten my job here. Comprende?

LeVon shoots a hard grin at Paco, then slides the big jar of pennies back where they're supposed to be. Paco swallows. LeVon motions again for the boys to come back inside. They reluctantly do so. LeVon heads for the stockroom.

Paco, Bobby, and Danny stand together, not knowing what to do with themselves. LeVon turns back to Bobby and frowns.

LEVON

Take off the hat--that's not part
of the uniform...

Bobby slowly removes the hat, revealing his crew cut. He turns pink and looks miserable. The others don't notice.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S--TWILIGHT

A big moon glows in the darkening sky. In the empty parking lot, Danny listlessly drags a push broom over the asphalt.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

Bobby stands at the cash register. On the other side of the counter, Paco straightens the magazines in the magazine rack. As Paco works, Bobby watches him. LeVon is nowhere in sight.

Paco glances up at Bobby, and the two stare at each other. They both drop their eyes. Paco speaks quietly, no accent.

PACO

I'm sorry... Alright?
Stop with the bad vibes already.

Bobby glances over his shoulder, checking around for LeVon.

BOBBY

Danny and me were here before you were.
We shouldn't have to be pushed around
by a bunch of criminals. It's not right.

PACO

I treated you rough 'cause I'm trying
to make my time as frictionless
as possible. I've got to be like
the others to fit in with them.

BOBBY

That's bull--Gully didn't treat us bad.

Paco looks a little sheepish. He hesitates.

PACO

Okay...I treated you rough 'cause I've
been the low man on the totem pole for
sixteen months now. I'm a white-collar (MORE)

PACO (CONT'D)
inmate in a blue-collar jail, and anyone
who wants to make me eat shit can pretty
much get away with it.

(sneer)
I treated you bad 'cause I could
get away with it. And it felt good.

Bobby stares, surprised by Paco's honesty--he appreciates it.
Paco checks for LeVon before he continues.

PACO
Anyway...you and Danny should quit.

BOBBY
We were here first.

PACO
LeVon's here now. Go find yourselves
safer jobs--like asbestos removal...

Through the plate glass we see the Corrections van trundle in
for its pick-up. Paco sees it and drifts toward the stockroom.

PACO
Please--just quit. It's not worth it.

INT. ZIPPIE'S STOCKROOM

LeVon sits at a desk in a tidied-up corner of the back room.
Cardboard boxes and steel soda cannisters surround him. He
wears Bobby's R-Braves cap. He presses a phone to his ear.

There is a light knock on the stockroom door. Paco calls
through it softly. LeVon ignores him.

PACO (O.S.)
LeVon...? Van's here...

LEVON
(into phone)
I need all of that by tomorrow...
Especially the banner. Can you do it?
(nod)
Great, perfect. Thanks a lot.

LeVon hangs up. He has been doodling on a notepad all this
time--the pad is covered with notes and sketches of banners,
retail displays, etc. He hides the pad behind some boxes.

EXT. PARKING LOT

The prison van blows its horn. Paco exits the store, followed by LeVon. LeVon still wears Bobby's baseball cap.

LeVon turns to proudly survey the glowing Zippie's, fists on his hips. Paco hurries to the prison van, which keeps blowing its horn. LeVon is unruffled.

A meager pile of pistachio shells is bunched on the asphalt where Danny has swept them. LeVon studies the pile.

LEVON

Where'd you find the most shells?

Danny shrugs. Behind him, a car drives into the parking lot and pulls up in front of the store.

DANNY

Maybe a handful by the frozen burritos
and the Tsunami machine...

LeVon chews his lip and nods. He slaps Danny on the back, inadvertantly making him jump.

LEVON

Outstanding. Get a good night's sleep.
Things are gonna happen tomorrow...

LeVon strides to the van. Danny stares sullenly at his back.

The van pulls away. As soon as it is out of sight, Danny lets his broom drop to the pavement. He jogs to the store, but slows when he sees the parked car. CLOSE ON the handicapped license plate--it says "ALLISON".

Danny peers inside the store. Bobby is nowhere in sight. The top of Allison Peabo's head shows over the back aisle.

DANNY

Spo...

Danny nods to himself. He walks around the corner of the Zippie's and sits down out of sight. He checks his watch, cradles his chin in his hands and waits.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

Behind the counter, Bobby squats on the milk crate where Gully sat. Bobby cradles his chin in his hands, deep in a blue funk.

Allison Peabo shoots a nervous glance around the store, then thunks a big box of Stayfree Minipads onto the countertop. Bobby huddles on his crate, his back to her--he can't see her, and she can't see him.

Allison looks around impatiently, seeing nobody.

ALLISON

Hello?--

Bobby is startled and stands up quickly. When he sees Allison the blood drains from his face.

Allison is likewise surprised, and a little dismayed. She takes her hand away from the Stayfree box and turns pink.

ALLISON

Bobby! I didn't know you...worked here...

Bobby forces a nervous smile.

BOBBY

Uh, yeah... How you doing?

Allison smiles nervously and nods. An awkward beat. Bobby clears his throat and slides the Minipads over to the register.

There is no price tag on the Minipads. Bobby glows pink and turns the box over and over in his hands. He handles the box like it was full of nitroglycerine. Allison glows pink, too.

ALLISON

(mumble)

I didn't, uh, see a price tag on that.
I didn't see a price on any of them...

Bobby keeps turning the box over, hunting for the tag.

BOBBY

Gee, yeah...there should be, uh...
...uh, a SKU number somewhere...

ALLISON

Yeah...

Bobby keeps turning over the box. It slips from his fingers and thunks on the counter. He and Allison are both exquisitely uncomfortable.

BOBBY

Lemme get Danny, ask him--he'll know.

ALLISON

No--let's...not make a big deal...

Allison trails off and swallows. She smiles down at her feet.

ALLISON

God--my face is probably beet red.
I don't know why I get so embarrassed...

Allison smiles shyly up at Bobby. He stares at her, surprised. She has struck a nerve with him.

ALLISON

(opening her purse)

Can't I just give you a ten? Maybe...
you could give me the change later..?

Bobby stares at Allison, lost. Finally he comes to his senses. He stuffs the box in a brown paper bag. He rolls the bag tight shut and holds it out to her.

BOBBY

Today they're free.

Allison takes the bag from Bobby, thankful.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S--NIGHT

Allison pulls open her car door. The paper bag hangs from her gripper claw. She waves to Bobby, who stands in the doorway of the Zippie's.

ALLISON

I like your haircut...
My older brother's in the Marines--
his is like that.

Bobby runs a hand over his crew cut. He smiles big and steps out of the store to wave at Allison.

As Allison pulls her car out of the lot, Danny steps out of the shadows and sidles up next to Bobby, who is watching her go.

DANNY

You sell her beer?

A beat. Bobby nods. Danny grins.

DANNY

You're in, Jack! Spo!--

Bobby grins, and the two shake hands vigorously.

The boys get sober. Danny clears his throat.

DANNY

So--what about our job here..?

Guy threatened to suck out my eyeball!

I mean, I fudged, man--I'm not ashamed
to admit that... Legs are still shaky...

(swallow)

I really just want to quit.

BOBBY

Me too.

(uneasy)

Maybe it's all the same to LeVon.

Maybe he doesn't care if we quit...

Danny looks unsure. Bobby glumly unzips his smock.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL LUNCHROOM--DAY

We TRACK ALONGSIDE two men as they stride through busy high school halls to the crowded lunchroom. One man is a uniformed COURIER carrying a padded envelope and a clipboard. The other man wears a suit and looks to be the PRINCIPAL.

The men weave around tables packed with KIDS. The Principal cranes his neck, then spots who he's looking for. He points.

PRINCIPAL

There they are...the two on the end.

The courier heads for a table in the corner. Bobby and Danny sit at the table, eating their lunches with some other kids.

The courier thunks down his envelope between Bobby's and Danny's lunch trays, surprising the boys. The courier presents the clipboard to Bobby.

COURIER

Sign here, please...

The Principal lingers in the background, curious about the package. The lunchroom din quiets--students turn and look at Bobby and Danny. The two boys are the center of attention.

Bobby averts his eyes from the crowd. He blushes and scribbles his name on the clipboard. Danny studies the padded envelope.

CLOSE ON the envelope being torn open by Danny--two pocket beepers slide out. They are voice pager models, molded in transparent yellow and red plastic.

Bobby and Danny look from the pagers to each other, confused. They cautiously glance around.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD--AFTERNOON

The MARCHING BAND rehearses in uniform. Allison and the drum majorettes march the lead and twirl their flaming batons. The band plays a Sousa-fied version of "We Will Rock You," relying heavily on the little guys in the percussion section.

The band marches out of frame, revealing the background. Behind the chain link fence, Bobby and Danny sit in Danny's parked Le Mans.

INT. DANNY'S CAR

The red and yellow pagers lie atop the dashboard between the two boys. The boys stare off into space, silent.

CLOSER ON Bobby as he stares at Allison--suddenly he blinks and sits taller in his seat.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD

The marching band executes a row-by-row turn with Allison and the majorettes leading the way. Allison is now marching toward Bobby's side of the field. Allison turns her head slightly and stares at Bobby as she marches. They lock eyes.

INT. DANNY'S CAR

Bobby's cheeks start to burn, but he forces himself to keep his eyes on Allison. The moment stretches--time stops. Bobby gives Allison a tentative little smile, a huge effort for him.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD

Allison and her majorettes lead the band toward Bobby. Allison smiles warmly at him, then executes a perfect turn at the fence. The plumed hats of the musicians reflect in the car's windshield.

INT. DANNY'S CAR

Danny turns and stares at Bobby, a crooked grin on his face. The pagers on the dashboard beep loudly. Bobby and Danny jerk. We hear LeVon's recorded voice broadcast out of the pagers.

LEVON'S VOICE

You're late. I know where you live.

Bobby numbly sets his pager back on the dashboard. He reaches into the back seat, finds his Zippie smock and shrugs into it. Danny starts the engine, his lip trembling.

DANNY

I've seen enough gangster movies
to know we're dead.

Danny reaches behind him for his smock and pulls it on, too.

EXT. HIGHWAY

Danny's car slows to make the turn into the Zippie's parking lot. It pulls to a stop in the foreground. We can't see the store at all--just the glowing Zippie's sign reflected in the windshield.

Bobby and Danny stare through the windshield, wide-eyed.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S

The heretofore empty parking lot is now bustling. Cars fill the spaces and a stream of PEOPLE enter the store. A banner hangs under the gable--it says "BUY TWO LOTTO TICKETS, GET ONE FREE!!---(With the Purchase of a Tsunami or Burrito)."

INT. DANNY'S CAR

The boys are amazed.

BOBBY

He's good.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S

LeVon makes his way through the crowd to the Zippie's door. He grins at Bobby and Danny and spreads his arms proudly, as if to say "check this out!"

INT. ZIPPIE'S--LATER

CLOSE ON a big crystal bowl of red and green pistachios placed by the door--a sign tells us they are free. CUSTOMERS' hands chunk into the bowl, grabbing fistfuls of nuts. We pan to...

...Bobby, Danny, and Paco, working fast to ring up customers. The register line snakes the length of the store.

CLOSE ON Danny at the cash register, frantically working the keys and flipping over items, searching for the price tags.

DISSOLVE TO Bobby working the register, punching numbers just as frantically as Danny did--neither boy is used to having this many customers. Bobby tries to tear a roll of quarters with two hands. Paco shows him how to crack the roll one-handed.

DISSOLVE TO Paco working the register--faster than the boys. Paco punches numbers without looking at the keypad, and even manages a smile to the customers.

LeVon stands at the back of the store out of everyone's way. He folds his arms, satisfied. He murmurs to himself.

LEVON

The store is full of people...
La tienda esta llena de gente.

LeVon slips on tiny Walkman headphones. He practices a taped Spanish lesson aloud as he strolls into the stockroom.

CLOSE ON the lottery ticket dispenser--tickets machine-gun out ten at a time. The huge roll of tickets spins and spins...

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

Same angle--the huge roll of tickets is gone. The dispenser coughs out its last ticket, and is now visibly empty.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S--SUNSET

Bobby and Danny, on stepladders, take the lottery ticket banner down from the gable. Inside, LeVon tapes a big sign to the window. The sign says "Out of lottery tickets--Sorry!"

INT. ZIPPIE'S--LATER

Purple twilight shows through the glass. The store is quiet again--devoid of customers, but littered with pistachio shells.

LeVon leads Bobby and Danny on an aisle-by-aisle tour. We track low ahead of them. They hunker down to follow the trail of shells much like a hunter follows the spoor of big game. Paco follows a pace behind them, his hands in his pockets.

LEVON

Well, of course it's against state law to offer discounts on lottery tickets... It's my nature to break the law--that's why I'm in prison.

BOBBY

Yeah, but...once you get caught, you're gonna lose your job...at the very least.

LEVON

I'm not here for the \$4.35 an hour. When it's what you love, it's worth the risk.

This strikes a chord with Bobby. He considers it carefully.

LEVON

You need cojones--whether the money's legal or illegal. That's four-fifths of a good businessman. Cojones.

LeVon mimes grabbing his crotch. Shells crunch under his feet as he moves ahead. Bobby stares at LeVon, deep in thought.

LeVon leads the three to the front aisle of the store, the aisle that is next to the plate glass and is visible from the parking lot. LeVon hunkers and points to the handful of colored shells on the tile floor.

LEVON

Note the thin distribution of shells on this, the window aisle of the store.
(to boys)
What does this tell you?

BOBBY

Very few customers were on the front aisle today...

LEVON

Why?--

BOBBY

Um...because there's nothing on this aisle but Hefty bags, light bulbs...

DANNY

Boring stuff.

LEVON

Sundries. What do we do about that?

Bobby and Danny glance at each other. Danny shrugs.

BOBBY

Oh... We move the best-selling items to this aisle, because it's the front aisle!

LEVON

No. We leave it just like it is...
Why?--

Bobby and Danny don't know. LeVon stares at his watch.

LEVON

Tick, tick, schoolboys...

The boys glance at Paco for help. Paco turns to LeVon.

PACO

Because...Zippie's is a convenience store. People drive here knowing what they wanna buy--they don't come to window-shop.

(addressing boys)

If we stock the high-turnover items way in the back, where people have to hunt for them, chances are they'll see something else they'll impulse-buy before they find what they're looking for...

Paco shoots LeVon a little smile. Bobby and Danny are relieved to be off the hook. A big Ryder truck pulls up outside.

PACO

However--if you really wanna get fancy, you stock by optical weight. That means you arrange items based on size and color, in order to draw the shopper's eye precisely where you want it. (MORE)

PACO (CONT'D)

(to LeVon)

Or, we could random-stock every month.
That way, regular customers would never
get used to where things were...

Paco trails off as LeVon silently puts a finger to his lips.

LEVON

Do you mind?--Let the kids have
their joy of discovery.

The door chime beeps. A raisin-eyed PUNK pulls a handtruck through the door. The handtruck is loaded with cartons of Marlboros. The punk glances around nervously. LeVon waves him to the stockroom in back. Paco and the boys eye the punk.

LeVon steps to the counter. He opens the register and grabs the twenties. He counts out a big stack of money as a SECOND, YOUNGER PUNK wheels in another loaded handtruck.

LEVON

Oh, uh...new rule. The back room
is off-limits from now on.

DANNY

But...the bathroom's back there!--

LeVon points the wad of money at Paco and the boys and grins.

LEVON

Cojones, boys... Help 'em unload.

LeVon disappears into the stockroom. Paco and the boys glance at each other, then turn to the window. Outside they see one more PUNK toss cigarettes and other boxes out of the rented truck, unloading frantically.

FADE OUT.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S--DAY

CLOSE ON Zippie the Elf on his gable--we crane down to watch Bobby and Danny hoist the Lotto banner back into place.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

LeVon tears through the frame, dropping a wrapped bundle of magazines on the counter behind Paco. All around the store are stacked cartons of Marlboros, stacked to the ceiling.

LEVON

Put 'em in the rack. Time to stock
some magazines that actually move.

Paco's eyes widen at the title.

Paco

"Hustler"?--

LEVON

Know your customers...

LeVon sticks his head out the door, yells up to Bobby and Danny
on their ladders.

LEVON

We got selling to do!--

The boys hustle. LeVon tears through the empty store toward
the stockroom. He calls back to Paco.

LEVON

Push the cigarettes. Hard.

INT. ZIPPIE'S STOCKROOM

CLOSE ON LeVon's hand chunking an audio cassette into a tape
deck. He hits the play button.

LEVON (V.O.)

You wanna sell them, play their music...

MONTAGE SET TO "CALL ME THE BREEZE"

The store's parking lot DISSOLVES from empty to bustling full.
The bright sun glints off the cars and trucks.

Inside the store, a huge new roll of Lotto tickets spins,
dispensing at a high rate of speed.

Bobby, Danny, and Paco hurry to keep up with the line of Lotto
ticket CUSTOMERS. Paco works the register. A blinker has been
installed next to the register--a blue light special from an
old K-Mart store.

The light blinks. LeVon's voice booms through a P.A. speaker.

LEVON (FILTERED V.O.)
Attention, shoppers...for the next
fifteen minutes, get a free twelve-ounce
Snowjob or fajita with the purchase of
a carton of Marlboro cigarettes...

The customers murmur. People duck out of line for cigarettes.
Bobby and Danny are impressed.

CLOSE ON bright ribbons of Snowjob thundering into cups thunked
down side by side--cherry, cola, and lemon-lime.

CLOSE ON a carousel full of sweaty fajitas rotating under the
nuclear light of the microwave oven.

Customers buzz the flashing blue aisles. We track through them
to the closed stockroom door--LeVon's eyes stare through the
door's slit window, checking out the crowd.

Inside the darkened stockroom, LeVon grabs his P.A. microphone.
A blue light built into the mike's base flashes.

LEVON (FILTERED)
Buy a carton of Marlboros along with any
smokeless tobacco product and receive a
free Confederate flag, while supplies last...

LeVon grins and waves a tiny Confederate flag on a stick.

CLOSE ON customer's hands grabbing tins of chaw and snuff from
the smokeless shelves out in the store.

CLOSE ON the cigarette cabinet being opened and closed--
customers' hands grab cartons of Marlboros. The cabinet
shrieks "Thank you for.....SMOKING!" over and over again.

LEVON (FILTERED V.O.)
Shoppers...did you know we now carry
a wide assortment of fireworks?
Stock up today--it's July Fourth
somewhere in the world. You can light
those babies with your cigarettes...

A smiling TEENAGER steps into line with an armload of M-80s,
Roman candles, and flying saucers.

We track from back to front along the serpentine line of
customers waiting to pay for their purchases. The line snakes
up and down aisles. The mood is festive, the people happy.

A LARGE MAN thunks down two bottles of Virginia Gentleman in front of Paco and Bobby at the register. The man is beaming.

LARGE MAN

I didn't know ya'll could sell bourbon!

PACO

(aside, to Bobby)

Me neither.

Bobby and Danny pause their frantic pace to stare overwhelmed at the crowd. They glance at each other. A reluctant smile slowly creeps across Bobby's face.

Inside the stockroom, LeVon walks in and out of frame carrying his microphone. He is walled in by boxes of Marlboros.

LEVON (FILTERED)

What's in a Marlboro? Why, only the finest broadleaf tobaccos grown right here in the South. Grown by your neighbors...

QUICK DISSOLVE--the wall of cigarettes is half the size it was before. LeVon steps into frame from the other direction. He flicks his Bic, but it won't light. He spits out his unlit cigarette and inhales deep into the mike.

LEVON (FILTERED)

Mmmmm--nothing beats that first drag...
Except this: Buy four cartons of Marlboros, get the fifth carton free.

QUICK DISSOLVE--the cigarettes are almost gone. LeVon sits atop his desk in the storeroom. He lifts an unopened six-pack of Meister Brau into frame. He clicks on the mike and grins.

LEVON (FILTERED)

Achtung, Damen und Herren:
Cigarettes and beer--they go together like "weiner" and "schnitzel."
So together, let's take a trip down the Rhine...

Outside the busy Zippie's, cars come and go on the old highway. They honk as they pass. We pan over to reveal...

...Danny standing on the road's shoulder. He wears knee socks, lederhosen, and a Bavarian Alps hat. He holds up a sign that says "WUNDERBAR!--CIGARETTES UND BEER!!"

LEVON (ECHOING V.O.)
Wir haben ein bier extravaganza!--

Danny waves glumly to honking passers-by.

Back inside at the register, Bobby studies an ID. The customer is an obviously-underage BOY who hugs a twelve-pack of beer. Bobby shakes his head and holds up the scissors.

LeVon swoops into frame behind Bobby and sticks his finger between the scissors just as Bobby starts to cut the ID card. Bobby freezes. LeVon tosses the card to the boy, then thunks a carton of Malboros atop the beer. LeVon grins.

LEVON
Don't forget your smokes!--

CLOSE ON the soda fountains, jetting out Super Tsunamis.
CLOSE ON the dials on the gas pumps outside, spinning up gallons and profits at high speed.

CLOSE ON the cash register's digital display, adding up the glowing blue numbers lightning fast.

CLOSE ON LeVon and Bobby in the parking lot, staring up into the sky. They stand at the controls of a rented cherry picker.

LEVON
This'll grab the bypass traffic.
Send 'er up!--

Grinning, Bobby thunks the lever forward. Hydraulics whine. The lighted fiberglass Zippie sign--formerly mounted on a short stanchion out by the old road--rises into the sky, now mounted atop the cherry picker. It rises alongside the new overpass.

As seen from atop the busy overpass, the big Zippie head slowly creeps up into view, peering over the highway guardrail like Kilroy. It rises higher and higher, finally revealing a sign which says "FREE LOTTO TIX!"

Back on the ground, LeVon hands Bobby his cordless microphone. He nods supportively.

LEVON
Do it just like I told you...

Bobby clears his throat. He's self-conscious and nervous, but also excited. He hesitates a beat, then clicks on the mike.

BOBBY (FILTERED)
Attention, shoppers...

Bobby pauses to hear his voice echo through the parking lot. It's not so bad. He continues, growing more confident.

BOBBY (FILTERED)
As our way of thanking you for your kind patronage this afternoon, um... Enjoy a refreshing Coke or Coke product half-price! Also, our remaining stock of Marlboro cigarettes is priced to satisfy at eighty-nine cents a pack.

LeVon nods his approval. Bobby glances around, not quite happy with the lack of excitement his announcement generated. As LeVon is about to take the mike, Bobby snatches it back and broadcasts a quick afterthought.

BOBBY (FILTERED)
Also, there is a fifty dollar bill hidden somewhere on the premises... Find it, and it's YOURS!

This gets their attention--a near-riot suddenly brews inside the store. A FARMER pumping gas bowls past LeVon and Bobby on his way inside. LeVon blinks in surprise. He grins and nods, very impressed.

LeVon snaps a fifty from his pocket and jogs into the store. Bobby smiles, feeling smart and energized.

We see a bird's eye view of the entire Zippie's--it looks like a used car lot. Customers pour in and out like army ants. The elf's hat casts its long, purple shadow.

CLOSE ON the lottery ticket dispenser--it coughs out its last two tickets, and is empty.

"Call Me The Breeze" ends, and we slowly FADE OUT.

END OF MONTAGE.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S--EVENING

The sun is set. In the store, the blue light no longer blinks. Only a few customers are left. TWO MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN man the counter. The store looks savaged; cleaned out. The women employees stare in wonder at the barren shelves.

We track away from the window and reveal Bobby, Danny, LeVon, and Paco waiting in the dark and quiet parking lot. All four sit on the curb under the streetlight. Somehow tonight they seem like a team--and LeVon knows it.

LEVON

What's your word there? 'Spo.'
Ya'll would make a good posse...

LeVon glances at his watch, then looks out at the quiet road. He wears Bobby's R-Braves cap. He looks content and proud. Quietly, he whistles a tune--one he seems to be inventing.

LeVon whistles in fits and starts, trying to find a certain note. Paco watches the quiet highway and lights a cigarette. Bobby and Danny sit motionless, dog-tired.

LEVON

(quietly singing)

Zip in, zip out--it's that convenient,
Our coffee's fresh, our prices lenient--

Bobby and Danny peek sideways at LeVon. Paco blows smoke and scratches at his face. LeVon eats some pistachios from his employee smock. He shoots a glance over at Bobby.

LEVON

I heard you talking about your
dad today...

Bobby points at himself. LeVon nods and chews his pistachios.

BOBBY

Um...I was telling Danny that my
folks were going to a trade show
this weekend...

LEVON

What's your dad like?

BOBBY

He's okay. I mean, he's my Dad.
I love him. He's okay...
He's a businessman. Sort of like you,
except.....not really...

LeVon thinks. He points a finger at Danny.

LEVON

What's your dad like?

DANNY

Uh...you know. He's cool. Um...
He bought me my car. He lives about
a half hour from me. I see him every
couple of months. He sells veal to
restaurants--he's got like, this route...

LeVon chews his lip and nods. He turns to Paco.

LEVON

What about you? What's your dad like?

Paco blows smoke and thinks.

PACO

When I was eight years old,
he taught me all about capitalism.
I was bored, so he built me this
lemonade stand and made me work there.

(beat)

Some parents make their kids practice
the piano--my Dad made me man this
lemonade stand for four hours a day.
He made me buy my own supplies--from him.
He charged me rent. He made me put half
my profits in a bank account for college.
But I didn't have any profits...we lived
on a cul-de-sac. The big money was
across the highway. I was like, "Dad!--
location, location, location!", but he
wouldn't let me cross the highway...

Paco smiles faintly at the memory. Bobby and Danny have been
listening closely, surprised to hear these things from Paco.

LEVON

Did you go to college?

PACO

Harvard. MBA.

LeVon nods slowly, looking very interested--and maybe a little
envious. He whistles the tune he was working on before.

LEVON

This corporation needs a good jingle.
Something catchy...with a good beat.

(to others)

I've been thinking...help me out here.

LeVon sings the first line. He glares at Paco and the boys, who remain silent. Weakly, Paco and the boys begin to sing along. CLOSE ON Bobby, who blushes at the ground as he sings.

With everyone singing, the jingle sounds half-assed and wretched. LeVon puts up with it for a time, then finally stops them, shaking his head in disgust.

LEVON

Let's all try singing the same damn song.
Sing what I sing. And Bob--you're
just moving your lips. Stop acting so
goddam self-conscious all the time--
ain't nobody gonna laugh at you.

LeVon starts, and everyone sings again--a whisper at first. This time, slowly but surely, the song starts to take shape.

Bobby looks uncomfortable, but this time he actually sings. The jingle actually winds up pretty hip and Temptations-like. Paco wows the others, as he is by far the best singer.

EVERYONE

Zip in, zip out--it's that convenient,
Our coffee's fresh, our prices lenient.
Zip in, zip out all night and day--
Our Elf wants you to enjoy your stay!

Before the song is finished, the familiar prison van appears, pulling into the lot. LeVon stands up, conducting. All four hold the last note, Bobby and Danny pretty much enjoying themselves. The van driver taps his horn.

The song finished, LeVon takes off the R-Braves cap and thunks it onto Bobby's head. Bobby stares at him, surprised. LeVon grins at the boys, then turns and strolls into the van's headlights, his hands in his pockets.

Paco turns his back to the van. He kicks Bobby's foot, getting the boys' attention. Paco speaks low and fast.

PACO

He's not your friend. He's involving
you in something criminal. Just quit.

Paco jogs to the honking van. The boys stare after him, and watch as the van pulls out. Bobby comes back to reality.

BOBBY

All those cigarettes today...they had to be stolen. We were selling them. That makes us involved.

(hard choice)

We should...maybe call the police.

DANNY

Call John Law? You nuts?-- LeVon's got a posse. He knows where we live.

(voice cracking)

Man, we can't even quit.

Bobby stares at the pavement. He's not sure what to do about LeVon--he's not even sure how he should feel about him.

EXT. CEMETERY--MORNING

The Creamer's yellow pickup slows and pulls off onto the edge of a cemetery car path. Bobby wears his R-Braves cap and a worried face, and slouches in the pickup bed. His mom and dad climb out of the cab.

Bobby's dad trudges into the cemetery without a word. Bobby's mom pauses next to Bobby, who remains in the truck bed.

BOBBY

He still mad at me..?

MRS. CREAMER

I thought you were mad at him.
The haircut thing, right?

Bobby shakes his head and climbs wearily out of the truck bed.

MRS. CREAMER

What's the matter, honey?

BOBBY

(mumble)

Just wanted to hang out with you...
Before you left.

Mrs. Creamer is a little surprised. The two of them follow Bobby's dad through the headstones.

EXT. FAMILY PLOT

They catch up to Bobby's dad at a plot much like all the others. The pink granite headstone is engraved "Creamer". One

side says "Robert", and the other, "Ruth". Both 1940's birth dates are engraved, but the death dates remain blank.

Bobby and his parents stare at the headstone. Bobby is uncomfortable with the morbidity of the situation--his parents aren't. They frown at the brand new grave next to their plot.

MR. CREAMER

You see, this is why a smile and a handshake just don't cut it anymore... When I bought this plot, they told me specifically they were gonna plant a shade tree here on this side of us.
(toeing at grave)
Who is this guy? Where's our damn tree?

MRS. CREAMER

(reading new grave)
Arthur Christopher Adolph...

MR. CREAMER

I'm complaining to somebody.
Better Business Bureau, or somebody.
I'm not eating shit on this.

Bobby breaks into a grin despite himself.

BOBBY

Geez, Dad--whattya want?
Want 'em to bring a backhoe out here and pull the guy up?

MR. CREAMER

When you're my age and you've worked your whole life, you'll understand. I bought this on the pretense I'd have a tree right here. Now what--I'm supposed to go through eternity next to some guy who reminds me of Hitler?

MRS. CREAMER

I'm sure he was a good person...
I mean, the point is the tree.

Mr. Creamer makes a confused face at Bobby.

MR. CREAMER

Why did you come here with us?
You hate being with us.

BOBBY

I don't hate being with you!

Bobby fingers the pager on his belt. He shrugs at the ground.

BOBBY

I just figured you're leaving on your big trip today, and I won't see you for awhile, so...

(quiet)

Thought...hang out with you...
But I figured you'd be shopping or something. Visiting your own grave is twisted.

MR. CREAMER

It's an investment. You gotta keep track of your investments.

BOBBY

Yeah, whatever. Look, um...I wanted to talk to you about something...

Mrs. Creamer carefully paces off the width of their plot, walking heel to toe like she's on a tightrope. She counts under her breath. When she reaches the new grave, she frowns.

BOBBY

(difficult)

It's about the store where I work...

MRS. CREAMER

You know...I don't think there's enough room for us here now.

Mr. Creamer steps over and paces off the plot just like his wife did. Bobby shoves his hands in his pockets and eyes his dad. Mr. Creamer finishes, then shakes his head in disbelief.

MR. CREAMER

Naw. Wait a minute...
This can't be right.

BOBBY

It looks right... You got room.
Dad--I was like, talking...

Bobby's parents pace the plot again, pacing together this time. They move their lips as they count.

MR. CREAMER

Christ. What are they gonna do--
stack us?

Bobby sighs and steps behind the headstone. He spreads his arms as wide as he can.

BOBBY

Look--this equals about six feet.
That's enough right there, and you got
way more than six feet here...

MR. CREAMER

You need more than six feet. Geez--
How wide do you think a casket is?
Not only a casket, but outside of that
you got a concrete, uh... The thing...

MRS. CREAMER

A vault. I doubt very much that
six feet is enough for two of them.

Mr. Creamer squints at the plot. He motions to his wife.

MR. CREAMER

Here--lay down with me for a second.
(then, to Bobby)
Okay...we're going to do something
you'll construe as embarrassing. Sorry.

Bobby's dad oofs and lies down under his name on the headstone.
Bobby's mom hesitates, looking to Bobby for his reaction--one
we assume will be extreme embarrassment.

Bobby stares at his dad for a beat. Then, he surprises us.
He snorts and gives a crooked grin. He shrugs to his mom.

BOBBY

Go for it.

Bobby's folks are pleasantly taken aback. Mrs. Creamer goes
ahead and lies down next to her husband. He checks to see how
much room they've got. Bobby spreads his arms wide again.

BOBBY

Alright. See? You fit.

MR. CREAMER

Yeah...I guess so. Good call, Bob.

MRS. CREAMER

What was it you were gonna say, honey?

Bobby hesitates, then gives a little shrug and shakes his head.

BOBBY

Nothing--don't worry about it.

Just then two cemetery MAINTENANCE MEN shuffle through the frame carrying gasoline weedtrimmers. The men narrow their eyebrows at Bobby's folks. Bobby scowls at them.

BOBBY

What're you looking at?

EXT. BOBBY'S FRONT YARD--NOON

CLOSE ON an old set of luggage--pea green hard-sided stuff that dates back to the early sixties. The nametags say "Creamer". The luggage is stacked in the bed of the pickup truck. Bobby hefts the last suitcase over the side and into the bed.

Mr. and Mrs. Creamer sit in the truck cab--Mrs. Creamer is behind the wheel. She smiles up at Bobby.

MRS. CREAMER

I left a sheet of paper by the phone.
it's got all the information on it--
where we're staying, phone numbers...

Bobby nods and toes the gravel, not really listening. He looks at his dad, who is studying the road map.

BOBBY

Hey Dad...you ever thought to...
do a floor traffic study in your store?
So you could rearrange your stock
and make it sell more efficiently?
Maybe arrange the items by their...
optical weight?

Mr. Creamer thinks, then answers brightly.

MR. CREAMER

No...

Mr. Creamer shrugs and smiles. Mrs. Creamer looks from her husband to Bobby.

MRS. CREAMER

Honey, you gonna be alright by
yourself for four days?

Bobby nods, distracted.

MR. CREAMER

(grin)

Sure he'll be alright...he's been
looking forward to this, I know.

BOBBY

Sure.

MRS. CREAMER

Alright then. We'll be at the Paducah
Sheraton--number's by the phone.
Just call us if you need us.

Mrs. Creamer reaches her arms out the window. Bobby kisses his
mom goodbye. Mrs. Creamer backs down the driveway as goodbyes
and waves are exchanged.

The truck picks up speed on the residential street, zooming out
of sight. Bobby looks lonely watching it go.

As the truck is driving away, a UPS delivery van motors into
frame from the other direction--it pulls into Bobby's driveway.
The DRIVER steps out and hands Bobby a long, thin package.

Bobby thanks the driver, who climbs in his van and trundles
off. Bobby looks the package over closely--it is peppered with
"Fragile" stickers and Chinese writing. It comes from Taiwan.
Bobby puzzles for a moment, then realizes what it is.

BOBBY

Oh, man.

INT. BOBBY'S DINING ROOM--LATER

CLOSE ON the package, lying unopened on the dining room table.
We pull back to reveal that Bobby and Danny sit at opposite
ends of the table, both staring at it. Bobby leans forward,
resting his chin in his hands.

BOBBY

I should do it, right..?

The boys are silent for a beat or two, just staring at the box.
Bobby looks up at Danny, smiles a weak but hopeful smile.

BOBBY

Like LeVon says...cojones, right?

Danny smiles back at him and nods. Bobby pushes back his chair and heads into the kitchen.

BOBBY

Will you drive me over there if I give her a call?

DANNY

You know it.

INT. BOBBY'S KITCHEN

Bobby picks up the phone. He pauses a beat, steeling himself, then he dials a number.

EXT. CREAMER PROSTHETIC LIMB & BRACE

The "CLOSED" sign is in the window. The lights turn on inside the store. The tiny parking lot out front is empty--we watch as Allison's car pulls into frame and parks in it.

Parked across the street from the prosthetics store, Danny waits behind the wheel of his LeMans, giving Bobby some room. He reads "Outlaw Biker" magazine while he waits. He looks up to watch Allison approach the store.

Allison raps gently on the door. Bobby appears, fumbles with the lock, and swings open the door. They smile at each other nervously.

ALLISON

Um...your folks aren't here?

BOBBY

They're out of town. It just came in today--I figured you might not want to wait, so...

Bobby gives a little shrug. Allison is very pleased.

ALLISON

Thank you, Bob.

He holds open the door and she steps inside. DISSOLVE TO...

INT. SHOWROOM

Behind the counter, Bobby stands at the bench grinder, goggles over his eyes. He finesses a small steel piece, and sparks fly. He concentrates hard on his work.

Bobby cuts off the grinder. He attaches the piece to something which lies atop the counter--we still haven't gotten a good look at it yet. He works fast, making final adjustments.

INT. FITTING ROOM

Allison sits at a small fitting table. She waits anxiously. She looks up as Bobby enters the room.

Bobby cradles Allison's realistic new arm--it has finally arrived. Allison finally gets to see it, and is more than happy with the results.

BOBBY

Here we go...

Bobby carefully fits Allison with her new myoelectric limb. He works gently and accurately. He is a little bashful, but so is she. They hardly look each other in the eye as he works.

BOBBY

(quiet)

There...try that...

Allison's new hand opens and closes like it's real. Her eyes glow with delight. She lets out a little squeal and squeezes Bobby's hand. He grins, happy for her.

ALLISON

It's wonderful! Thank you so much!

Allison smiles at her new hand, working it open and closed. She leans across and gives Bobby a quick peck on the lips.

Allison quickly glances at Bobby to see what his reaction is. He slowly leans forward in his seat. The moment lingers--it starts to look very likely they will kiss again.

Just then, the pager on Bobby's belt goes off, startling them both and ending the moment.

LEVON'S VOICE

¿Donde esta usted?--

INT. ZIPPIE'S

Slouched across the register counter, LeVon checks his watch as he speaks into the phone.

LEVON

Come to work, por favor...

Aside from Paco manning the register, there is no one in the store. The shelves are mostly empty--the Zippie's badly needs restocking.

Paco frowns at LeVon's back as LeVon hangs up the phone. Paco clears his throat and tries to sound nonchalant.

PACO

LeVon? Maybe you should just let the kids quit...

We hear a familiar truck rumble into the parking lot. LeVon walks to the front of the store carrying a handmade sign.

LEVON

How do you say in Spanish--
"I know where you live?"

LeVon tapes his sign to the glass door. It says "SORRY!--CLOSED FOR RESTOCKING". It fills the frame, blocking our view of LeVon and Paco.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S--LATER

The Ryder truck we remember from an earlier scene is backed up to the front door of the Zippie's. A steel-belted radial with a price tag on it rolls out of the back of the truck and bounces on the pavement. Bobby catches it with an oof.

The raisin-eyed punk we remember from earlier is alone in the truck, rolling out tires. He wears a stained Zippie's smock, as if he's trying to pass as an employee. Bobby, Danny, and Paco look askance at the punk as they bucket-brigade the last of the tires inside the Zippie's.

LeVon stands nearby, checking off inventory on a clipboard. He wears his Walkman and counts to himself in Spanish.

PUNK

Ain't nobody come to a convenience store for tires. I don't see how you gonna move 'em.

LEVON
(cocky)
I can move anything.

A car pulls up nearby. LeVon pulls down his headphones, smiles and waves at the DRIVER.

LEVON
I'm sorry...we're temporarily closed.

The punk hangs out of the truck and nervously eyes the car as it pulls away. He checks the highway in both directions before he disappears back inside the truck. We hear him straining.

CLOSE ON the tailgate--the punk slides a narrow wooden crate out of the shadows and into view.

PUNK
Might need a dolly for this one...

Bobby and Paco lift the crate to the ground, straining their backs. They load it onto a mover's dolly. LeVon checks a sticker atop the crate that says "soda fountain parts"--he rubs down a corner of the sticker that has popped up.

LEVON
Just roll it into the back room.
(dismissing them)
Go. I give you permission.

Paco and Bobby manhandle the dolly into the store. LeVon slips on his earphones and flamboyantly resumes his Spanish lesson. He checks something off on his clipboard.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

The store has undergone a change--big columns of auto tires are stacked by the windows. Cheap silver jewelry and Chia Pets are for sale. Beach towels hang like tapestries from the ceiling--"Dogs Playing Poker" is well-represented.

Bobby and Paco hunker over the crate as they slowly roll it through the store. Danny follows them carrying black velvet paintings of clowns and matadors. The three speak low.

PACO
You shouldn't have come.

BOBBY
Yeah...like we've got a choice.

DANNY

Yeah, man--he won't let us go.
He keeps beeping us!

(swallow)

You think that guy out front
is part of his posse?

They don't know. Bobby backs into a row of big plaster Elvis busts, breaking one. He stares at it.

BOBBY

I am not paying for that.

Paco kicks the pieces aside and opens the stockroom door.

INT. BACK ROOM

Paco and Bobby roll the crate into the back room. They linger, glancing around. Aside from books on Spanish and travel guides to Costa Rica and Argentina, there's not much different.

Paco stares at the crate on its dolly. He gives it a kick. Danny steps into view, peeking in the open doorway.

BOBBY

What do you figure this really is?

Paco squats down and gently pulls off the sticker that says "soda fountain parts".

CLOSE ON the Smith & Wesson logo underneath the sticker--stenciling reads ".357 COMBAT MASTERPIECE--BLUED, 50 COUNT".

Bobby and Danny are wide-eyed. Paco carefully puts back the fake soda fountain sticker. He stands up and faces the boys.

PACO

We've gotta quit...all three of us.

Bobby takes a deep breath. He and Danny slowly nod.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S

LeVon counts out fifties, hands the bills a thousand dollars at a time to the punk, who recounts them. The punk keeps an eye on the highway.

LEVON

I need that other inventory.

PUNK

I'm shorthanded. My two guys got
pinched last night on a drunk-in-public.
I can't make the pickup without 'em.

LEVON

I need it today. Working here is
a sweet arrangement--but it won't
last forever.

(thinking)

Two guys... What do they need to do?

PUNK

(shrug)

Mainly keep their mouths shut.

Bobby, Danny, and Paco exit the store, returning the dolly to
the truck. LeVon stares at the boys.

LEVON

How long will you need them?

PUNK

Three, four hours... Why?

LeVon presents Bobby and Danny to the punk.

LEVON

Here's your guys.

The punk peers at the boys. Bobby and Danny turn to LeVon.

BOBBY

To do what?--

The punk considers. LeVon turns to the boys.

LEVON

You two are gonna help him run
a little errand. No big deal...

Bobby and Danny look at each other, shake their heads.

BOBBY

No...uh uh. Seriously...

DANNY

No thanks, man.

LEVON

Not like I'm asking you to do it
for free... How's fifty each sound?

LeVon peels off two fifties, offers them to the boys. The boys shake their heads no, so LeVon slides the bills into the breast pockets of the boys' Zippie smocks.

LEVON

Go ahead...get in the truck.

The boys refuse, backing away. Paco speaks up.

PACO

LeVon--forget about it.

LEVON

(ignoring Paco)

Get in the truck.

BOBBY

No way!--

LEVON

Get...in...the truck.

PACO

No they won't. We're quitting.

LeVon glances at the punk, who checks his watch and looks uncomfortable. LeVon fixes Paco with a fearsome gaze.

LEVON

Go inside, Harvard.

Paco swallows hard. He stands his ground.

PACO

We're quitting.

LeVon strides toward Paco, backing him toward the store. LeVon stabs a finger at Paco's chest, seems to push him with it.

BOBBY

(weak)

Leave him alone.

LeVon propels Paco backwards through the door, into Zippie's. He holds up a warning finger, ending all further discussion.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

The glass door swings closed, separating Paco from LeVon and the others in the parking lot. LeVon herds the boys toward the truck cab. The boys argue, the sound muffled by the glass.

Paco and Bobby glance at each other through the glass--the boys need help. Paco steels himself. He backs away from the door. Keeping an eye out for LeVon, he slips into the back room.

INT. BACK ROOM

Paco opens the door to the bathroom and flips the lock. He shoves the crate of pistols into the bathroom and slams the door, locking them inside. He grabs the phone on the desk.

EXT. ZIPPIE'S

LeVon flings open the truck's passenger door. He has Danny by the earlobe, leads him to the cab. Danny yells and pulls free. Danny and Bobby dance around, staying out of LeVon's reach.

LeVon works to keep his sang-froid. He refuses to chase after the boys, or even raise his voice.

LEVON

Get...in...the truck.

BOBBY

No!--

Meanwhile, the punk heads off a car entering the lot. The punk nervously eyes his watch, then trots back to LeVon.

PUNK

Man--forget it. I need enthusiasm.

LEVON

They're enthusiastic.

(nasty)

You love life--don't you, boys?

Danny dances around and holds his ear. He blinks fast and chokes up--he's about to cry.

DANNY

You're wiggled, man! First cigarettes,
then a load of freakin' guns!
Uh uh! Uh uh, man!--

Bobby looks from Danny to LeVon. LeVon's eyes narrow.

PUNK

(scared)

These two won't keep quiet!--

Danny realizes he's said the wrong thing. He starts backing up even before LeVon advances on him. Just then the punk sees something out of the corner of his eye--he turns and points.

PUNK

What the hell? LeVon?--

LeVon--then the boys--look at Zippie's. A brilliant red strobe light is flashing silently--the strobe is attached to an alarm box on the front of the store, an alarm box we probably haven't paid much attention to until now.

Without a word, LeVon strides into the Zippie's. Bobby follows him, as does a reluctant Danny. The punk yanks shut the cargo door on his truck.

PUNK

Later...

INT. ZIPPIE'S

LeVon ducks under a "Dogs Playing Poker" beach towel and checks the register counter--the phone is on its hook. He heads for the back room. The boys follow. Through the plate glass, we see the punk's truck roar out of the parking lot.

BOBBY

Be cool, LeVon--

INT. BACK ROOM

LeVon flings open the stockroom door. Paco turns and sees him. Staring at LeVon, Paco mumbles into the phone.

PACO

Please hurry.

Paco hangs up. He slowly stands up from the desk.

LeVon stands motionless in the doorway, staring at Paco. His expression is unreadable. Behind him, Bobby and Danny peek their faces into view. Tense silence. Finally, LeVon blinks.

LEVON
(pointing)

Get out.

Paco hesitates. He holds his breath and sidles past LeVon, never turning his back on him. LeVon lets him pass.

Once Paco exits, LeVon stands on tiptoes and pokes out a square of the suspended ceiling. A gym bag falls into view. LeVon also grabs his Fodor's guides to South America.

INT. ZIPPIE'S

LeVon punts an Elvis head out of the way and hurries to the checkout counter. Paco and the boys stay out of his way as he cleans out the registers, dumping the cash in his gym bag. The bag is already packed with wrapped wads of bills.

BOBBY
(seeing the money)

Jesus...

PACO
I'm sorry, LeVon--you didn't
give me a choice.

LEVON
(to boys)
Gimme my hundred bucks.

Bobby and Danny come to life and yank the bills out of their breast pockets. LeVon shoves them in his bag. Paco and the boys follow LeVon outside into the parking lot.

BOBBY
What are you gonna do?

EXT. ZIPPIE'S

LeVon strides to Danny's car, the only car in the empty parking lot. He sets his bag on the car's roof and checks his watch.

LEVON
Car keys.

Danny looks at Bobby and Paco. LeVon snaps his fingers. Danny tugs the car keys from his pocket and tosses them to LeVon.

DANNY
Yeah, sure...whatever.

LeVon walks around and unlocks the trunk. He throws out a lawn chair and a spare tire, making room.

BOBBY

LeVon...maybe you ought to stay
here and wait for the police.
I think they'd go easier on you if--

This thought is lost when LeVon swoops onto Paco. He neatly grabs up Paco and crams him in the trunk, slams it shut before the boys can react. He crouches, hands on his knees, and bellows into the keyhole.

LEVON

CROSS ME? ME?! YOU IVY LEAGUE PUNK!!--

Bobby and Danny are thunderstruck. LeVon lets out a breath and instantly regains his composure. He shoves past Bobby and Danny, opens the driver's door.

Bobby and Danny yank on the trunk lid, straining to open it. Inside the trunk, Paco thumps the lid--his yells are muffled.

BOBBY

Let him out, LeVon!--

DANNY

Let him out!--

Bobby and Danny shut up when they see LeVon produce a small pistol from his gym bag. He sticks it inside his Zippie's smock, then climbs behind the wheel. Bobby runs to LeVon's window, scared.

BOBBY

Dammit--let him out.

LeVon reaches out the window and casually takes a handful of big lapel, pulls Bobby face-to-face with him.

LEVON

Tell the cops we're heading north.
North. You overheard me saying I
got family in New York.
(including Danny)
That's the story--got it, fat boy?

Bobby and Danny swallow hard. Paco thumps faintly in the background. We hear sirens in the distance, getting louder. LeVon lets go of Bobby and starts the engine.

LEVON

We'll be in touch.

BOBBY

What are you gonna do to Paco?--

LEVON

You worry what I'll do to you
if you cross me and my posse.

LeVon heads for the lot's exit. Bobby runs alongside the car, slaps a hand on the trunk. Paco is still yelling and thumping.

BOBBY

Let him go!--

LeVon drives as cool as he acts--he putters down the empty highway in the direction of the approaching sirens. The boys watch him drive out of sight.

After a beat, police cars tear into view, apparently having just passed LeVon. The police cars screech into the Zippie's lot, lights flashing--they converge in a semicircle around the frightened boys.

CLOSE ON Bobby and Danny--they stare at the police surrounding them. Blue lights sweep across their faces.

CLOSER ON just Bobby--he stares out at the empty highway. The sounds of sirens and mayhem fade away...his mind is elsewhere.

To the police, Bobby robotically points his arm--opposite the direction that LeVon just took. Next to Bobby, Danny hesitates and swallows, then does the same. DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SEDAN--AFTERNOON

CLOSE ON Bobby's face--his thoughts are still elsewhere. He is riding with Danny in the backseat of a car. Woods and suburban houses recede behind them. Danny stares at his knees.

After a beat of silence, a loud sniff is heard from the front seat. Mrs. Kelbick, Danny's mom, is driving the boys in her Volvo. Her eyes are teary, and she mutters into her Kleenex.

MRS. KELBICK

God--I just wish I could get my hands
on those two characters. I could
murder them for the way they terrorized
you two! Hunt them down like--

Mrs. Kelbick catches herself before she says "animals." Danny glances uneasily at Bobby, who looks grim.

MRS. KELBICK

Bobby...I really feel I should call your parents.

BOBBY

Um...I'll call them. I'd rather be the one to tell them, if that's okay.

Mrs. Kelbick sniffs and nods.

MRS. KELBICK

Please tell them to call me after you talk to them.

Bobby stares absently out the window, watching the trees pass.

EXT. BOBBY'S HOUSE

The Volvo glides to a stop in front of Bobby's house. Bobby climbs out of the back and stands at the mouth of his empty driveway. He glances around--nothing looks out of place.

MRS. KELBICK

(powers down window)

I really wish you'd come home with us.
I don't like the idea of you here alone--
especially with those two thugs loose.

DANNY

Yeah--come on over, man...

BOBBY

Thanks... But I kinda feel the need to be in my own house tonight.

Bobby and Danny share a look. Danny starts to insist, but Bobby gently shuts the car's back door on him.

Mrs. Kelbick honks her nose into a fresh Kleenex and attempts a faint smile at Bobby--she's barely holding it together.

MRS. KELBICK

We're down the street if you need us,
or if you just want to talk. I mean it.

Bobby limply waves goodbye. Mrs. Kelbick pulls away. Bobby and Danny stare at each other through the car's back window.

The Volvo disappears up the street. The neighborhood is quiet. There are no neighbors in sight. Nothing seems out of place. Bobby crunches up the driveway, fishing for his house keys.

Bobby is heading for the front door when something catches his eye. He backtracks, slowly hunkering down to study the handle at the bottom of the garage door--something is amiss.

CLOSE ON the bottom of the garage door--paint chips and bits of wood lie like confetti, and there's a tire iron-sized dent underneath the latch. The door has recently been pried open.

As Bobby reaches to touch the broken latch, the door's motor suddenly rattles to life, startling him back a step. He watches as the garage door slowly raises, revealing the grill of Danny's stolen car.

CLOSE ON Bobby, looking up at someone just offscreen. A silhouetted hand rises into frame--a finger beckons Bobby inside. As Bobby steps inside the garage, the door immediately starts to close again.

The sound of a phone starting to ring carries over to...

INT. BOBBY'S KITCHEN

The kitchen is empty. We track in on the wall phone as it rings. CLOSE ON the phone as the answering machine picks up.

BOBBY'S DAD'S VOICE

Hello!--You've reached Creamer
Prosthetic Limb and Brace! Please leave
a message...and think of us for all
your orthopedic and home nursing needs!

The answering machine beeps.

DANNY'S VOICE

Bobby, man, pick up--I need to talk.
My Mom is freaking. I'm like,
six years old again--she practically
wants me to roll my bed to her room.
And she is wolfing down the Butisol.
Bob--you there? Pick up already.

(nervous beat)

Dammit--I'm calling John Law,
you don't pick up.

A hand picks up the receiver. We widen to reveal LeVon blowing on a hot cup of coffee--the mug says "Over The Hill".

LEVON
Call "John Law" and I'll wear your
ass for a hat.

LeVon hangs up. He exits the kitchen, sipping his coffee.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM

The shades are drawn. Paco slumps on the sofa in the darkened room--his arms are trussed. Duct tape covers his mouth.

Bobby reaches to pull off the tape, but freezes when LeVon enters the room. LeVon shakes his head no, and Bobby stops.

BOBBY
(to Paco)
You okay?

Paco nods. He and Bobby glare up at LeVon.

BOBBY
Why are you here?

LEVON
Sit tight--we'll be gone soon enough.

LeVon studies the decor--antique wooden legs accent the room. An antique wheelchair sits in a corner. LeVon snorts.

LEVON
Who's your decorator?

BOBBY
(under his breath)
Bite me.

The doorbell rings, startling the three. LeVon produces the pistol from underneath his Zippie smock. Paco's eyes go wide. Bobby starts to get up--LeVon puts a finger to his lips, glaring at the boy. LeVon silently moves to the nearby door.

LeVon peers through the peephole in the front door, his gun aimed at the wood. Bobby and Paco sit frozen and scared.

LeVon smiles. He sets his pistol on a lamp table next to him, then opens the front door.

LEVON
Hello, hello!--

We see a slice of a uniformed COURIER--LeVon stands in the half-open doorway, blocking the man's view of Bobby and Paco.

Bobby and Paco huddle on the sofa--they both stare at LeVon's pistol, which lies ten feet away. Could Bobby jump for it?

COURIER

Hello--I have a C.O.D. delivery from
Ace Printing, for a Mr. Eugene Funston?

LEVON

That's me!

COURIER

It's cash due--two thousand dollars.

LeVon already has his cash out, is counting out a horsewad of bills. He hands the wad to the man, who quickly recounts it.

LeVon's pistol beckons to Bobby. CLOSER ON Bobby as he stares at the gun. Paco nudges Bobby, nods at the pistol. Bobby hesitates, trying to work up his courage.

LeVon shoots a glance over his shoulder at Bobby. LeVon hands the courier an extra fifty and takes the manila envelope.

COURIER

Thank you, sir! Have a nice day!--

LeVon nods and shuts the door. He smiles knowingly at Bobby, then picks up his pistol and puts it back inside his smock.

LEVON

Smart choice.

LeVon tears open his package. Paco groans, and Bobby looks like he's been kicked in the gut--he missed his big chance. LeVon scrutinizes the contents of the package--two passports.

LEVON

Nice work. Looks real...

LeVon holds one of the passports out to Paco.

LEVON

This one's yours. I changed your
name to Iglesias--'cause apparently
you love to sing.

(beat)

These'll get us out of the country.

BOBBY

What do you mean, "out of the country?"

LEVON

(ignoring this)

All we need now are passport photos.
Got a camera in the house?

Bobby glares at LeVon, not answering.

INT. BOBBY'S BEDROOM--LATER

LeVon squints into a 35mm viewfinder--he aims the camera at us.

LEVON

Say "cheese", Julio.

LeVon snaps the picture, blinding us with the flash.

Paco sits on the edge of Bobby's bed, posing reluctantly.
Paco's arms are still trussed, but the duct tape is gone.

LeVon winds the camera. He and Paco both wear clothes from Bobby's closet. Bobby stands behind LeVon, watching.

BOBBY

What's it for? Where you going?--

LEVON

(taking pictures)

I've found myself a whole new market:
Up-and-coming South America. I can't
say where...but it's a little country
with big NAFTA dreams and no extradition
laws. I'm gonna bring cutting edge
retail techniques to people eager to
part with their hard-earned pesos.

(big grin)

I'm going to bring them...my very own
home shopping network.

Bobby and Paco glance at each other. We can tell from Bobby's face that he is at least begrudgingly impressed by the idea.

PACO

Jesus. What do you need me for?

LEVON

You speak Spanish better than I do.
Your Harvard MBA can't hurt...

PACO

I'm not a career criminal!--

LEVON

You're not flyspeck since you
crossed me. Be grateful I need you.

(ominous)

Enjoy it while it lasts.

Paco shuts up.

BOBBY

LeVon--they're gonna catch you.
Turn yourself in. Throw yourself
on the mercy of the court and all.
Don't make this worse than it is...

LEVON

Just give myself up.

BOBBY

You're this genius businessman.

(quietly sincere)

I'd speak on your behalf.

LeVon believes him, and his expression softens just a little.

LEVON

I'm a free-market capitalist--I've
gotta be free. I'm not going back
to prison. No matter what.

LeVon pulls Paco up off the bed, then sits down in his place.
He hands Bobby the camera.

LEVON

Now take my picture.

Bobby stares at the camera as he mulls things over in his head.
He finally snaps the picture--the flash whites out the frame.

INT. GARAGE--LATER

A bare lightbulb glows bright white--we are looking straight
up at the garage ceiling. LeVon's face sweeps into frame
upside-down, looking down on us.

LEVON

Cheer up--no more prison food.

Paco lies tied up in Danny's trunk, tape again covering his mouth. He stares wide-eyed as the trunk lid is slammed shut. We hear him kicking his feet inside the locked trunk.

LEVON

Shut up.

Paco doesn't. LeVon thumps the trunk as he heads back inside.

INT. BOBBY'S KITCHEN

LeVon studies the shot roll of film as he talks on the phone.

LEVON

Hi, do you offer one-hour developing?
Super. Thank you...

LeVon hangs up. He drops the film in his pocket and exits.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM

Bobby sits in the antique wheelchair--his arms and legs are individually tied to the chair. Bobby yanks at the ropes, rattling the chair. LeVon enters the room.

LEVON

I just called my posse. They're gonna be around, keeping an eye on you and your friend Danny for the next couple of weeks--just till I get settled down south of the border. So you two play it smart and keep your mouths shut...you hear?

Bobby stares at LeVon a beat, unimpressed and bitter.

BOBBY

Your posse. Cut the crap already.
If you had one, why would you need us?

LeVon gathers his things, preparing to leave. He double-checks his bag of money. He gives a little shrug at the floor.

LEVON

I had a posse once. We got busted, and they all turned state's evidence against me. I was the only one who wound up doing time...

(sneer)

I seem to have that effect on people.

Bobby considers this soberly. LeVon rips a piece of duct tape off its roll.

LEVON

Anyway...

BOBBY

Let Paco go!--

LeVon gently presses the tape over Bobby's mouth. As Bobby struggles, LeVon notices the pager he gave the boy, still clipped to his belt. LeVon takes the pager from Bobby, looks it over, then sticks it in his own pocket.

LEVON

Vaya con Dios...

LeVon grabs his gym bag full of money and exits. Bobby grunts and strains at the ropes till his face goes red.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

The garage door rattles open--inside, LeVon sits behind the wheel of Danny's car. He cranks the engine and pulls out. The old LeMans squeals out of the driveway, out of sight.

Once LeVon is gone, Danny pokes his head into view from behind a tree. He runs across the street to Bobby's house, glancing over his shoulder to check if LeVon is coming back.

INT. BOBBY'S LIVING ROOM

CLOSE ON Bobby's wrist as a steak knife saws through the ropes holding it to the wheelchair. Bobby's arm comes free. Danny cuts loose Bobby's other arm. Danny's hands are shaky.

DANNY

Jesus, man--I didn't know what was going on over here. The shades were drawn...I was totally fudging! I mean--oh man, Bobby...

BOBBY

Thanks...

Bobby unties his leg. Danny storms out of the room.

DANNY

I'm calling the cops!--

Bobby thinks. His eyes go wide and he jumps out of the chair, dragging it behind him by one leg.

BOBBY

Wait! Don't touch the phone!--

Bobby hops on one leg, frantically untying himself.

INT. BOBBY'S KITCHEN

CLOSE ON the redial button as Bobby punches it. He presses the receiver to his ear and listens as it rings.

MAN'S VOICE (FILTER)

Hi, Mall Foto Kwik...may I help you?

Bobby hangs up the phone and turns to Danny.

BOBBY

He's heading for the mall.

DANNY

Alright! Call John Law!--

Bobby turns to Danny. He sheepishly shakes his head no.

BOBBY

I don't want to call the police.

DANNY

Why not?

Bobby tries to think of a reason not to.

BOBBY

I don't know. I just...

(shrug)

I don't want to call them on LeVon.

I'm afraid it'll end badly.

DANNY

So now what?

BOBBY

Gonna need your mom's car.

Bobby heads out the back door. Danny chases after him.

DANNY

Huh? C'mon, man! Bobby?--

EXT. MALL PARKING LOT--LATE AFTERNOON

The red sun floats over the horizon--it glows across acres of parked cars. SHOPPERS stroll to and from the huge mall.

Danny's mother's Volvo drifts into frame, passing us--we see its familiar bumper stickers. The Volvo cruises slowly.

INT. VOLVO

Danny drives. Bobby rides shotgun. Bobby stares fiercely out the windows, scanning the parked cars. The radio is on: We come in right in the middle of a news report, read by the same female announcer we've heard throughout the movie.

ANNOUNCER

...controversial prison work-release program. Police continue their search for an inmate who, earlier today, escaped from the local convenience store to which he was assigned, stealing an employee's car and taking another man hostage.

DANNY

(groan)

Oh man. It's a good thing my Mom's zonked out on tranquilizers...

The announcer goes on to name LeVon and Paco, and give more details on the crime. Bobby points out the windshield.

BOBBY

Over there!

Bright red and blue flashing lights slowly cruise through the sea of car roofs. Two police cars are converging on a spot in the distance ahead.

BOBBY

Let's go... Let's go, dammit!

Danny reluctantly presses on the accelerator.

EXT. PARKING LOT

Here among all the other cars is Danny's old LeMans, parked and empty--one of the two police cruisers crosses the "T" behind it, blocking it in. The second cruiser parks nearby, lights flashing. Two no-nonsense COPS approach the LeMans, hands on their holsters.

The Volvo rolls into frame twenty feet away--from the car, Bobby and Danny watch the police peer into the windows of the empty LeMans. Other SHOPPERS stand around gawking, and other cars slow to look, so Bobby and Danny don't really stand out.

INT. VOLVO

Through the windshield, we watch a third COP stride over to the LeMans, sifting through a giant steel ring of automobile keys. As the first cop reports in on his radio, the man with the keys unlocks the door in short order.

BOBBY

(under his breath)

Open the trunk...

The second cop searches the interior of the LeMans, and the third cop goes to work unlocking the trunk. Without even thinking, Bobby climbs out of the Volvo and takes a couple of steps toward the LeMans, craning to see.

DANNY

Bobby--

EXT. PARKING LOT

The latch clicks, and the trunk lid rises open. Bobby edges closer still, trying to peer around the third cop. Finally, Bobby's POV--the trunk is empty.

The third cop slams shut the empty trunk, turns and sees Bobby. The officer has no idea who Bobby is, but is annoyed by his presence. He waves him away.

THIRD COP

Nothing to see here, guy...

Bobby stands his ground as the cops step past him. They leave their cruisers idling where they are and split up--one searches the parking lot, two head for the mall on foot. We can hear one of the men calling on his radio for reinforcements as he departs. Danny hisses at Bobby, waving him back to the Volvo.

BOBBY

Paco must be inside with LeVon.
Maybe he was making too much noise
locked in the trunk...

DANNY

Let's just get out of here...okay?

Bobby turns to Danny, serious. He slowly shakes his head.

BOBBY

I can't let it end like this.

DANNY

Bobby--the cavalry's here! It's ended.

Bobby turns and looks at the mall--already, other police cars are motoring into view, lights flashing. They are pulling up in front of the mall entrance.

BOBBY

LeVon said he wouldn't give up.
What's gonna happen then?

With that, Bobby heads toward the mall on foot, first walking, then breaking into a run. Danny sighs and lets his head drop back on the headrest. He wheels the Volvo into the nearest parking space, then jogs after Bobby.

INT. MALL FOOD COURT

The mall's entrance is one long, high expanse of plate glass. Golden sunset backlights Bobby as he flings open the glass doors and strides into the mall's crowded food court area. Danny catches up with him just inside the mall.

Bobby and Danny skirt wide around two new COPS, male and female. Both the boys and we notice the mug shots the two officers refer to: Black and whites of LeVon and Paco printed on shiny fax paper. The cops are actively looking for LeVon. Bobby and Danny edge past them nervously.

BOBBY

(sotto)

Head for the Foto Kwik.

Danny nods. In the middle of the food court, the boys pass a promotion for a local radio station: A D.J. broadcasts live before a growing crowd. The centerpiece: A brand-new black Corvette slowly revolves atop a big lazy susan (maybe we saw a banner for this promotion outside in the mall's parking lot).

The D.J.'s amplified voice echoes through the food court. He points to a sexy MODEL in a tight radio station T-shirt--the woman presents seven identical Corvette keys, dropping them one by one into a racing helmet and shaking it with a flourish. The D.J. talks fast and excited, really selling it.

D.J.

One of those seven keys'll start that mighty 425 horsepower engine...pick the right key, that car is yours. I'm gonna call one name from the crowd every ten minutes, and we'll keep going--live--until some lucky Richmonder cranks up this bad boy and drives...it...home! The ZR-1 giveaway--only on Z-103!!

This spiel follows Bobby and Danny as they board the up escalator, heading for the upper level of the mall.

DANNY

Damn, man--giving away a Corvette...

BOBBY

Yes. I know.

Bobby shoots one quick, pained glance back at the free ZR-1.

INT. MALL UPPER LEVEL

CLOSE ON the landing of the up escalator--it's the place Bobby lost his new shoe. Bobby and Danny spill onto the landing, then jog along the balcony through the crowd of shoppers.

Bobby stops and leans against the railing, looking out across the mall at the far balcony opposite him--on the far side we see the bright "Foto Kwik!" sign glowing over a storefront. Through the window of the store we can see Paco and LeVon.

BOBBY

There they are.

Inside the Foto Kwik, Paco is operating a newfangled machine that allows customers to print their own photos. LeVon stands behind him, one hand in his jacket pocket--leveling his gun.

Danny taps Bobby's shoulder--Bobby glances left and right.

POLICE OFFICERS--mug shots in hand--are doing a door-to-door search of the mall. Two cops enter the store immediately to the left of the Foto Kwik...more cops work to the right of the camera store, showing yogurt shop EMPLOYEES the mug shots.

LeVon is unaware that he is flanked by police, and the police don't know he's there either--yet. At a glance, Bobby sees the situation, and his eyes go wide. The Foto Kwik is the long way around the balcony, and time is short.

DANNY

Oh man--not good.

Bobby glances around frantically, looking for something that can help him. He does a double-take, then smiles hopefully: A dozen yards away sits an ear-piercing kiosk--inside, with her back to us, is Allison Peabo.

Allison is about to do the earlobe of a grungy MALE CUSTOMER. She steadies a pneumatic piercing gun to his ear. Bobby runs to the kiosk, slaps a hand on the countertop phone.

BOBBY

Hey Allison...

Allison turns around, sees Bobby and is pleasantly surprised.

ALLISON

Bob?--

We hear a loud pneumatic THUP and an "Oww!" Allison whirls and apologizes to her customer, handing him a gauze patch.

BOBBY

(breathless)

How you doing? Can I use your phone?

Before Allison has time to nod, Bobby starts dialing like a madman. Danny sidles up behind Bobby and gives Allison a wave.

DANNY

What's up? Like your new arm...

Allison thanks him, keeping one eye on Bobby. Bobby whispers something in the phone, then hangs it up. He waves to Allison, then runs back to the railing to peer across at the Foto Kwik.

INT. FOTO KWIK STORE

LeVon's face fills the video screen of the Print-O-Matic machine. Paco presses the "print" button, and motors start to whirr. LeVon is impressed--he's been in prison a long time.

LEVON

What'll they think of next?

A muffled beeping sounds in LeVon's pants pocket. He pulls out Bobby's old pager and quickly ratchets down the volume. He and Paco listen as Bobby's voice broadcasts in a fierce whisper.

BOBBY'S VOICE

You got police left and right--
head for the back right now.

LeVon's eyes narrow. He and Paco turn and look out the window. They see Bobby and Danny staring at them from across the mall. Bobby nods vigorously at them, mouths the word "Go."

Something in his eyes makes LeVon believe him. LeVon smoothly steers Paco to the back of the quiet store. The TEENAGER behind the counter talks on the phone--he doesn't pay the least attention as the two convicts disappear into the stockroom.

JUST AS LeVon closes the stockroom door behind them, two BIG COPS enter the Foto Kwik store and head toward the counter. CLOSE ON the door--it opens just a crack. LeVon peers out.

CLOSE ON the deserted Print-O-Matic machine at the front of the store--a big sheet of wallet-size photos of LeVon chugs out of the slot, on display for anyone who walks in or out the door.

INT. MALL UPPER LEVEL

Bobby and Danny watch all this play out from their safe distance away. Bobby steels himself.

BOBBY

Wait here. No sense in both
of us going...

Bobby heads for the Foto Kwik store. Danny hangs back a beat, then finally lopes after Bobby, mad at himself for following. We pull back to find...

...Allison in her ear-piercing booth, applying pressure to her customer's earlobe. All the while she is staring intently at Bobby and trying to figure out what he's up to.

INT. FOTO KWIK

Bobby enters, feigning interest in the Print-O-Matic. He palms the prints of LeVon and slides them under his shirt.

Bobby leads the way--he and Danny head toward the counter where the teenage employee talks to the cops. The employee holds his hand over the phone--his call interrupted--and shakes his head at the grainy mug shots the first cop holds out to him.

EMPLOYEE

Is that hair, or is he wearing a hat?

Danny slips by on his way to the back of the store, virtually unnoticed. Bobby audaciously stops to peer at the mug shots. The cop holds it out so he can see it better.

FIRST COP

Have you seen either of these men?

BOBBY

Uh...yeah. I think so. Both of them.
About ten minutes ago, down in Penney's.

FIRST COP

You're pretty sure?

Bobby shrugs and nods. The cops thank him and jog for the door, the first one calling on his radio as he exits.

The teenager behind the counter resumes his phone conversation, pretty much ignoring Bobby as he tells his girlfriend about the excitement they just had in the store. Bobby meanders to the stockroom door, where Danny is waiting for him.

Bobby pauses with his hand on the doorknob--the boys exchange a meaningful glance. They're both scared.

BOBBY

(appreciative)

You don't have to do this.

DANNY

Neither do you. C'mon already.

Bobby leads the way into the stockroom.

INT. STOCKROOM

This storage room is small and dimly-lit. Bobby and Danny step inside and come face-to-face with a deadpan LeVon. He has his pistol out and ready, though he doesn't point it at them. Danny shrinks back, but Bobby forces himself not to.

BOBBY

Since when do you need that?

LeVon doesn't answer. Paco steps forward out of the darkness, looking confused, and a little betrayed.

BOBBY

You okay, Paco?

PACO

What the hell you doing, sending the
cops the other way? I'm a hostage here.

BOBBY

Not anymore.

(to LeVon)

I'm gonna do you one gigantic favor--
But first, you're gonna let him go.

LEVON

Yeah?

BOBBY

Yeah. You don't have a choice.
There's a dozen cops looking for you.
Everyone in the mall's gonna know
who you are. No way you're getting
out of here without my help.

LEVON

What's in it for you?

BOBBY

No one gets hurt.
(holds out a hand)
Give me your gun.

LeVon is impressed, maybe amazed, by Bobby's willfulness.
Bobby continues to hold his hand out, not budging--Paco and
Danny are quietly amazed by him, too.

BOBBY

You can't be planning to shoot
your way out of here--you're too
smart for that. Give me your gun.

LEVON

(to all three)

You're not gonna try and screw me,
are you? Send the cops after me?

Danny and Paco shake their heads. Bobby edges forward.

BOBBY

LeVon--the last thing any of us
want to do is make you mad.

Bobby, though nervous, is clearly in charge of this situation.
LeVon considers, then finally hands him the pistol butt-first.

DANNY

Oh man.

LEVON

(admiringly)

You're a born salesman, kid...

Bobby holds the gun like it's made of uranium. He disposes of it in a huge drum of developer--no way to get it back now.

LeVon moves to the door and peeks out through the crack. Paco sags with relief, as does Danny...and as does Bobby himself.

PACO

(heartfelt)

Thanks, Bob. That was... Whew.

LeVon glances back at Paco, sizing up his mood.

LEVON

(nonchalant)

I can still use you in South America.
Big money to be made. Legal money.
You can still come along.

Paco makes a noise of sheer disbelief.

PACO

Kiss my ass I can come along!
I'm going back to prison, LeVon.
Without you, it'll be Club Med.

LeVon's eyes flash. Bobby heads things off, handing LeVon the photos he smuggled in under his shirt.

BOBBY

Here, LeVon--finish your passport.
You're gonna need it, right?

LeVon takes the photos, still eyeballing Paco. He finds some scissors on a shelf and goes to work cutting out his picture.

Danny is concerned. He leans close to Bobby, speaking quietly.

DANNY

Bob--how you gonna do this?

Bobby steps to the back of the stockroom--he studies the back door, which is used for bringing in stock. LeVon looks up from his work and points his scissors at the door.

LEVON

I already checked--it's a service hallway. It just leads back into the mall.

(points at Paco)

Now, what about him? If he wants to give himself up, he can't do it till I'm out of here.

Bobby looks to Paco. Paco grudgingly agrees. Danny speaks up.

DANNY

I'll take care of Paco.

Paco looks askance at Danny. LeVon finishes his passport.

LEVON

So--how do you get me of here?

Everyone looks to Bobby, waiting to hear. Bobby thinks.

BOBBY

I'm gonna roll you right out the front door.

INT. MALL UPPER LEVEL--LATER

LeVon's POV--we track low through the mall concourse, cleaving a path through the crowd. Shoppers occasionally glance down at us as they pass. This tracking shot is kind of bumpy.

LEVON (V.O.)

Great. Real incognito...

Bobby pushes LeVon in a wheelchair. LeVon wears a big cowboy hat and wraparound sunglasses--he looks like a black Richard Petty. His legs are pulled up under a blanket that still has its pricetag. LeVon mutters out of the side of his mouth.

LEVON

Why don't you just stick a big sign on my head--"Suspicious Character"?

BOBBY

It's working, alright? Just relax.

LeVon and Bobby are equally nervous. From behind, we see the wheelchair is obviously a courtesy loaner: The back is stenciled "PROPERTY OF SOUTHFIELD MALL." LeVon's all-important gym bag rests on his lap.

LEVON

This thing rides like an ox cart.

BOBBY

(preoccupied)

It's an old WheelKing 3000--their
aluminum spokes tend to warp...

LeVon raises his eyebrows. Bobby realizes how geeky that sounded, and catches himself.

BOBBY

Man, just deal with it.

They both suddenly clam up. Bobby walks on eggshells as two more new COPS stride right past them, keys jingling and radios squawking. Bobby's head swivels around, watching them pass--then he sees something ahead which scares him even more.

Up ahead is the familiar ear-piercing kiosk. Allison stands at the counter talking to a COP who shows her the mug shots of LeVon and Paco. The cop's back is to us--Allison is staring right at Bobby as he approaches her.

Bobby slows his pushing. He can hear the cop asking Allison to study the mug shots closely. She is instead closely looking over LeVon in his wheelchair, her eyebrows narrowed--then she looks again to Bobby.

LEVON

(sotto, to Bobby)

Get us moving--

Bobby and Allison stare meaningfully into each other's eyes--Bobby gives an almost imperceptible shake of his head, sending her a clear message. Allison looks quickly down at the mug shots when the cop glances up at her.

ALLISON

Is he dangerous?

COP

Not to scare you, but...yeah.

Behind the cop, Bobby vigorously shakes his head no--LeVon's not dangerous. Even LeVon himself gives Allison a contrite shake of his head. Bobby looks pleadingly at Allison.

Allison watches this out of the corner of her eye. Finally, she shrugs at the cop.

ALLISON

Sorry. Haven't seen 'em.

Relieved, Bobby swiftly rolls LeVon past the kiosk and out of frame. The cop asks Allison to keep an eye out, then walks off in the other direction.

Allison turns and watches Bobby, concerned. She exits her booth and takes a few steps after him.

Bobby glances back over his shoulder at Allison as her kiosk recedes in the distance. Cops come and go in the background.

LEVON

What the hell was that about..?

Smiling faintly, Bobby falls in behind a group of MALLWALKERS: Elderly men and women who powerwalk for exercise. Bobby uses them for cover as he and LeVon pass several more officers.

Bobby manages a friendly nod to the nearest officer, who seems to be watching him closely. After an antsy beat, the cop turns his attention elsewhere. Bobby keeps pushing along.

Without thinking about it, Bobby does something out of sheer, unself-conscious nervousness--he sings to himself. We can barely hear him. It takes us a while to figure out what he's singing is the theme from "The Dukes of Hazzard" TV show.

BOBBY

Just two good old boys...
Never meaning no harm...
Beats all you ever saw--
been in trouble with the law
since the day they was born.

As he sings, Bobby peels off from the Mallwalkers and backs LeVon into an open, empty elevator.

INT. ELEVATOR

The doors ding closed, and they have the car to themselves. LeVon absently joins in with Bobby--they stare up at the floor numbers as they sing.

BOBBY & LEVON

Straightening the curves...
Flattening the hills...
Someday, the mountain might get 'em
but the law never will.

They finish, smiling, as the elevator reaches the ground floor. The doors ding open, and Bobby pushes out the wheelchair.

INT. LOWER LEVEL--FOOD COURT AREA

Bobby speeds LeVon's wheelchair into the food court. He slows it to a stop in the foreground--he and LeVon see something in the distance that makes their hearts sink.

Ahead, The Corvette giveaway is still going on, but past all the hub-bub stands a K-9 OFFICER with a police dog on a leash. The two seem to guard the glass doors into the parking lot.

CLOSER ON the K-9 officer--he holds a torn strip of Zippie smock, getting the dog to sniff it good. The dog reacts with a jerk, pulling left and right and snuffling the ground, working to pick up the scent.

LeVon tilts down his dark glasses, getting a better view.

LEVON

They got my Zippie's uniform...

The dog seems to be catching on to the scent. He works in a wide zig-zag, half-dragging the officer behind him. The dog is slowly working toward them--it's only a matter of time.

BOBBY

Is there some way to fool a dog?

LEVON

We could run through a stream,
maybe. Other than that...nope.

Bobby glances around the food court, trying hard to think what to do. The Corvette promotion is in full-swing: We hear the D.J. call another name out of the crowd.

D.J.

Mr. Niles.....Padofsky! Did I
say that right? Where are you, Niles?
There y'ar--c'mon up here and see
if you can start this puppy!--

A MAN--apparently, Niles Padofsky--sidesteps LeVon and Bobby in his excited dash for the stage. The crowd applauds.

LeVon wheels his chair around, looking for another route of escape. He and Bobby see another K-9 OFFICER with another

police dog, working their way toward LeVon from the other direction--LeVon and Bobby are boxed.

LEVON

Shit.

Bobby quickly wheels LeVon through the crowd and behind a fat column, affording them a little privacy. Bobby peeks around the column at the approaching K-9 officers. LeVon tosses off his blanket, hat, and sunglasses.

LEVON

I'm just gonna run for it.

BOBBY

You'll never make it--

LEVON

What choice do I have?--

Bobby tries to think. Suddenly, there's the deep, throaty rumble of a souped-up car engine sparking to life: Niles Padofsky has apparently picked the right key. The crowd screams and cheers wildly.

Bobby peeks out from behind the column, staring at the scene. A slow, satisfied smile crosses his face. He turns back to LeVon, nods his head at the revving Corvette.

BOBBY

There you go.

LeVon stares at Bobby like he's crazy--then he thinks about it, and we can tell from his face that it starts to sound good.

INT. UPPER LEVEL

Allison leans against the railing of the balcony, peering down into the food court, searching for Bobby--she doesn't see him. She turns and heads back to work. She sees Danny, who hoofs past her in the opposite direction, practically walking on his tip-toes. He drops a hank of rope in the nearest trashcan.

DANNY

(under his breath)

Just...play...alo-oong...

Allison frowns at Danny, puzzled. She continues the ten feet to her kiosk--once there, her eyes widen with surprise.

INT. EAR-PIERCING KIOSK

Paco lies hog-tied on his belly on the floor of the kiosk. Duct tape covers his mouth. He glances up at Allison, nodding at her as if to say "Do it."

Allison stares down at Paco, deadpan. She sighs and takes a quick glance around--then SCREAMS at the top of her lungs.

INT. FOOD COURT

LeVon is out of his wheelchair and sans his disguise--he and Bobby work their way through the thick crowd toward the platform that holds the revolving, idling Corvette. They look up upon hearing Allison's scream...everyone else does, too.

BOBBY

There's your cue.

LeVon watches one or two cops jog past, heading for the scream. LeVon smiles at Bobby--he quickly extends his hand.

LEVON

Have a nice life, Bob--you're alright.

Bobby hesitates, then shakes LeVon's hand. He smiles back.

BOBBY

Good luck.

LeVon nods, then wades through the crowd, leaving Bobby behind. He leaps up onto the platform, his gym bag in hand.

The D.J. leans into the open driver's side window, holding his mike to the madly-grinning face of winner Niles Padofsky--before either knows what's happening, LeVon smoothly pulls them both out of the way and climbs behind the wheel of the ZR-1.

A confused murmur goes up from the crowd. LeVon powers closed the windows and power-locks both doors.

INT. CORVETTE

We see the mall revolving through the rear window behind LeVon. The yells of Niles and the D.J. are muffled. The men bang their fists on the window, but LeVon pays them no mind.

CLOSE ON LeVon's hand turning a second, engine governor key in its switch--he clicks it from "VALET" to "PERFORMANCE." He stomps his foot on the gas.

CLOSE ON the tach--the needle smoothly pushes up to redline.

INT. FOOD COURT

The ZR-1's MerCruiser revs high, rattling the soda cups in the Taco Bell booth--the decibel level rises to that of an F-15 on full afterburner. The crowd scatters, wisely sensing danger.

We look up at Bobby, standing his ground amidst the chaos--above him, Allison reappears at the railing of the upper level balcony. She is flanked by a handful of cops.

The Corvette revolves on its lazy susan, exhaust jetting out its twin pipes. Headlights click on. Cops are coming. Niles and the D.J. figure it's about time to bail out.

INT. CORVETTE

LEVON

(super calm)

Five....four....three....two...

LeVon waits patiently for the lazy susan to clock back around facing the mall entrance. Through the windshield, we see Bobby revolve into frame--Danny jogs into frame behind Bobby, joining him. We see their hands go up in a tiny little wave.

LeVon stares at them, smiling crookedly. He gives them a wink.

INT. FOOD COURT

The car revolves into firing position--facing the wide glass entranceway dead-on. Just as a flying wing of cops comes charging up onto the platform, LeVon drops it into first gear and lays on the horn.

CLOSE ON the rear tires--the fat Gatorbacks spin to life, chewing down thru Astroturf and plywood like belt sanders.

The ZR-1 launches off the platform, scattering the cops. It squeals across the empty food court and bashes through the plate glass of the mall entranceway, blasting it to atoms.

The ZR-1 beelines across the parking lot, accelerating straight into the big red sunset which squats on the horizon. Flashing cop cars tear off after it, but it's already out of sight.

All that's left of LeVon is the waning roar of his engine. Hunks of plate glass fall and crash like icicles.

Bobby and Danny, and Allison above them, stare in total awe. Danny looks to Bobby, then back to the parking lot.

DANNY

Spo.

The boys stand silhouetted by the sunset. The song "Danger Man" starts to play as we... FADE TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. ZIPPIE'S--DAY

The familiar store is vacant, its storefront covered with sheets of plywood. Weeds grow through the asphalt. A big realtor's sign by the quiet highway says "For Sale or Lease".

FADE TO:

EXT. PRISON--DAY

The big front gate of the familiar Goochland Correctional Center slides open. Paco, wearing his own civilian clothes, exits the prison--a free man. He is smiling big as he heads for a waiting taxi cab. It is a beautiful day.

FADE TO:

EXT. VIDEO STORE--DAY

Danny's Le Mans is parked in the "Employee of the Month" space.

INT. VIDEO STORE

Danny kicks back behind the counter in the busy store. On a big chalkboard behind Danny's head: "CRAPPY MOVIE WEEK....Rent A Crappy Movie For Less--And You Don't Have To Rewind!!"

Underneath is a long list of Official Crappy Movies (made-up). Danny grins at the business he's getting.

We see the rest of the video store--a healthy number of CUSTOMERS mills the aisles. Red and green pistachio shells litter the floor in definite traffic patterns.

Danny pops a pistachio in his mouth. A big bowl of them sits on the counter. Danny clunks a copy of "Robot Monster" into a high-speed rewinder.

FADE TO:

EXT. BOBBY'S HOUSE--DAY

Bob jogs down the steps, smiling. His crew cut has grown out. He has keys in his hand, and wears a bright "Corvette" T-shirt. He heads toward a lone silver car in his driveway. We can only see enough of the car to know it's a car--not what kind it is.

Bob admires his vehicle, then climbs into the driver's seat. We pull back to see that it is a '72 El Camino pickup--silver, but freckled with gray Bondo. Bob cranks it, but has trouble starting the engine.

EXT. CREAMER PROSTHETIC LIMB & BRACE--DAY

A towable outdoor sign sits in the ditch, pointing its blinking arrow at the store. The sign says "A FULL LINE OF HOME NURSING PRODUCTS FOR YOUR ONE-STOP CONVENIENCE". We track in on the store's plate glass window...

Inside, Bob and his dad put the finishing touches on a window display they are building. A male mannequin dressed as a Tour De France racer sits in a wheelchair, fists clenched over his head in victory.

Bob stretches finish line tape across the mannequin's chest. Mr. Creamer places a big sign that says "RACE to low prices on Everest Wheelchairs!" Bob motions for his dad to move the sign to a better spot. The two work together well.

FADE TO:

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO

The studio is dark, and the video cameras are old-fashioned. A silhouetted STAGE MANAGER wears a bulky headset and counts down to zero in Spanish. He points to someone out of frame, and the stage lights blaze to life.

CLOSE ON a video monitor--color bars give way to LeVon's big smiling face.

LEVON

Buenos Dias, Venezuela!--

LeVon has made his dream a reality: He has his very own home shopping channel. He gets right down to selling, speaking fluent Spanish--we watch him for a beat. But then...

The camera widens to introduce...Paco, seated next to him.

PACO

Hola, Amigos! Hola, Venezuela!--

LeVon and Paco both speak rapid, perfect Spanish, and they play off each other wonderfully as they sell, sell, sell. There are no subtitles, but we don't need them--we can easily discern the phrase "cubic zirconium". The products are all shot through a cheesy, rotating "starburst" filter.

LeVon--and Paco--are as happy as we've seen them.

FADE TO:

INT. MALL EAR-PIERCING KIOSK

It's a bustling day in the mall. We track through the crowd of SHOPPERS to the familiar ear-piercing kiosk. Inside the kiosk, Allison grins at a nervous Bob as she swabs his earlobe with an alcohol prep pad.

Bob and Allison lean close and joke around together. They are comfortable with each other--all's right with the world.

Allison raises the pneumatic piercing gun to Bob's earlobe. The song "Danger Man" ends...

ALLISON

Hold still now...

CLOSER, CLOSER ON Bob as he winces and sucks in his breath. The frame cuts to black--then we hear a loud, pneumatic THUP.

THE END