

DE NIRO

by  
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For Molly the dog,  
My teacher, my friend.  
2001-2011

A steady canine PANTING...

FADE IN:

INT. STATION WAGON - NIGHT

A large plastic ANIMAL CRATE bobs with the motion of a car.

Passing streetlights illuminate the unflinching EYES of the Dog swathed in shadow within for just a moment.

CANINE POV:

Monochromatic.

Looking out through plastic breathing ports as we pull into a building, and then stop.

We hear the front door open. Driver circling.

Only his torso is visible as he opens the tailgate. He wears a dark BLUE windbreaker.

A HANDLER joins him. A small Mercedes logo on his jacket, the kind a dealership's master mechanic might wear.

He opens our crate, and lashes a thick leash to our neck.

Guides us from the trunk --

INT. LOADING DOCK - CONTINUOUS

-- and then we're moving along cracked concrete --

-- a POCKET CHAIN hanging from the Handler's pocket swaying before us like a metronome as we follow his gatorskin boots.

We turn to Blue's feet as we move. Expensive rubber rain covers slid over a pair of perfectly polished dress shoes.

Beneath the windbreaker, he's wearing an expensive suit.

We pass through a door --

STAIRWELL

-- down a flight of rotting stairs, now.

VOICES drifting up.

Lots of them.

A crowd.

Louder as we reach the bottom --

HALLWAY

-- and move into a dark hall.

The voices echo up the narrow space.

A cacophony of excitement. Anticipation.

*A sporting crowd.*

LOUDER, as we approach a door ahead.

The light changing, here, as reflected flames lick the walls.

Sound rising to a crescendo as we pass through the door --

PIT ROOM

-- into a large room. Burning oil drums light the space.

DOZENS OF PEOPLE stand before us. Their faces are out of view, but their dress ranges from formal to street.

A hush falls as they turn to us.

Reverence.

They PART --

-- revealing a fourteen foot PIT beyond.

We continue toward it, our view locking ahead as a panel slides up to admit us, and the Handler leads us into --

A DOG PIT

We scan three-foot wooden walls, pocked with scratches and stains -- as we are guided into a corner.

Our breathing accelerates --

-- as THREE PITBULLS are lead into the remaining corners.

We shift to see through our Handler's legs, the other dogs straining against the hold of their own handlers.

Froth lining jaws. Keyed in anticipation. GROWLING.  
Their focus is on us, alone.  
But we remain silent.  
Just the sound of our own BREATHING.  
Blue leans down --  
-- and looks into our eyes.  
His face is hard, eyes dark.  
He is a man who exudes violence.  
Off his sign, a REFEREE enters the arena. The Handler steps  
aside, clearing our view to the other dogs.  
As the Referee raises his hands --  
-- our perspective FOCUSES.  
Time RAMPING DOWN --  
-- sound FILTERING OUT --  
-- as everything but the other animals washes from sight.  
Until there is nothing...  
Except these words:

REFEREE  
*Release your dogs.*

All three dogs EXPLODE TOWARD US.  
And as we dash HEADLONG TOWARD THE FURY--

CUT TO:

TITLE: **DE NIRO**

As it fades...

The SOUND OF RAIN.

FADE UP:

EXT. INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT PARKING LOT - DAY

Steady rain beats against a rundown warehouse.

The sound of an APPROACHING CAR bleeds through the drone.

After a moment, a sagging old Monte Carlo turns unevenly into the lot, one of its wheels jumping the curb.

It moves too quickly toward a carport adjoining the building.

Enters without slowing --

-- and CRASHES--

CUT TO:

EXT. HOTEL - DUSK - PAST

A PLANE cuts through a burnt-orange summer sky, coming in for a landing at an airport nearby. We PULL BACK --

-- through a window --

INT. HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

-- to find a man's shirtless silhouette watching it.

This is [YOUNGER] STACY mid-thirties. Hard but handsome, eyes full of life beneath the veneer of a career criminal.

He turns --

-- to a GIRL, pulling on a blouse as she emerges from a bathroom. She's beautiful. Maybe thirty. Eyes much wiser.

She crosses to a suitcase on the bed -- a glimpse of a yellow dress and an old first-edition book inside as she closes it.

Stacy approaches behind.

She leans into him -- but doesn't allow herself to indulge too much. Lifts her hair so he can button her blouse.

As he finishes, she turns.

KISSES him deeply.

There is no mistaking the love between these two.

She looks into his eyes as they pull apart.

STACY

Maybe I'll meet you out there.

She studies him, turning something over in her mind.

She goes to say it --

-- but doesn't.

Chooses something else instead.

GIRL

I won't wait. Not even for you.

He stares back.

STACY

What would I...?

He trails off -- unable to envision it.

GIRL

Same sun in every sky.

STACY

And the clouds?

She studies him. Shakes her head.

GIRL

Those change.

He pauses, taking in her words...

But he isn't yet equipped with whatever it would take to leave this life and follow her. And she can see it.

She touches the side of his face, tenderly.

It's almost a gesture of pity.

She lifts her suitcase --

-- and moves out the door.

As Stacy watches her go, the SOUND OF RAIN rises...

BACK TO:

EXT. CARPORT - DAY - PRESENT

Rain water runs down the corrugated metal wall --

-- to the front end of the Monte Carlo protruding from within, STEAM hissing weakly from the folded hood.

The grill is dented and strafed with a smear of BLOOD.

INT. MONTE CARLO - DAY

The driver is slumped over the steering wheel, face buried against the dash.

Stacy regains his bearings in the passenger seat. He's maybe five years older, a week's stubble, and a lot worse for wear.

GAGE (20's), skinny and wound tight, a faint rural twang at odds with his street attire, cusses at the driver from the back seat.

GAGE  
Stupid motherfucker!

WALKER (50's), a wiry old pro in a faded leather jacket, speaks beside him.

WALKER  
Don't think he's listening....

Stacy checks.

STACY  
Fuck!

The driver is dead.

Gage takes it in.

Quickly turns his attention to a yellow tote bag at his feet.

Dozens of bottles of prescription pharmaceuticals of all varieties have spilled from inside.

He bends to scoop them back into the bag --

-- but Walker takes his wrist.

WALKER  
I got it.

The two hold a look for a moment.

Stacy pops the hood --

INT. CARPORT - CONTINUOUS

-- emerging and checking the engine.

Walker and Gage move up beside him.

STACY  
Radiator's split.

Walker turns away, crossing to scan the street.

GAGE  
So?

Stacy turns a disgusted look on him.

WALKER (O.S.)  
Stacy.

Stacy and Gage approach, leaning against a wall beside him --  
-- as a police cruiser pulls by on the street across the lot.  
It passes, but there's another one visible a block beyond.

WALKER (CONT'D)  
Hotter than that engine out here.

Stacy knows he's right.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRCASE - DAY - PAST

The Girl wipes sweat from her brow --

-- as she moves up an industrial staircase.

She peers nervously back down a dozen flights.

GIRL  
You usually wait till the second  
date to take a girl trespassing?

Ahead, Young Stacy leads the way up a final flight.

STACY  
Here we go.

They come to a stop before a door. A sign upon it reads:

*ROOF ACCESS*

A warning is posted below: *Bar triggers alarm.*

GIRL  
We're gonna go to jail.

STACY  
Nah, it's my off-day.

She laughs despite herself.

Stacy takes her hand and places it on the door under his own.

They share a look --

-- and push it open together into a flood of SUNLIGHT--

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - MAIN ROOM - PRESENT

A SNAP --

-- as a heavy door is pried open, dim light and the sound of rain cutting into the dusty air of a large main room.

Stacy, Walker and Gage move in, securing the door behind.

Several other doors lead off the main space, a rotting staircase leading up to another floor to their right.

A sheet of perfectly still water lines the floor.

Gage kneels and picks up something floating on the surface, disturbing the perfect mirror image of the three men.

Smiles as he holds it up: a twenty dollar bill.

GAGE  
Lucky day.

Stacy ignores him, turning to Walker.

STACY  
You got any good will in transpo?

WALKER  
Short notice, short money, tall heat? Not in my rolodex.

GAGE  
The fuck's a rolodex--?

STACY

Don't talk for a while, okay?

Gage snorts defiantly, stuffing the money into his pocket--

Walker stops him short as he almost walks into a hole in the floor descending into a flooded basement below.

WALKER

Lucky day.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT - PAST

CANINE POV:

The sound of CANINE BREATHING as we watch a crimson droplet fall from our own face into a small puddle on a filthy floor.

Blood.

The rasp in our BREATH suggests there's more in our lungs.

Footsteps cause our attention to rise, the sound of uncoiled WHEELS approaching along with them.

After a moment, the Handler appears pushing a wheelbarrow.

As it moves past us, three limp pitbulls are visible inside. The ones from the fight. They aren't dead but they're close.

One stares back at us, the ferocity gone from its eyes --

-- as it passes into a ROOM ahead, door closing behind.

Silence again.

After a moment, the lights above us FLICKER and DIM --

-- our view cocking as we listen to a brief chorus of HOWLS behind the door. The man in BLUE emerges up the hall.

We rise, excited by our master's arrival --

-- but a chain prevents us from going to him.

He moves to us.

Stands looking down, his face swathed in shadow -- as the Handler emerges from the room and moves to his side.

For a moment they just look at us in silence.

BLUE  
Shame.

HANDLER  
Had heart.

They take another beat.

HANDLER (CONT'D)  
I'll take care of it.

Blue looks a moment more.

Nods.

Grateful not to have to do it himself.

BLUE  
I'll be back for the count.

We watch as he moves off up the hall.

The Handler unties us.

HANDLER  
Come on, boy.

As our master disappears from view --

-- we follow the Handler toward the room ahead...

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - STAIRWAY - PRESENT

Stacy follows Walker and Gage up the stairs -- a phone held to his ear. After a moment, someone picks up.

STACY  
(into phone)  
Car trouble....

He looks at Gage.

STACY (CONT'D)  
(into phone; re: Gage)  
My wild card came up a deuce.

Stacy continues up --

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

-- following Walker to a window at the end of a long hall.

STACY  
 (into phone)  
 Day to flip, I make you whole then--

They take position on either side of the glass, watching as two police cruisers move down parallel streets a block over, searchlights scanning through the constant rain.

STACY (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Right...

Stacy listens.

STACY (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Right.

Hangs up.

GAGE  
 What he say--?

Walker answers for him.

WALKER  
 He said it's all over the news.  
 Told us we're on our own till  
 nightfall at best, and he wants  
 fifty-percent hazard pay just to  
 think about sticking his neck out.

STACY  
 Sundown's 8:08. He'll try to send  
 a van then if it cools off.

GAGE  
 That's six fucking hours!

They turn to him.

GAGE (CONT'D)  
 What?!

STACY  
 You stupid piece of shit--

GAGE  
 No one told me there was alarms!

STACY

That wouldn't have mattered if you  
stuck to your own shopping list--

GAGE

We should'a had burners--

STACY

You gonna shoot a cop?

GAGE

Don't know who I'm gonna shoot.

WALKER

Watch that.

GAGE

Look, we got the shit and we got  
out, that's a score--

STACY

You can tell that to our wheelman's  
wife, she'll be very proud of us--

GAGE

I didn't need to bring you in--

STACY

Maybe you can throw her a couple  
hundred for the casket -- if there  
even is a fucking buyer--

GAGE

Fuck you!

Walker narrows his eyes.

He moves closer to Gage.

GAGE (CONT'D)

What...?

Closer.

Gage steps back, on edge --

-- hits the wall.

GAGE (CONT'D)

What the fuck, yo?

Walker leans just inches from the boy's sweating face...

And SNIFFS Gage's skin.

WALKER

He's sick.

Stacy looks at Gage, assessing Walker's analysis.

Knows he's right.

STACY

Aw, Christ.

Gage turns back to Walker.

GAGE

The fuck would you know--?

WALKER

I spilled more dope in my day than  
you'll ever live to shoot, son.

Gage holds his look.

But he can see it's pointless to deny it.

GAGE

I just... didn't have no wake-up  
for this morning, alright?

WALKER

So you figured you'd snag one.

Gage knows he fucked up.

GAGE

Just...

He turns to the yellow tote bag.

GAGE (CONT'D)

Just let me get well.

He looks up at Walker.

GAGE (CONT'D)

Come on, man...

Walker tosses the tote bag to Stacy.

WALKER

(to Stacy)  
Your show, kid.

Stacy turns to Gage, disgusted.

STACY  
I should let you fucking sweat.

GAGE  
It's the yellow one.

Stacy digs a vial of powder from the bag and tosses it Gage's way -- Gage tracking its flight like an outfielder --

-- frantically bobbling, then securing it in his hands.

He looks up, embarrassed at his desperation.

GAGE (CONT'D)  
They got a sink in here?

STACY  
We been here longer than you?

GAGE  
Whatever.

Gage turns and scampers through a door down the hall.

Stacy turns to Walker.

But Walker's already moving through another door up the hall.

Stacy lets out a breath, closes his eyes--

CUT TO:

Two blinking GREEN LIGHTS --

INT. TOWNHOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - PAST

-- of an alarm system.

High end wall unit, domestic.

The lights GO YELLOW.

After a moment, a STEADY SCRAPING is heard.

We move away from the unit, through a beautiful kitchen of polished marble, past a brushed steel fridge --

-- the SCRAPING getting louder as we approach a window.

It stops.

And we turn to a second window beside it --

-- revealing a hole in the glass.

A man in black RISES into view, bag slung over his shoulder.

It's Young Stacy.

He sets his watch.

#### BEDROOM

Stacy moves into a lavish, sprawling bedroom.

He passes by silver, crystal, jewelry, paying no mind, as he crosses to another door across the room, and moves through.

#### DARK ROOM

The faint hiss of climate controlled pressure as Stacy enters, and passes a mini-Maglite across a long shelf.

It is lined with books. Old ones. Pristinely preserved.

He marvels for just a moment at the gorgeous first editions.

And then gets to work -- moving down the line, delicately loading them into a custom padded bag.

Everything one could imagine, from Ulysses to Lolita to--

He stops, as he realizes a book is missing from the shelf.

A faint noise -- moist -- calls his attention to a corner ahead. He moves toward it, head cocked, listening.

As he rounds an adjoining section of the room --

-- he STOPS.

The GIRL sits cross-legged on the floor, a bowl of strawberries in her lap -- and the book in her hand.

She is staring at him as she finishes a bite of strawberry.

STACY

Who are you?

GIRL

Housekeeper.

Stacy processes.

STACY  
You don't come on Saturdays.

GIRL  
I... like to read. They're gone on  
the weekends, so...

She trails off.

They stand in silence for a moment, both embarrassed.

GIRL (CONT'D)  
They have an alarm, you know.

Stacy nods.

But it's hard for either to take their eyes off each other.

He gestures to her book.

STACY  
I read that one.

GIRL  
Yeah?

STACY  
I like the ending--

GIRL  
Don't tell me.

Stacy looks insulted.

STACY  
I wouldn't do that.

She stares at him a moment. Nods appreciatively.

GIRL  
These people... They don't read.  
It's an 'investment.'

He shares her disgust.

STACY  
I know.

He checks his watch.

GIRL  
Sorry.

Assuming he's waiting for the book, she holds it out.

STACY  
No... Finish it.

She almost smiles.

GIRL  
Thanks.

SIRENS approach in the distance.

GIRL (CONT'D)  
You should go.

STACY  
Yeah.

But he doesn't.

And she doesn't want him to...

As the SIRENS grow louder--

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - STOREROOM - PRESENT

Stacy enters --

-- to find Walker watching another cruiser pass by outside.

The older man looks at the younger.

STACY  
I fucked up--

WALKER  
Rinky-dink pharmacy scores and  
crewing up with punks that can't  
keep their hands out of the cookie  
jar long enough to finish the main  
course?

STACY  
I dropped the ball, I'm sorry--

WALKER  
I've seen this.

Stacy holds his look.

WALKER (CONT'D)

Guy gets shaken up -- partner dies,  
kid gets sick, wife balls someone  
else -- and he starts making his  
own chaos.

STACY

Walker--

WALKER

Most of them can't even see it.  
But they're folded on their feet;  
can't stay in, can't walk away.  
Only three types of last score--

Stacy's heard it before.

STACY

-- the kind that gets you life, the  
kind that gets you a bullet, and  
the kind you walk away from.

Walker studies Stacy as he lights a smoke and starts to pace.

WALKER

Why didn't you get on that plane?

Stacy doesn't want to talk about this.

STACY

Guess the beach wasn't for me,  
alright?

Walker holds his look.

Not satisfied with Stacy's answer.

STACY (CONT'D)

I'm not the one whose reached  
retirement age, here. Don't see  
you hanging up your toolbox.

Walker slides out pack of nicotine gum and pops a piece.

Considers a moment.

WALKER

I did this score when my kid was  
little. Christmas eve, I must've  
been nineteen. Pet shop job.

He rolls the piece between his fingers.

WALKER (CONT'D)

Manager told me there was gonna be  
five grand in the safe - guess  
these places do good on holidays,  
bunnies and kittens and all that.

Stacy smokes as he listens.

WALKER (CONT'D)

I'm counting on this score to put  
something under the tree for my  
little girl, so I crack this safe --  
six number dimple cut, I was so  
proud of myself -- and I pull this  
thing open and...

INT. PET SHOP - NIGHT - PAST

And then we're in there.

YOUNG WALKER (19) staring into a safe.

His pride melts to disappointment.

WALKER (V.O.)

... nothing. Not a note. Turns  
out this manager's a degenerate,  
already dropped it at the track.  
But it's still Christmas, and I'll  
be goddamned if my little girl  
doesn't have something special  
under that tree when she wakes up.  
So I say, fuck it. I'm going  
shopping.

INT. PET SHOP AISLES - MOMENTS LATER

Fluorescent light reflects off Young Walker's face as he  
moves along an aisle.

WALKER (V.O.)

I'm looking for a bunny or a cat,  
you know? - but all they got is  
puppies and fish. Now, I know  
who's gonna be walking a puppy...

A BEAUTIFUL FISH passes into the foreground, and we realize  
we're now watching Young Walker through an aquarium.

WALKER (V.O.)  
 ... so I find this fish. Tropical  
 one. Beautiful, bright yellow,  
 different than the others.

EXT. PET SHOP - BACK LOT - NIGHT

Young Walker emerges with an aquarium in his arms.

WALKER (V.O.)  
 I grab the whole tank. Must've  
 weighed sixty pounds, cord hanging  
 off the back for a heater or some  
 shit -- and I'm about to split...

Young Walker pauses.

WALKER (V.O.)  
 ... and I stop and think: Am I  
 really about to walk out of a score  
 with one goddamned fish?

INT. PET SHOP AISLES - MOMENTS LATER

We TRACK along a row of fish tanks.

WALKER (V.O.)  
 So I go fishing.

A NET plunges in, plucking a fish from each tank as we go.

WALKER (V.O.)  
 Long shrimp-lookin' ones, leopard-  
 type guys, big old black ones with  
 those big bubble eyes. Just  
 dropping them in the tank with  
 Yellow.

INT. REAR OF VAN - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Young Walker drums on the wheel to the radio up front.

WALKER (V.O.)  
 By now, I'm pretty happy how this  
 worked out, you know? I mean, I  
 never would've come up with this on  
 my own - would've been a teddy  
 bear, or a coloring book, or a doll  
 if I was flush, but this...

BOOM DOWN to find --

-- the AQUARIUM on the floor, rocking with the motion of the road, dozens of fish now present with the yellow tropical.

WALKER (V.O.)  
... This is *inspired*.

Water spills over as the van comes to a stop.

INT. YOUNG WALKER'S APARTMENT - DAWN

We FLOAT through an apartment decorated for Christmas.

WALKER (V.O.)  
So I slip in, real quiet. And I set up this tank, right under the tree. Even fed 'em all so they were nice and happy. It's starting to get light, about now, so I sit down to wait for my kid to get up, because I just gotta see her face when she sees this -- but lugging that aquarium around is hard work.

We pass into a small living room --

-- and find Young Walker asleep in an easy chair.

WALKER (V.O.)  
I'm out as soon as I hit the chair.

We RISE to find our STACY and WALKER standing over him.

WALKER  
And I wake up...

Walker's mood sobers.

WALKER (CONT'D)  
And there's this screaming...  
Nothing like that sound. Of your own kid, just *screaming*...

And now we see what he sees:

A little girl.

Wailing in tears under a fake little Christmas tree.

The aquarium sits before her.

WALKER (CONT'D)  
These fish... they're all dead.  
All bloated up like an East River  
dump job.

ON THE TANK

Sure enough...

WALKER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
All except that yellow tropical.

The yellow TROPICAL swims into view beneath the bloated  
corpses of the other fish floating on the surface above--

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - ROOM - PRESENT

Stacy stares.

A long head of ash drops from his neglected smoke.

WALKER  
Turns out fresh water fish don't  
make it in the salt....

Walker gives him a sad smile.

WALKER (CONT'D)  
Me, I'm a fresh water fish; I ain't  
cut out for the beach. You...?

His look sobers.

WALKER (CONT'D)  
You might just be a tropical.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM - DAY

Gage slides a syringe from a slit in the fabric of his fly.  
Lays it next to a slop-sink by his dope and turns the faucet.  
But nothing comes out.

GAGE  
Shit.

He looks up -- noticing something glass peaking out of one of  
a series of portable cabinets alongside the sink.

Opens it.

He cocks his head, intrigued.

Large gauge syringes with oversized cylinders hang on the door along with dozens of vials of pharmaceuticals.

He inspects one:

Creatine Monohydrate.

Drops it on the floor. Examines another:

Testosterone. He drops it, too, hastening his inventory, scanning labels and discarding them just as fast:

Winstrol V, Dinabol, Equipose...

... Propionate, Repotest, Cocaine hydrochloride...

He pauses at this, examining the crystalline powder inside. Sticks it in his pocket and turns to the next cabinet--

But stops --

-- as SOMETHING IN THE CORNER catches his attention.

For a moment, he just stares.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT - PAST

The door where we saw the Handler take the Dog stands closed.

After a moment--

The LIGHTS FLICKER and DIM as before.

There is no howl from within this time --

-- but the sounds of POUNDING PAWS and NAILS SCRAPING METAL are heard faintly as electricity hums beyond the door.

HANDLER (O.S.)  
God DAMN it!

The struggle persists another beat.

And then stops, the lights returning to normal.

After a moment --

-- the Handler emerges.

Stands inspecting a bloody hand.

A bite.

HANDLER (CONT'D)  
God damn it...

He pauses, a curious look rising on his face --

-- as he SENSES something behind him.

Slowly... he turns back to the door...

BACK TO:

INT. SUPPLY ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

Stacy and Walker move into the room behind Gage --

-- and stop, just as he did, staring beyond him...

Across the space, in the threshold to the next room --

-- is the gnarled corpse of the HANDLER. He lies face down  
in a pool of congealed blood, clothes and flesh badly torn --

-- POCKET CHAIN and GATORSKIN BOOTS confirming his identity,  
along with the MERCEDES LOGO on his now shredded jacket.

But that isn't the problem.

There, standing over his savaged remains --

-- is a massive, *WHITE PRESA CANARIO*. The single toughest  
fighting dog on the planet. Think Pitbull squared....

This one weighs in at 190 pounds.

Its body is badly scarred, its fur matted with blood, fresh  
bite wounds and punctures lining it from face to tail.

It blinks through a veil of crimson, the fur along its neck  
singled where the Handler tried to put it down.

*And failed.*

The men stand for a moment in silence.

GAGE  
(whispering)  
I don't think it knows we're here--

The Dog sends a BLAST OF AIR out through its nostrils.

And LOOKS RIGHT AT THEM.

It raises a lip to expose a row of BLOODY TEETH.

STACY

Shit.

It unleashes a furious BARK without any sound.

And CHARGES.

WALKER

Go!

They race from the room --

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

-- the Dog EXPLODING into the hallway after them and bounding across the hall in thunderous strides.

Walker and Stacy make it into another room, but Gage is lagging behind, the Dog right on his heels.

WALKER

Run!

Gage dives through the threshold.

The Dog BARRELS into it as it slams closed--

CUT TO:

A bath of SUNLIGHT --

EXT. CITY ROOFTOP - DAY - PAST

-- as Young Stacy leads the Girl out onto a roof.

She looks down to see a makeshift picnic set up there.

Bedsheet as a blanket.

She can't help but smile.

Upon it --

-- is a bowl of STRAWBERRIES.

She stoops. As she lifts one--

STACY (O.S.)  
Over here.

ACROSS THE ROOF

Stacy stands looking out at a city we cannot see.

The Girl approaches beside him.

Takes it in.

They stand for a moment in the silence.

Whatever they're looking at, it's beautiful.

GIRL  
Almost makes me want to stick  
around.

Stacy's smile fades.

STACY  
Where you going?

GIRL  
I don't know...

Pauses.

GIRL (CONT'D)  
... but I always do.

Stacy considers a long moment.

Turns another question in his mind.

STACY  
How do you know when to stay?

She thinks.

GIRL  
I don't know...

Stacy watches as she looks down at the strawberry.

GIRL (CONT'D)  
I never felt that before.

As she looks up to Stacy, the sound of BREATHING...

BACK TO:

INT. BOOK DEPOSITORY - DAY - PRESENT

The men stare at each other, breathing hard.

The wall that separates them from the hall stops four feet from the ceiling, wooden crates stacked all along it, heaps of rotting text books piled throughout the room.

STACY

What the FUCK was that?!

GAGE

It didn't make any noise...

WALKER

(quiet)

Beware still water or a silent dog.

STACY

What?

WALKER

I bunked with this gangbanger used to fight pits in Chicago. Said he cut out their voice boxes so he could throw 'em in the trunk and drive around with the bass bumping...

STACY

Christ...

GAGE

What the fuck for?

WALKER

Guess he was a music lover.

STACY

The guy -- I never seen a squatter with gatorskin boots before...

WALKER

Banger said bigger operations hop from place to place, little pop-ups, just temporary; leave someone to put down the losers when they split...

Stacy crosses to a row of grafiti-frosted windows.

STACY

Five-and-a-half hours till transpo.

Walker joins him.

There's a FIRE ESCAPE outside. Stairs leading down.

WALKER

We hole up right here till then and  
take the stairs.

GAGE (O.S.)

Fuck!

They turn.

Gage is furiously checking his pockets.

He is sweating, skin a glistening, doughy pale.

GAGE (CONT'D)

My dope... My fucking dope!

He turns to the door --

-- realizing he left it in the supply room.

STACY

You'll live.

Stacy crosses with Walker and inspects the door. Despite how thick it is, it's splintered where the Dog slammed it.

WALKER

We should block it. To make sure.

A DRY HEAVE rakes through Gage's body.

They ignores him --

-- nodding to the heavy crates along the wall.

Gage steadies himself, blocking a nostril and firing snot to the floor, as Walker and Stacy begin sliding a crate toward the door. They look up as Gage starts toward the door, too.

STACY

What do you think you're doing?

GAGE

I'm fucking sick.

WALKER

And?

GAGE

And my dope's in the other room!

Stacy watches in disbelief.

WALKER

Did you... Did we not just almost  
get eaten by a giant fucking dog?

STACY

You're not touching that door.

Gage raises a hand to his mouth as he RETCHES --  
-- bile spurting through his fingers.

WALKER

Have a smoke, it helps.

Gage wipes his hand on his pants --

GAGE

Fuck you.

-- and reaches for the door.

Stacy and Walker block his path.

STACY

You got shit in your ears?

Gage reaches to push Walker aside.

GAGE

Fuck you--!

Stacy PUNCHES him in the face.

Gage stumbles back, hand moving to his mouth, a line of blood  
dribbling down his lip. Walker turns to Stacy.

STACY

He was going for you.

Gage raises a fist to strike back --

But Stacy SLAMS him again --

-- sending him toppling to the floor, clutching his nose.

GAGE

You broke my fucking nose!

STACY

I should've thrown you out of the  
fucking car.

Gage lunges --

-- but Stacy fires another blow mashing Gage's lips into his teeth -- and sending him toppling back to the floor.

He hits the ground in a limp heap.

Stacy flexes his hand as Walker stoops to inspect Gage.

Out cold, but he'll live.

WALKER

Jesus, kid--

STACY

You hear that?

Walker rises -- as Stacy crosses to the door.

Leans against it, listening.

Walker approaches, leaning to the wood beside him.

STACY (CONT'D)

There....

The faint sound of LIQUID hitting the other side.

They look down --

-- to see a yellow puddle growing under the door.

SLAM! -- THE DOG CRASHES AGAINST THE OTHER SIDE.

Stacy and Walker brace for another attack...

But it doesn't come.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOSHOP - BACKROOM - NIGHT - PAST

A makeshift vet's office. Homemade medical paraphernalia lines the walls along with tools for automotive bodywork.

A young white dog sits on a workbench, back to us.

Blue and the Handler stand looking down at him.

HANDLER

Big paws.

BLUE  
Real big.

HANDLER  
Been de-barked.

BLUE  
Too much street in the game.

HANDLER  
Mm-hm.

And now we get a look at the Dog. Maybe nine months old.  
He has no scars, yet. But the eyes are the same.  
Looking back at the two men.

BLUE  
Think he's pure?

HANDLER  
As the driven snow. Raise him  
right, could be a wrecker.

BLUE  
If he's game.

HANDLER  
You gonna roll him?

BLUE  
Only way to know.

They stare at the Dog for another moment.

HANDLER  
I'll start the work.

BACK TO:

INT. BOOK DEPOSITORY - DAY - PRESENT

Two large beams have been positioned against the door, the  
opposite ends braced against the floor with a heavy crate.

SMOKE drifts up from the other side --

-- where Stacy and Walker sit side by side against it.

STACY  
Time?

Walker checks his watch.

WALKER  
Five hours.

STACY  
Christ.

Walker peers around the crate at Gage. They've laid him on a pair of the crates against the wall like a make-shift bed.

WALKER  
You think I'm helping you carry his  
ass down those stairs you're crazy.

STACY  
I can fucking carry him.

A snicker escapes from Walker.

STACY (CONT'D)  
What? This shit is funny to you?

WALKER  
No, it's just... I know you always  
been a cat person is all....

Walker cracks himself up.

Stacy can't help but smile.

STACY  
Fuck you.

WALKER  
Back at you.

STACY  
And I'm not.

WALKER  
Not, what?

STACY  
I'm not a cat person.

WALKER  
You switched?

STACY  
I still like cats, I just prefer  
dogs now, that's all.

WALKER

It's alright to be a cat person.

STACY

I know it is.

WALKER

They're smart, they're independent,  
you don't have to pick up their  
shit--

STACY

I had a thing happen on a job made  
me re-think the thing, alright?

WALKER

You had another dog thing happen on  
a job?

STACY

It's a long story.

WALKER

We don't have a paucity of time,  
here.

STACY

It's personal.

WALKER

What kind of job?

STACY

I told you, it's personal.

WALKER

Being a cat person doesn't  
necessarily mean you're less of a  
man.

STACY

You had to be there.

WALKER

It doesn't mean you're a pussy--

STACY

Truffles.

WALKER

What?

STACY

Truffles, it was a truffles job.

WALKER  
Truffles, like chocolates?

STACY  
No, like mushrooms.

WALKER  
You pulled a mushroom job?

STACY  
Not mushrooms. Truffles.

Walker laughs.

WALKER  
You're kidding me.

STACY  
Serious. Good gig, too. Dope boys  
get maybe eighteen-grand on a key  
of blow, kilo of White Alba's'll  
cost you a hundred fucking K.

WALKER  
How you get plugged in with that?

STACY  
Had this chef out of Boston I used  
to get loaded with. I did a stint  
in South Bay and come out and this  
guy's in Gourmet fucking magazine.  
Turns out he's even better at  
cooking food than he is base.

WALKER  
And he needed truffles.

STACY  
Fifty cents on the dollar.

WALKER  
Where the hell's the product?

STACY  
It's in the ground, you gotta dig  
it up. But he tells me about this  
auction they hold once a year.  
Fucking thing is simulcast in  
Florence, London and Macau.

We BOOM UP -- and the top of the crate behind Stacy and  
Walker becomes a VELVET-DRAPED TABLE covered in TRUFFLES.

An expensively dressed AUCTIONEER bangs a gavel and we--

CUT TO:

EXT. STORAGE FACILITY - DAY - PAST

A handcuff snapping around the handle of a steel SUITCASE.

STACY (V.O.)

Things get brought in the country  
chained to some ex-Mossad's wrist,  
I mean high security.

As it's lifted we follow it across a parking lot --

STACY (V.O.)

But the guy that runs the auction  
decides he's gonna cut costs.

-- to a STORAGE FACILITY.

STACY (V.O.)

Puts them in a regular old storage  
unit right here in town.

INT. STORAGE FACILITY - NIGHT

MOVING through the halls.

STACY (V.O.)

I case the place, and there's only  
one guard on night shift.

We round a corner --

-- and come to a stop before a sleeping SECURITY GUARD.

STACY (V.O.)

Poor bastard humps mail all day for  
the post office, so he's out like a  
light as soon as the guy before him  
takes off. But this place is not  
playing around when it comes to  
client privacy and I can't for the  
life of me sort out which unit  
these truffles are in. I call The  
Geek --

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT APARTMENT - DAY

A VERY FAT MAN works at a bay of sticker-plastered computer monitors. He turns to Young Stacy and shakes his head.

STACY (V.O.)  
-- no dice. The place is old  
school, strictly paper files.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

We emerge from the back of a garbage truck --  
-- continuing around a massive pile of trash --

STACY (V.O.)  
I borrowed a truck and checked the  
trash for billing --

-- to find a grime-encrusted Young Stacy picking through it.

STACY (V.O.)  
-- but I'm getting nothing.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Young Stacy stands by as a CHEF pleads his case.

STACY (V.O.)  
I tell the Chef I'm throwing in the  
towel -- I mean, this place is five  
floors, a hundred units each -- but  
he begs me to stay on. Tells me  
he's gonna pay seventy cents on the  
dollar. So I do a little research.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

PANNING ACROSS a sea of pine trees.

We STOP on an OLD MAN with pompadour and tracksuit, spittle  
flying from his lips as he SCREAMS like a drill sergeant.

STACY (V.O.)  
 Find out about this guy in New  
 Jersey -- crazy Italian living in a  
 shack way out in the Pine Barrens.

And now we see that the Old Man is shouting commands to a  
 little JACK RUSSEL TERRIER, sniffing along the forest floor.

STACY (V.O.)  
 He trains truffle dogs.

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY - PRESENT

Walker stares at Stacy.

WALKER  
 Truffle dogs.

STACY  
 Right. They're better than pigs  
 because pigs eat the things, but  
 dogs just dig them up as long as  
 you've got food they like better on  
 standby.

WALKER  
 Right.

Stacy sparks a cigarette --

CUT TO:

INT. LOG SHACK - DAY - PAST

-- and Young Stacy smokes it, as he sits negotiating with the  
 Old Man, who is now cradling the Jack Russel in his lap.

STACY (V.O.)  
 Turns out there's only three of  
 these dogs in the whole fucking  
 country, and this guy owns two.  
 (MORE)

STACY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Now, as you know, at the time, I haven't cultivated an appreciation for the canine species, but I'm looking at this little Jack Russel and I'm thinking maybe I can make this work, you know, get one of those carrying cases like what's-her-name with the sex video and sneak him right in the place to sniff this shit out. But this little bastard must smell my cat or something because he won't even let me get near him.

The Jack Russel barks ferociously at Stacy.

STACY (V.O.)

So I have to take the other one.

WALKER (V.O.)

The other one.

EXT. LOG SHACK - DAY

The Old Man and Young Stacy emerge and cross to a KENNEL.

STACY (V.O.)

Right.

We don't see the dog that's inside --

-- but Young Stacy's face slackens as he does.

CUT TO:

INT. STORAGE FACILITY - LOADING DOCK - NIGHT

MOVING across the concrete floor toward a garage door.

A circle of metal hits the ground --

-- and then A POODLE drops roughly to the floor beside it.

STACY (V.O.)

Goddamn standard poodle. White pom-pom tail and puffy bootie things on his feet and everything.

WALKER (V.O.)

No.

STACY (V.O.)

Yes.

INT. STORAGE FACILITY - HALL - NIGHT

Young Stacy follows the dog --

-- sniffing up the hall at each unit.

STACY (V.O.)

We cover four floors and old boy is doing his thing, but he's not getting any hits. At this point, I'm getting nervous, you know, because the morning crew is gonna relieve sleeping beauty in a half hour. And just when I'm starting to think I got conned...

The dog STOPS before a unit.

INT. UNIT - NIGHT

Light floods in as the door cracks open.

Young Stacy grins as our WALKER and STACY look on over either shoulder into the unit before them.

STACY

It's all there. The goddamn truffle mother load.

Young Stacy moves into the unit with the dog.

We HOLD on Walker and Stacy.

STACY (CONT'D)

I give pom-poms his reward and start loading these things into the hall...

Young Stacy emerges into the hall with a duffle bag --

-- and stops dead.

STACY (CONT'D)

There's sleeping beauty.

The SECURITY GUARD stands with a very big GUN pointed at him.

He does not look pleased...

STACY (CONT'D)

I don't know what must've happened to him at the post office that day, but the way he's looking at me, I can just tell he's getting ready to put me down right there. Now, I can do a stretch just fine, but the prospect of getting killed over a bunch of mushrooms--

WALKER

Truffles--

STACY

Whatever-- is just not sitting right. So I start praying to God. And the damndest thing happens.

The Guard's face FALLS SLACK...

And then he TURNS AND RACES OFF UP THE HALL IN TERROR.

Young Stacy, Stacy, and Walker all turn --

-- to see the POODLE has emerged from the unit behind them.

STACY (CONT'D)

If I'd have pulled two forty-fives he wouldn't have thought twice about peeling my scalp back right then and there, but this mailman sees a dog and he's in the wind.

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY - PRESENT

Stacy stubs his smoke.

STACY

Goddamn standard fucking poodle. Took old boy straight to the groomer and dropped five-hundred bucks getting his pom-poms fluffed. Been a dog person ever since.

Walker laughs.

Stacy rises and turns to check on Gage.

His cheer fades.

STACY (CONT'D)

Shit.

Walker rises, too.

Gage is GONE.

They look up --

-- to the crates stacked like a staircase along the wall --

-- leading to the four foot GAP between the top of the wall and the ceiling above. Gage has gone over.

WALKER

Fucking kid...

INT. WAREHOUSE - SUPPLY ROOM - DAY

Gage emerges into view, peering around the threshold.

He's pouring sweat.

The room is empty.

He lets out a breath.

Moves to the sink and retrieves his dope. A moment of relief as he pulls out a kit with a syringe, cooker, and cottons --

-- but it fades as he tries the sink --

-- remembering the dilemma as, once again, nothing comes out.

GAGE

Shit.

He eyes the dead Handler, face down in his own blood.

Swallows.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Silence.

A shadow grows on the wall.

Gage. He slides into the hall on full alert, moving in measured steps as he scans the passage before him.

Another room opens off the hall ahead.

He slows as he approaches. Steels himself --

-- and leans around the threshold --

A bathroom.

Two sinks.

A smile rises on his face --

-- but it's tempered as he eyes three adjacent STALLS.

The rusted steel walls have fallen to the tile floor long ago, preventing any possibility of a peak underneath.

The doors hang open, but he can't see inside from here.

Slowly --

BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- Gage moves in.

Pouring sweat, he creeps across the space, breath held.

Toes of his sneakers passing over the chipped tile.

He steadies himself as he nears a vantage point into the stalls. Cranes his neck to see inside...

Empty.

Gage's whole body loosens.

He hurries to the sink, twisting a faucet --

-- but nothing comes out.

GAGE

Fuck...

He goes to try the next.

A weak dribble of black sludge comes out.

Gage leans down, twisting the handle with one hand as the other probes the faucet, trying to coax it back to life...

GAGE (CONT'D)

Come on, come on, come on...

But the feeble dribble quickly ends.

Gage freezes as he hears a noise from the other room.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Gage eases back into the hallway, listening.

The sound:

The faintest metallic clinking coming from a doorway ahead.

He ventures forward.

Approaching the threshold.

Sweat lining his face.

Again, he steels himself --

-- and leans around it:

Inside, there's a large contraption bolted into the floor. A thick, metal post with a series of long beams jutting out.

No sign of the Dog.

Gage moves cautiously in --

INT. CATMILL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- avoiding several holes rotted through the floor as he crosses to the contraption for a better look:

Steel rings have been fitted to every odd beam.

What appear to be little cages on every even.

He bends to look inside one.

Little dried balls of shit inside.

The NOISE again. He turns --

-- to a row of cages lined up along the wall.

Rabbits. Dozens of them.

Gage approaches.

And finds the source of the sound:

A rabbit drinking from a water bottle.

He grins -- opening a cage and lifting a bottle from within.

Quickly pulls out his kit --

-- sliding against a wall to prepare a shot:

He works quickly, tipping orange powder into his cooker.

Paying no mind to the rest of the room as he draws water into his syringe from the bottle and squirts it over the powder.

The door standing open behind him.

He pulls a pack of menthols, bites a piece of filter from one. It expands as he drops it in the liquid in the cooker.

He draws it up, rolling up a sleeve to expose an arm lined with track marks -- and plunges the needle into a bad homemade tattoo of a SLEDGEHAMMER covering his mainline.

Calm slides over him as he pushes the plunger home.

He swallows.

Eyes tearing.

After a moment, he remembers the room and turns --

-- but there's nothing but the bunnies in their cages.

He screws the cap back on the bottle, tucks it in his pocket and prepares to go --

-- but stops, turning to the bunny whose bottle he has taken.

It's sniffing around where the bottle had been.

Thirsty.

Gage crosses and lifts the bunny out --

-- transferring it into a cage with a bottle.

He give it a little stroke.

GAGE

(quiet)

There you go, little guy.

As he turns to leave -- he stops again -- noticing something through one of the holes in the floor for the first time:

A loading dock a story below.

A MERCEDES SUV parked there.

He smiles.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
... It's a way out...

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY - PAST

The voice comes from a speakerphone, a call already underway:

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
... You attain this thing and it  
will change everything for you...

A woman, her back turned, listens as she stands alone before a floor-to-ceiling window in the spacious modernist office, expensive furniture around her, luxurious city view beyond.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
... change your life; it's about  
meaning, growth, redemption,  
choice; and if you make this  
choice, you'll have it all...

It's the Girl.

Younger, hair different, in expensive business casual.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)  
... the job, the money, the man...  
You'll have everything you ever  
wanted, and it will COMPLETE you.  
It's a lifestyle, it's security,  
it's your future. The hole in your  
soul will be filled with this  
miracle -- a modern, spiritual,  
existential solution to all that  
ails you, it is the thing that will  
end your search for peace of mind,  
for God, for true happiness and joy  
and partnership and a reason to be  
on this Earth. THOSE are the jeans  
you are selling here. Got it?

GIRL  
Yeah... Yeah, I got it.

WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Then go get 'em, rockstar. And tell that gorgeous James Bond-looking piece of ass to stop bringing you flowers or whatever the hell he's doing -- he's distracting the whole goddamn office with that body. Kidding. Marry him, he's perfect. Love you.

Click.

The Girl stares out at the blue sky.

A JINGLE draws her from her trance --

-- and she turns to see a little daschund puppy move into the office. It's got a red bow tied around its neck.

She lifts it --

-- looking up as a MAN walks in.

We don't see him clearly. Just a handsome outline.

MAN (O.S.)

Surprise.

BACK TO:

INT. BOOK DEPOSITORY - DAY - PRESENT

Stacy stands on a stack of crates by the wall --

-- peering over the gap into the hall.

WALKER

Saw a kid climb five stories up the side of a building to get a taste once; dopefiend's fucking Spiderman if he's got a shot in his sights.

They turn as someone tries the door.

GAGE (O.S.)

Let me the fuck in.

STACY

Should leave him out there.

WALKER

Yeah. We should.

But they won't.

They move to the crate that holds the makeshift barricade --  
-- and begin sliding it aside.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Gage listens.

GAGE

What are you, rearranging the  
fucking furniture? Let me in!

Stacy calls through the door.

STACY (O.S.)

Is it gone?

GAGE

No, I took it for a nice hike and  
now it's out here playing fucking  
frisbee with me! Dog was half-dead  
to start with, of course it's  
fucking gone! Let me the fuck in!

INT. BOOK DEPOSITORY - CONTINUOUS

Gage pounds on the door again as Stacy and Walker prepare to  
move the beam that's bracing it out of the way.

GAGE (O.S.)

Look, there's a car, downstairs, in  
a loading dock. A Mercedes -- just  
like homeboy's jacket!

Stacy and Walker share a look.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

GAGE

I bet you my whole goddamn share  
the key's sitting right in dead  
guy's fucking pocket!

Gage pounds the door again.

GAGE (CONT'D)

You hear me--?

A CREAK behind him.

He turns...

But there's nothing there.

Gage lets out a snort at his nerves.

GAGE (CONT'D)  
Let me the fuck in!

INT. BOOK DEPOSITORY - CONTINUOUS

Stacy and Walker hoist the beam aside.

STACY  
You pull that shit again, you're  
gonna stay out there.

Neither of them notice a slight THUMP from the other side of the door as they lean the beam on the crates along the wall.

Walker pulls open the door--

TO FIND THE DOG LOCKED ONTO GAGE'S ARM AS GAGE STRUGGLES ON THE FLOOR BEFORE THEM.

It LOOKS UP, releasing Gage --

-- and EXPLODES STRAIGHT AT WALKER.

WALKER  
Run!

Walker stumbles back --

-- toppling into a shallow storage pit --

-- ribs CRUNCHING AUDIBLY as he slams into an exposed pipe.

The Dog peels back its lips revealing a BLOODY SNARL --

-- and prepares to leap in after him.

STACY  
Hey!

The Dog turns to Stacy across the room.

And LAUNCHES TOWARDS HIM.

Walker pulls himself from the pit as Stacy races back. The Dog right behind him, Stacy LEAPS onto the crates --

-- just out of reach of the Dog's SNAPPING JAWS.

Stacy calls out to Walker as he points to the open door.

STACY (CONT'D)

Go!

Walker hesitates.

STACY (CONT'D)

I'll go over!

The Dog spins back toward Walker --

STACY (CONT'D)

Fucking GO!

-- and charges him again.

Walker races for the door.

Dog right on his heels -- he makes it through the threshold --

-- and slams the door, just blocking the charging animal.

Stacy surveys the distance to the next crate.

It's a long jump...

Walker calls out from the other side.

WALKER (O.S.)

You alright?!

The sound of nails on wood --

-- and Stacy looks down to see the Dog standing on its hind legs against the side of the crate, staring up at him.

STACY

Okay, pup, it's okay...

Stacy steels himself as he considers the leap.

Swallows.

And JUMPS.

He makes it.

But the stack of crates WOBBLER from his landing.

The Dog stares up, waiting for him below...

But he regains his balance.



They drag Gage back --  
-- the Dog reaching full gallop --

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

-- as they just barely make it through another door.

THE DOG LEAPS INTO THE AIR TOWARD THE THRESHOLD.

Stacy lunges to shut it behind them...

BANG-- the door slams closed a moment before the full weight  
of the Dog crashes into the other side -- SLAM!!

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT - PAST

An ANIMAL CRATE bobs with the motion of a car.

The adolescent Presa is inside, just a little bigger than the  
last time we saw him, but still devoid of scars.

DOG'S POV:

Looking out through plastic breathing ports as we pull to a  
stop. The front doors open. Driver and passenger circling.

Blue opens up the trunk, the Handler by his side.

They leash us --

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

-- and guide us out onto cracked pavement.

The roaches of blunts and crushed vials litter the ground,  
bass thumping in the distance in the neighborhood around us.

We move after the two men --

INT. ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

-- into what looks to be the back of a videogame arcade.

Old games and pinball machines line the walls.

The Handler's chain swaying before us.

We turn a corner into a darker hallway.

The path descending, narrowing.

Blue's polished shoes leading the way. We turn --

-- scanning the space around us:

Cages to the left and right.

But it's too dark to see inside--

SUDDENLY, A PITBULL SMASHES AGAINST ONE.

It growls through a muzzle as another terrifying mug smashes against a cage opposite, then another, snarling furiously.

The cages end --

-- as we emerge into a small RING.

We inspect the walls.

Scratches.

Dried blood.

An OVERWEIGHT MAN approaches Blue and the Handler.

Looks down at us.

OVERWEIGHT MAN  
That's your prospect?

HANDLER  
Mm.

OVERWEIGHT MAN  
Ain't nothin' but a pup.

HANDLER  
I been working him.

OVERWEIGHT MAN  
Sheeit. What line he from?

HANDLER  
Scatter bred.

OVERWEIGHT MAN  
All respect due, but I don't think  
you want a tot going fifteen pounds  
uphill on a Dirty Mary-Chinaman--

The Overweight Man quiets as Blue steps forward.

BLUE  
I look like a yardboy to you?

The Overweight Man stands down.

OVERWEIGHT MAN  
No, sir--

BLUE  
Then put a fucking dog in your  
corner.

The Overweight Man nods to a pair of gangbanger thugs.

The Handler leads us to a corner --

-- as a LARGE PITBULL is lead into the corner opposite.

It barks as its muzzle is removed --

-- straining towards us.

Its face is scarred from experience. Eyes gone cold.

ON BLUE AND THE OVERWEIGHT MAN -

Standing ringside.

OVERWEIGHT MAN  
You can call it if it's ugly.

BLUE  
You can't.

The Overweight Man doesn't want trouble with Blue.

OVERWEIGHT MAN  
Your party.

He raises a hand --

-- and lowers it.

OVERWEIGHT MAN (CONT'D)  
Release your dogs.

WE HOLD ON THE MEN as we hear the pitbull CHARGING.

Then flesh SLAMMING into flesh.

The Overweight Man can't help but smile.

GROWLING, now, the sound of a STRUGGLE.

After a moment --

-- the growling turns to a feeble whine.

The Overweight Man's cheer fades...

... Becoming disbelief.

Blue looks to the Handler across the ring.

Nods.

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - OFFICE - DAY - PRESENT

The sound of tearing fabric.

An office. Cheap recycled furniture. A long adjoining section stretching off to the side.

Walker tears a strip of fabric from a white undershirt --

-- while a shirtless Stacy wraps Gage's arm with another.

Gage is seated on a desk, a pile of blood-spotted fabric and the bunny's open water bottle beside him.

STACY

No main cables.

Gage grimaces, trying not to show the pain he's in.

GAGE

Told you it was my lucky day.

Stacy almost smiles.

STACY

Walker knows a doctor.

WALKER

We'll get you squared as soon as we're clear.

Gage isn't used to being taken care of.

He's grateful.

Watches as Stacy puts his other shirt back on.

GAGE  
Sorry... About your shirt.

STACY  
Ain't my color anyway.

WALKER (O.S.)  
Check this out.

They join him at a long TOURNAMENT BOARD.

It tracks what look to be the outcomes of dozens of fights,  
labeled with corresponding dates.

STACY  
Tournament brackets.

In each pairing, a RED LINE has been drawn through the loser.

WALKER  
Red line for the losers, winners  
move forward.

As the match-ups move chronologically across the board,  
numbers beneath each rise from two digits to four.

STACY  
Purses?

GAGE  
Chump change.

Walker narrows his eyes at something on the board.

And points to one of the dogs.

WALKER  
This guy...

His name is "DE NIRO".

Walker traces De Niro's brackets with his finger, Stacy and  
Gage following along the record of his fights:

Win.

Win.

Win.

Win.

Win... and on and on and on....

GAGE

Fuck...

Walker continues tracing the line, slightly awed.

WALKER

Look. Here...

De Niro's pairings start to show ADDITIONAL BRACKETS, penned in separately.

WALKER (CONT'D)

He started fighting *pairs*.

Walker's right.

STACY

Tough motherfucker....

Walker looks ahead down the board.

WALKER

Jesus...

The De Niro brackets start to depict THREE challengers.

STACY

He's fighting three at a time...

They stop as they reach the last fight on De Niro's row.

There's a RED LINE through all of his challengers --

-- and through De Niro.

Walker leans in and checks the date.

WALKER

This is last night.

STACY

Guess they called it early.

The three of them stare for a long moment, taking in the number of De Niro's victories on the board.

There are HUNDREDS OF THEM.

Stacy turns away, crossing to a window. The fire escape outside is accessible from here as well.

He checks his watch as Walker joins him.

STACY (CONT'D)  
Two hours if they show.

WALKER  
Would've brought a deck of cards if  
I knew we had a layover.

They turn back to Gage.

He's still staring at the tournament board.

STACY  
How about you, kid?

Gage turns, drawing his mind back from another place.

GAGE  
Hm?

STACY  
Cats or dogs?

Gage considers a fading poster of different dog breeds.

GAGE  
Dogs.

He reaches out -- and runs a hand lightly down it.

GAGE (CONT'D)  
Used to love them books when I was  
little where they got 'em acting  
like people; driving around in cars  
and making deposits at the bank and  
buying ice cream and all that. Dad  
kept on having to whoop my ass for  
trying to talk to 'em.

WALKER  
To dogs?

Gage nods, smiling a little as he remembers.

GAGE  
I'd see 'em tied up outside the  
store and ask where they parked  
their cars. Always wanted one, but  
my pop said he could hardly keep us  
fed. Had chickens and all that,  
but...

STACY  
You a farm boy?

Gage shakes his head.

GAGE

Nah. Just country. Few egg chickens, busted ass old milk cow. Found this one dog by the side of the road when I was six...

He trails off, looking down at his arm.

GAGE (CONT'D)

He couldn't've been more than a couple years old -- must've got hit by a car or something, leg busted up real bad. Part hound I think...

The LIGHT ON GAGE'S FACE CHANGES.

Sound of BIRDS.

And as Gage turns --

-- instead of the wall, we're looking at a RURAL ROAD.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY - PAST

YOUNG GAGE, a grubby six year old in filthy overalls, pushes a wheelbarrow up the dusty path through a tree-lined meadow.

GAGE (V.O.)

I knew my pop wouldn't let me keep him and the dog catcher'd just put him down, so I hauled his poor ass all the way back to this old shack we had out behind our house.

INT. STORAGE SHACK - NIGHT

BOOMING DOWN a collection of rusty tools lining the walls --

GAGE (V.O.)

Dad was on the bottle so much by then I knew the toolshed's the last place he'd be, but this little dog was crying so loud from the pain that first day, I was sure he'd hear no matter how loaded he was.

-- to find Gage lying next to a shaggy young mutt. His fur is matted with blood, leg tucked protectively beneath him.

GAGE (V.O.)

I stayed in there all night just petting him and begging him to be quiet, till he finally calmed down.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Following Young Gage down a lunch line.

GAGE (V.O.)

Started bringing my lunches home from school. First all he wanted was that cheese you peel off. But a few days in I had him grubbing on meatballs and smiley face tater tots and chicken nuggets and all that like a regular schoolboy.

He slides a meatball into a baggy in his pocket.

INT. STORAGE SHACK - NIGHT

PANNING across empty baggies and moonlit cheese wrappers --

GAGE (V.O.)

Had to clean the shit off his fur every day 'cause his leg was still too fucked to stand up, but I didn't mind -- nobody ever been that happy to see me my whole life as when I walked in that room; tail wagging so hard against the ground he's kicking up dust all over himself.

-- to find the dog's tail wagging away in the dust.

GAGE (V.O.)

I'd hide food under my bed to save up for the weekends, you know...

INT. RURAL STORE - DAY

PANNING past a customer talking to a STORE OWNER --

GAGE (V.O.)

... But it was June already, and pretty soon school was done.

-- descending to find Young Gage moving up the aisle.

GAGE (V.O.)

I busted open my piggy bank, sold  
some baseball cards I had from  
Christmas and bought him some food,  
but I ran out after a week.

Young Gage reaches a rack of animal food --

-- and begins sliding cans into his overalls.

GAGE (V.O.)

Had to swear I'd never come back to  
the only store in town after I got  
caught racking Alpo just to  
convince 'em not to tell my pop.

A shadow falls over Gage --

-- and he looks up to find the Store Owner towering above.

GAGE (V.O.)

Only one place left to go for  
food...

INT. GAGE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Young Gage stands in the threshold, staring --

GAGE (V.O.)

I was having nightmares just  
thinking about it. But the look on  
that dog's face after a couple  
days...

-- at his FATHER.

He is a huge man, back turned at the kitchen table, a bottle  
beside him as he mops up grease with a piece of white bread.

GAGE (V.O.)

... It was like not eating wasn't  
the worst of it for him, like he  
thought he was in trouble, you  
know? Like he thought I was  
punishing him for something and he  
couldn't figure out what it was he  
did wrong.

INT. SHACK - NIGHT

Young Gage sits in the dust, tears on his cheeks --

GAGE (V.O.)  
 Started to get this froth around  
 his lips. Tail slowin' down.

-- looking at the dog's tail barely moving in the dust.

GAGE (V.O.)  
 Two more days and it wasn't hardly  
 moving at all.

INT. GAGE'S HOUSE - DEN - NIGHT

Gage's Father nods in and out in an easy chair in the light  
 of a television, bottle hanging in his hand beside him.

GAGE (V.O.)  
 Got so I couldn't stand it anymore.

His hand slackens, bottle slipping loose as he passes out.

GAGE (V.O.)  
 Waited till late at night, never  
 been so scared in my whole life.

INT. GAGE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The light from the TV on the floor is cut off --

-- as Young Gage moves in from the den.

He pauses, staring up --

-- at an old REFRIGERATOR towering before him.

GAGE (V.O.)  
 Took a big old block of hamburger  
 from the fridge. Buried the  
 wrapper with the chickens.

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - OFFICE - DAY - PRESENT

Gage smiles at the memory.

GAGE  
 I can still see that dog's face  
 when he saw me come in with it.  
 (MORE)

GAGE (CONT'D)  
 Swear to God he's grinning at me  
 just like a little kid, eyes  
 dripping down his nose like he's  
 crying he's so happy.

CUT TO:

INT. GAGE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY - PAST

Young Gage moves into his room --

GAGE (V.O.)  
 Next morning I came back in from my  
 chores...

-- and stops dead.

GAGE (V.O.)  
 Chickens. They must've dug it up.

The plastic wrapper from the hamburger meat sits on his bed,  
 red juice dripping off of it and seeping into his sheet.

EXT. GAGE'S HOUSE - DAY

Young Gage races across the dusty yard.

GAGE (V.O.)  
 I ran as fast as I could...

He throws open the shack --

-- and stops, looking up...

GAGE (V.O.)  
 My dad... He was waiting for me...  
 So I could see him do it...

As Young Gage looks down --

-- we see GAGE, STACY and WALKER looking on behind him.

GAGE  
 Worst part of it was... Dog got  
 that same look he always did when  
 he saw me come in...

And now we see one of the tools is missing from the wall.

GAGE (CONT'D)  
 Like he's smiling at me... Tail  
 just wagging away in the dust...

Sure enough, the tail wags against the dirt floor--

It STOPS SUDDENLY as an impact jostles it from off-screen, sending the faintest mist of blood across the dust.

Gage looks away --

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - OFFICE - DAY - PRESENT

-- running a finger unconsciously across the SLEDGEHAMMER TATTOO on his arm. Walker and Stacy watch as he looks up.

Gage swallows back emotion, face blank.

GAGE

Stupid...

He pauses a moment, looking at Stacy and Walker.

Forces a sad smile.

GAGE (CONT'D)

Stupid kid.

He lifts the water bottle from beside the bloody rags --

-- and moves off into the adjoining room.

CUT TO:

INT. AIRPORT - SMOKING CAGE - NIGHT - PAST

Young Stacy watches through glass.

An old couple. Making their way steadily toward the gates arm in arm as other passengers breeze past.

As they move out of view, Stacy looks down at his smoke.

Last drag.

He takes it and drops the butt.

Looks down as the cherry smolders.

INT. MOVING WALKWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Young Stacy floats along a flat pedestrian escalator.

He's dressed to travel, bag over his shoulder.

He gazes at his reflection sliding along a wall of glass.

SHIFTS FOCUS --

-- to a PLANE taxiing on the runway beyond.

He stares out as it moves into its gate--

Starts, as something RACES PAST his legs.

A little boy.

His parents offer an apologetic look as they hurry after him.

INT. GATES - NIGHT

Young Stacy pauses as he rounds a corner.

Passengers are queued before a gate, ahead.

Getting ready to board.

Stacy approaches.

Sets down his bag at the edge of the crowd.

He scans the faces around him.

Families, couples, children...

Civilians.

Stacy catches eyes with THE LITTLE BOY.

He smiles --

-- but the boy just stares.

Stacy turns away, awkwardly --

-- eyes landing on a SIGN:

It depicts a vision of a tropical PARADISE, a couple holding hands as their child plays in crystal water.

He reads the slogan beneath it:

*"Are you ready for the rest of your life?"*

ON THE LITTLE BOY -

Watching.

THE CROWD -

Where Stacy was.

And is no longer.

CUT TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - OFFICE - ADJOINING ROOM - DUSK - PRESENT

Stacy and Walker stand staring down --

-- at Gage.

He's dead.

Stacy kneels down beside him.

The needle still hangs from the sledgehammer tattoo.

STACY

Stupid...

There's no malice in his words. Walker's either.

WALKER

History's a rock...

Walker takes off his jacket.

WALKER (CONT'D)

Can't swim if you're holding it up.

He tosses it to Stacy.

STACY

Stupid kid.

Stacy pulls the jacket over Gage's face.

Walker turns away, scanning the room.

A small area, rotting old couch.

Walker cocks his head, eyes narrowing slightly.

Stacy rises, watching --

-- as Walker starts slowly across the room --

-- coming to a stop before a single column that protrudes from one of the corners, covered in an array of pin-ups.

Walker looks at a calendar, the centerpiece of the collage.

WALKER

Miss June...

He traces his fingers over her picture.

WALKER (CONT'D)

Two-thousand-twelve.

He pulls the calendar off the wall --

-- revealing a COMBINATION DIAL.

Stacy crosses as Walker peels the rest of the pin-ups --

-- exposing a LARGE WALL SAFE.

It's a nice piece of hardware. Expensive.

For a moment, they just stare in silence.

WALKER (CONT'D)

You up?

Stacy shakes his head.

STACY

Can't remember.

They shoot for it.

Stacy, rocks. Walker, paper.

They both step forward --

-- Walker unravelling a length of plastic cord.

Stacy spits and wipes the surface beside the dial clean with his sleeve as Walker applies a suction cup to it --

-- and inserts an earbud.

STACY (CONT'D)

Five bolt Amsec. Tricky pull--

Walker raises a hand for quiet.

Stacy watches his mentor as he slowly spins the wheel.

The movements effortless. Instinctual.

A master craftsman.

CLICK.

Walker allows himself a look of satisfaction.

CLA-CLACK.

The door pops open.

As the two look into the safe --

-- their faces slacken.

STACY (CONT'D)

Those purses on the board...

Walker finishes his thought.

WALKER

... missing a couple zeroes.

THE SAFE IS LINED WITH STACKS AND STACKS OF BILLS.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTO SHOP - NIGHT - PAST

Hundreds of cartons of cigarettes.

We're in a large, clean shop, hydraulic lifts empty after hours, a group of hard-looking men counting boxes and boxes of the cigarettes on pallets, a stolen truck beyond.

One of them nods.

And we see Young Stacy standing before a BUYER in a suit.

Though we don't see his face, his body language and attire are enough to confirm he's the boss, perhaps the owner.

He hands Stacy a piece of paper.

Stacy nods.

The Buyer nods to a man with a LAPTOP, who hits return.

LAPTOP

In your account.

Stacy nods to the Buyer.

STACY

Thanks.

He turns to leave--

But stops, as one of the hard-looking men lets his jacket fall open to allow Stacy a peak at a sawed-off shotgun.

It's not an overt threat.

Just an indication the Buyer isn't done.

Stacy turns back to the Buyer --

-- and we see his shoes for the first time. Expensive rubber rain covers over a pair of perfectly polished dress shoes.

And now we see his face...

It's BLUE.

BLUE

We been doing so good together...

Stacy holds his look.

STACY

I'm already gone.

Blue considers Stacy.

BLUE

I like dogs some.

Slowly begins to walk around him as he speaks.

BLUE (CONT'D)

Just a hobby of mine, nothing serious. There's this thing some people noticed. An old dog been doing something a while, it becomes almost automatic. Like when you been making the same drive home every night for twenty years your car just drives you.

He smiles, shakes his head a little.

BLUE (CONT'D)

Here I go mixing metaphors, I'm sorry. Let me put it simple: You know how it goes teaching an old dog new tricks, but what they don't tell you is why it don't stick.

(MORE)

BLUE (CONT'D)

See, an animal been acting a certain way long enough, it gets to be all it knows. And even if that thing ain't working -- even if they're eating pieces of the carpet, or chewing up your shoes and shitting out the laces till they're insides are so tied up in knots they're half killed -- at a certain point far enough along, you try to change that behavior, you cause a thing they call *dissonance*; just the idea of switching things around causes so much distress inside their little head the animal doesn't know what to do with itself. You reached that point, it ain't unheard of for a bitch to stop eating shoes -- but I ain't never seen it, myself.

He circles closer to Stacy.

BLUE (CONT'D)

Keeping that in mind, I wonder if you can't understand my skepticism when a man like yourself, who's been doing something so well so long, comes in here and tells me he's gonna walk away from it all.

Blue pauses just feet away from Stacy, face to face.

BLUE (CONT'D)

It even makes me wonder if he's maybe got something else going...

Stacy holds his look.

STACY

I fly tomorrow. I'm gone.

Blue stares at him for a long moment.

The man with the shotgun awaits a cue.

Blue smiles.

BLUE

'Course you are.

He nods, and the man with the gun stands down.

Stacy moves past --

EXT. MERCEDES DEALERSHIP - PARKING LOT

-- pushing out into a car dealership's lot outside.

Blue steps into the doorway, watching as Stacy moves out through a sea of Mercedes. Calls out from behind him.

BLUE  
I'd say see you around...

As Stacy turns, Blue pulls on his blue windbreaker.

BLUE (CONT'D)  
... But we wouldn't want that to happen.

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT - PRESENT

The yellow tote bag sits on the floor, loaded with bills.

Walker stands at the window watching Stacy as he holds the phone to his ear. Night has fallen outside.

He hangs it up. Shakes his head.

STACY  
We're on our own.

Walker manages a little laugh.

WALKER  
Yeah... Yeah, okay.

Walker suddenly stumbles, legs giving out beneath him.

He groans, clutching his side as Stacy catches him.

WALKER (CONT'D)  
I'm alright.

But he isn't.

STACY  
Show me.

Walker hesitates.

STACY (CONT'D)  
Fucking show me, Walker.

Walker opens his shirt --

-- to reveal a MASSIVE BRUISE. It's purple and black. Climbing up his ribs where he slammed into the pipe.

WALKER

I'm fine--

STACY

Bullshit. I saw a guy in the joint take a boot party from the screws, looked just like this; went to sleep and he never woke up.

Walker clutches his side, doubling over.

Spits thick CRIMSON.

Stacy pulls out his phone

WALKER

'The fuck are you doing?

STACY

Calling an ambulance--

Walker smacks the phone out of his hand, sending it slamming into the floor where it breaks to pieces on impact.

STACY (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Stacy kicks a chair against the wall.

WALKER

They're looking for at least two of us. Solo, you make it on foot--

STACY

Stop it!

WALKER

I'd rather die right here with bag of green than give those bastards another minute of my time--

STACY

God DAMN it, Walker!

Stacy starts to pace as Walker slides weakly down to lean against the desk. Stacy stops. Turning to him.

A thought restoring his focus.

STACY (CONT'D)

The Mercedes. You heard what the kid said, we get the key and--

WALKER

You go out that door and that dog'll chew you to pieces--

STACY

Or I stay here and watch you bleed out into your own gut while we wait for whoever's money we're stealing to show back up and do us both!

WALKER

Get on a plane--

STACY

She's fucking gone, Walker!

WALKER

You don't know--

STACY

She's *five years* gone, and she said she wouldn't wait!

WALKER

People change.

This quiets Stacy.

But...

STACY

You wouldn't leave me.

Walker knows there's no arguing this.

STACY (CONT'D)

We're going. Both of us. Say it.

WALKER

(quiet)

You're going.

Walker hacks up another round of blood.

STACY

We're driving right out of here with a big bag of money and never looking back! Fucking say it!

Walker steadies himself.



INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT - PRESENT

The office door slowly opens --

-- and Stacy moves out.

He eases the door closed behind him.

Grimaces as it CLICKS shut --

-- but the hall remains silent.

Stacy looks to the center of the hall where Gage was attacked. Blood spattered on the floor and wall.

He pulls his eyes away --

-- and begins up the corridor.

Ahead, the threshold of his destination comes into view:

The SUPPLY ROOM where they found the body of the Handler.

Stacy edges closer, sweat beading across his brow. Wincing in fear of the loose floorboards with every measured step.

He reaches the door.

And slowly peers around...

CONFUSION rises on Stacy's face.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The body of the Handler is gone.

Stacy crosses to where his body had been.

A line of blood leads into another hall beyond --

-- as if the body has been dragged...

INT. SECOND HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stacy leans into a dim corridor.

All quiet.

Slowly, he starts up the bloody trail, squinting to follow the drag marks. Backwards paw prints alongside it.

The trail leads around a corner ahead.

Scanning the shadows, Stacy approaches it.

And slides around it --

AROUND THE CORNER

-- into a stretch of hallway we've seen before.

The one outside the room where the Handler took the Dog.

The trail leads through the open door...

Stacy takes a breath --

INT. BOILER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- and moves inside.

Even darker here, columns lining the long, shadowy space...

He stands listening as his eyes adjust --

-- but it's dead quiet, no sign of the Dog.

Relief turns to disgust as Stacy takes in the room:

The tin tub is overturned on the floor.

Scratch marks line its surface.

Alligator clips lead to a pair of duct-taped truck batteries.

Stacy fights through his revulsion --

-- finding the body of the Handler laid out on the floor.

He stoops and begins searching his jacket pockets.

Nothing.

His eyes fall on the pocket chain.

He draws it out. A brief moment of triumph --

-- as he finds a set of KEYS on the end:

MERCEDES.

He unclips the chain from the belt, rising with it.

Pauses a moment -- running his thumb lightly across the Mercedes logo, as a thought occurs to him...

But he lets it go --

-- as he notices something on the far side of the room. The sight that disturbed the Presa earlier. He rounds a column --

-- coming to a stop before A ROW OF DEAD DOGS ALONG THE WALL.

We see them for only a moment, but it's long enough to glimpse what they are:

One night's losers. Executed for their efforts.

Despite himself, Stacy crosses.

And kneels before them.

STACY  
Christ...

He reaches out and strokes one's fur.

STACY (CONT'D)  
Jesus fucking Christ...

Then--

THE DOG RISES FROM AMONG THE DEAD.

Stacy stands dead still.

It's been watching him.

STACY (CONT'D)  
Easy...

The Dog stares at him, head slightly cocked.

As if processing what it has just seen.

STACY (CONT'D)  
Easy...

Slowly, Stacy stands --

-- and begins backing toward the door a step at a time.

The Dog remains where it is, watching him closely.

Studying him...

As Stacy reaches the door, he gently raises his hands in a gesture of deference --

-- exposing the POCKET CHAIN held within one of them.

The Dog's expression SHIFTS.

His lips rise into a FURIOUS SNARL.

Stacy BOLTS --

HALLWAY

-- slamming the rotting door behind him as he races out.

SLAM! The Dog crashes into the door behind him --

-- exploding straight through the splintering wood.

Stacy races around a corner --

SHIPPING ROOM

-- sprinting into larger room.

It's lined with packaging equipment.

A SHIPPING SLIDE in the floor at the far end.

Stacy races to the slide, diving in --

SHIPPING SLIDE

-- SPIRALING down the black tunnel --

INT. FURNITURE DEPOSITORY - MOMENTS LATER

-- and tumbling into a massive STORAGE room.

Stacy backs away from the slide.

No way it can follow...

A THUMP from above.

It's coming down.

Stacy spins --

-- to a sea of CLASSROOM DESKS and CHAIRS stacked ten feet high extending out before him like a great wooden labyrinth.

He dashes into it.

## INSIDE THE MAZE

Rotting furniture rises on every side, too high to see over.

Stacy races up the corridors of leaning wood --

-- rounding a corner --

-- then another.

The SOUNDS OF THE DOG'S FEET in a steady pursuit.

*He's inside the maze.*

Stacy looks back as he continues deeper into the labyrinth, but the furniture is too thick to see through.

The Dog is moving faster, nails clicking on concrete.

Stacy quickens, trying to track the direction of the Dog as he goes, but the acoustics make it impossible to pinpoint.

It's CLOSER NOW -- strafing through a parallel aisle.

Stacy dashes on, scanning frantically for a way out --

-- sprinting as he spins around a rotting corner --

## INT. PIANO ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- and stopping.

A valley between the furniture opens ahead --

-- DEAD ENDING into a concrete wall.

He scans the space as the footsteps close.

Nowhere to run...

Then--

His eyes lock on something along the wall:

A rotting old GRAND PIANO...

## DOG'S POV

Racing up the labyrinth.

It's on a scent, now.

Speeding up the final stretch of passageway through the furniture full-tilt, and tearing around the corner --

PIANO ROOM

-- emerging into the valley where we last saw Stacy.

He's nowhere in sight.

As the Dog scans the room --

-- we BOOM UP --

-- to reveal STACY:

Stretched on his back inside the Grand Piano.

IN THE PIANO

Stacy holds his breath --

-- listening...

Sweat pouring down his face.

Nothing but the sound of his own blood in his ears.

Then--

The sound of NAILS ON THE FLOOR.

Closer...

Closer...

HIGH ANGLE

The DOG STEPS INTO FRAME.

As it begins circling around the piano, we BOOM DOWN, ROTATING, until we lose it from view -- and settle on STACY:

Eyes straight up --

-- bracing himself for attack on any side...

He waits.

And waits.

But the Dog does not come.

After a long moment, Stacy lets out a breath.

Then--

SLAM!! THE WOOD BENEATH STACY CRUMPLES IN, ONE END OF THE PIANO SLAMMING INTO THE FLOOR AS ONE OF THE LEGS GIVES OUT IN AN EXPLOSION OF SPLINTERING WOOD AND SNAPPING WIRE.

Stacy scurries up, like a shipwrecked seaman --

-- as the Dog charges up the wood.

It slides down, unable to find purchase.

The Dog CHARGES again.

Stacy struggles to keep his balance as the Dog crashes into another leg, trying to take the rest of the piano down.

SLAM!!

Stacy barely holds on.

The Dog races back across the room.

Stacy braces himself as it turns --

-- and SPRINTS TOWARD THE PIANO...

CRASH!!!

The piano leg SNAPS as the Dog barrels into it, the entire piano crumbling and dropping with Stacy still on it.

He crashes down, SLAMMING his head against the concrete--

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT - PAST

MOVING PAST A PRISTINE GRAND PIANO in a modernist apartment --

-- sparkling lights of an expensive city view outside.

It's spacious, tasteful, all the amenities. Several photographs of a couple out of focus in the background.

We pass through an impressive collection of books -- but, unlike the one in the wealthy family's home, this one is built around a central chair, a lamp on a table beside.

These books are meant to be read.

As we round a corner into a large kitchen --

-- we find the GIRL, her hair is a little longer than when we saw her last. She is standing there, staring down --

-- at a box of DOG BISCUITS.

She steels herself. After a long moment --

-- she shakes the box.

The DASCHUND comes running excitedly into the room -- he's older now, maybe a year-and-a-half -- and stops before her.

Staring hungrily up.

The Girl swallows hard --

-- and withdraws a biscuit.

Bends down.

Her eyes moisten as she gently pets the dog.

But she forces back the emotion.

Hands over the treat.

As he eats --

-- she tucks a rolled-up note under his collar.

And now we see there is a SUITCASE beside her.

The same one she had in the hotel.

She lifts it.

CLOSE ON THE DOG as he hungrily finishes the biscuit.

Looks up --

-- as the door closes behind the girl.

BACK TO:

INT. PIANO ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

GAUZY SILENCE --

-- as Stacy's HEARING and VISION slowly bleed back.

A white visage begins to come into view before him...

THE DOG.

Stacy slides back.

But the Dog is pinned under the wreckage of the massive piano. It stares at him, still managing a silent growl --

-- but is unable to move beneath the tremendous weight.

Stacy assesses the Dog.

One of its legs is broken, trapped beneath the wreckage.

He is stoic --

-- but tears running from his eyes betray great pain.

Stacy swallows hard, knowing there's nothing he can do.

He starts back, unclipping the keys from the Handler's chain.

As he tosses it aside --

-- the silent growl ceases.

The Dog stares up at him, processing once again.

Stacy looks to the chain on the floor.

Then back to the Dog.

Understanding.

And though he knows he should go --

-- he cannot.

Slowly...

Stacy approaches.

STACY

Easy...

The Dog raises a lip --

-- but Stacy's voice calms him.

STACY (CONT'D)

Easy, now...

Stacy bends --

-- and takes hold of the wreckage pinning the Dog.

STACY (CONT'D)

Okay...

The Dog stares up at him --

STACY (CONT'D)

Okay, now...

-- studying the act unfolding before it's eyes:

MERCY.

Stacy hoists the wreckage clear.

The Dog withdraws its leg, pulling it up as it rises to stand stoic as ever on its remaining three. It looks up at Stacy.

For a moment, the two stare at each other.

Stacy watches as the Dog turns.

And moves off into the maze of wood.

INT. WAREHOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Walker opens his eyes as Stacy returns --

-- and holds up the keys.

STACY

What did I say?

Walker smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - LOADING DOCK - NIGHT

Stacy leads Walker toward the Mercedes arm in arm, clutching the loaded tote bag in his other hand.

WALKER

Do three lives worth of living, get  
three lives worth of pain.

STACY

Three lives worth of bitching.

Stacy leans him on the Mercedes, and tries the keys.

They work -- the car unlocking.

A breath of relief.

Stacy crosses --

-- and slides open a heavy garage door.

It's dark -- the downpour making it even harder to see across the lot. But there's nothing but the sound of the rain.

Stacy moves back toward Walker.

Looks down at the bag, the money peaking out from within.

STACY (CONT'D)  
Guy once told me there's only three  
types of last score...

Walker smiles.

WALKER  
I been wrong.

As Stacy lifts the bag, A SINGLE HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL BLOWS FROM WITHIN. TIME SLOWS as Stacy turns to watch it fall...

And suddenly-- HIGH BEAMS BATHE THEM.

Stacy turns --

-- to see BLUE EMERGE from his car outside.

Stacy's face falls slack.

He turns to the Mercedes, as he puts it together--

FLASH TO:

-- *The Handler's Mercedes jacket* --

-- *The Mercedes dealership where Stacy met Blue* --

-- *Blue's face as he tells Stacy the story about dogs* --

BACK TO:

A silent moment of RECOGNITION between the two men --

-- as Blue looks from the Mercedes -- to the BILL still falling through the air -- to the BAG on Stacy's shoulder...

He RAISES HIS GUN.

WALKER (CONT'D)  
Run!

Walker DIVES in front of Stacy shoving him back --

-- A HAIL OF BULLETS HITTING WALKER INSTEAD.

Stacy looks up from the ground.

STACY

Walker!

But there's no doubt...

Walker is dead.

No time to mourn--

AS BLUE BEGINS FIRING AGAIN AND AGAIN AS HE WALKS INSIDE.

Stacy BOLTS --

INT. WAREHOUSE - MAIN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- bullets strafing past as he ducks back into the main room.

He leans to secure the door--

PLUNK-PLUNK-PUNK --

-- bullet holes open in the wood, shots ZIPPING past.

Stacy spins back and races across the floor, splashing through the sheen of black water lining the concrete.

Blue enters behind as Stacy passes the flooded basement.

WHIP-WHIP-WHIP!

Bullets streaking into the water right on Stacy's heels --

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- as he pushes into another room.

He slams the door.

STACY

FUCK!

He pulls himself from his grief to scan the space:

Old steel lockers, sagging and rusted, line the room ahead, an oversized graffiti mural of a RAT stretching across them.

Stacy races up an aisle, looking for a way out --

LOCKERS

-- but there's nothing but lockers.

Stacy stops as he hears the door open across the room.

ACROSS THE ROOM

Blue moves in.

Scans the space as he calmly reloads.

BLUE  
Been a while...

LOCKERS

Stacy moves among the rusted steel.

But there's no way out except the way he came in.

He turns to the lockers.

Takes a breath --

-- and moves into the last one in the row.

IN THE LOCKER

Stacy peers out through the vents.

The sound of his own breathing amplified.

BLUE (O.S.)  
I'd ask what you been up to...

He hears Blue's footsteps --

LOCKERS

-- as Blue enters the row where Stacy is hiding. Sees there's nowhere else to run. Knows he's got him, now.

He starts down the row -- opening lockers as he goes.

BLUE  
Thing of it is...

IN THE LOCKER

Stacy tries to still his breathing in the confined space.  
STARTS as something bites at his feet. He looks down --  
-- to see a RAT scurry through a hole in the decaying steel.

BLUE

Three more lockers to go. He opens the first.  
Nothing.

BLUE  
Man like you...

He opens the second.  
Nothing.

BLUE (CONT'D)  
Ain't but one thing you can do.

He stops as he reaches Stacy's locker.  
Raises the gun --  
-- AND FIRES FOUR QUICK SHOTS STRAIGHT THROUGH THE DOOR.  
He listens for a moment.  
Pulls open the locker.  
And looks almost amused as he sees:  
Stacy has broken THROUGH THE ROTTING STEEL WALL --  
-- into a STAIRWELL on the other side.

INT. STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Stacy dashes up deteriorating steps --  
-- reaching a second floor landing.  
He pulls at the door -- but it's locked.  
WHIP-WHIP! --

-- bullets strafe past from below, one of them ripping  
through Stacy's shoulder, as Blue starts up.

Stacy races on, taking the stairs two at a time --

-- but they come to an end at the third floor landing.

Nowhere else to run. He turns to the door. Identical to the one that was locked below. Reaches for it...

It OPENS --

INT. THIRD FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

-- and Stacy dashes through. Racing up a narrow hall --

OPEN FLOOR

-- and emerging on a five-hundred yard stretch of open floor.

At the far end, a FIRE ESCAPE is visible through a wall of broken windows, streamers blowing where the glass once was.

Stacy breaks for it.

Legs pounding.

Escape within sight.

Halfway across--

He STOPS SHORT --

-- almost falling through the floor.

The last fifty yards have ROTTED COMPLETELY THROUGH.

Stacy looks down through the deteriorated wood.

A three story drop.

He turns --

-- as BLUE moves into the room across the floor.

Seeing Stacy is cornered, he slows.

Stacy steps back --

-- his heel reaching the very edge of the rotting floor.

Debris FALLS --

ON THE DEBRIS

-- as it drops through the air --  
 -- down toward the floor below --  
 -- and SPLASHES into the flooded basement.

THIRD FLOOR

Stacy hears the sound.

Blue raises his gun as Stacy makes a silent decision.

And FIRES --

-- the bullet TEARING THROUGH THE FABRIC OF THE TOTE BAG --  
 --AS STACY DROPS STRAIGHT BACKWARDS THROUGH THE ROTTED FLOOR.

MID-AIR

As Stacy twists toward the dark water...

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREIGN MARKET - DAY

A row of vendors is set up in a small market overlooking a secluded strip of beach, a group of little children laughing in the distance as they play soccer before crystalline waves.

The Girl, beautiful in a simple yellow dress that blows in the breeze from the sea, is working behind one of the stands.

She is five years older, skin darker, her hair lighter from the sun. It's a book shop, a dozen well cared-for books lovingly arranged on simple homemade beachwood stands.

Though the market is still in full swing --

-- she reaches under the stall, and lifts her SUITCASE.

She pauses a moment, looking back to the books. Places a handwritten sign before them: "*lijepe price -- besplatno*".

She pauses -- running her fingers across one in particular.

The book she was reading when she met Stacy.

MOMENTS LATER

The Girl moves through rows of vendors selling fresh fruit and vegetables, live animals, nuts, and salted meats, under the hot summer sun.

The way she negotiates the environment suggests she has been here before, effortlessly moving among the patrons.

She slows a little as she approaches a little ROMA BOY standing over a crate of puppies, black and gray and white. Can't help but smile. But she pulls herself away.

Continuing past --

-- to a small wooden fruit stand.

A VENDOR smiles out from behind it as he sees her.

An old man. Warm face deeply lined from the coastal sun.

He reaches beneath his stand -- lifting a bag of perfect STRAWBERRIES he has already prepared -- and hands it over.

This is a familiar ritual.

She hands him the book she was reading when she met Stacy.

GIRL  
(Croatian; with subtitles)  
Make sure you finish it.

As he pages through it, he sees there is money inside. Tries to hand it back -- but she raises her hand, refusing it.

GIRL (CONT'D)  
(Croatian; with subtitles)  
I have all I need. And no price is  
enough for two-thousand days of  
your strawberries.

He nods to her suitcase.

VENDOR  
(Croatian; with subtitles)  
Why go? Here, you can eat them all  
the time?

She considers him.

Lifts the strawberries in a final gesture of thanks --

-- and starts off.

VENDOR (CONT'D)  
 (Croatian; with subtitles)  
 How will you know?

She pauses, turning back. And he finishes in English:

VENDOR (CONT'D)  
 How will you know when it's time to  
 stay?

She stands there, staring at him.

Recalling a time she heard those same words.

BACK TO:

INT. BASEMENT - UNDERWATER

Dim EMERALD WATER in every direction.

After a moment, a tiny SILHOUETTED FORM appears ahead --

-- growing as it approaches -- until we can realize it is the  
 form of a man falling towards us from above, a bag in hand--

CRASH!!

Stacy BURSTS through into the flooded basement, a wake of  
 bills and blood as he plunges through the silent green.

A world of pipes and jagged metal around him.

Finally slowing, he kicks back for the surface --

ZIP-ZIP! --

-- bullets strafe the water --

-- RIPPING THROUGH HIS THIGH.

Stacy desperately reverses.

Rapidly running out of air, he scans the darkness --

-- and spots a HOLE in the wall.

He swims for it --

-- pushing through.

Then kicking up.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Stacy breaks the surface --

-- SUCKING A GREAT BREATH of air.

He pulls himself from the water, groaning at his shoulder.

He stops dead --

-- as he realizes THE TOTE BAG IS EMPTY.

The tear in the fabric has RIPPED open.

Stacy turns --

-- to see the CASH from the bag floating on the dark water, suspended there like a still life in black and green.

Stacy starts back to retrieve it --

-- but stops.

He leaves the money and races across the dark space --

INT. PIT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- emerging into the room where our story began.

The DOG PIT stands before him.

And for a moment, Stacy is stilled by the sight:

The walls of the enclosure strafed with blood.

Claw marks where dogs tried to climb their way out.

Stacy goes stiff --

-- as a fresh clip CLICK-CLACKS into place behind him.

CUT TO:

EXT. FREEWAY ROADSIDE - DAY - PAST

Cars hurdle by like shells from a mortar.

On the shoulder of the road --

-- a little white PUPPY flinches back. Just a few weeks old.

Harmless. Afraid.

As small as it is, its eyes are the same.

The Presa.

It watches as a car pulls up.

A station wagon.

It cowers back as the driver steps out.

A man in a blue windbreaker.

He squats --

-- and we see it's Blue.

BLUE  
Well, look at you.

The Dog watches him, shaking.

BLUE (CONT'D)  
Come here, boy.

It hesitates.

Sniffs in Blue's direction.

BLUE (CONT'D)  
That's it.

After a moment --

-- the Dog starts toward him.

BLUE (CONT'D)  
That's it.

It pauses a few feet away.

Blue extends a hand.

The Dog bows its head, and starts to wag its tail.

BLUE (CONT'D)  
There you go.

It crosses the rest of the way --

BLUE (CONT'D)  
Good boy...

-- and begins to lick Blue's hand.

BACK TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - PIT ROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT

Stacy turns as Blue steps from the shadows, gun raised.

BLUE

Lot of folks would have questions.

Blue chambers a round.

BLUE (CONT'D)

I already know...

Stacy stares back.

BLUE (CONT'D)

Dogs fight. Thieves steal.

He raises the gun--

But pauses as something moves into view beside him:

The Dog.

It stares at Blue from the doorway.

BLUE (CONT'D)

Well, look at you.

Stacy watches as the Dog stares, hesitant.

BLUE (CONT'D)

Come here, boy.

After a moment --

-- the Dog starts toward him, injured leg held up beneath it.

BLUE (CONT'D)

That's it.

Stacy watches helplessly, clutching his bleeding arm --

-- as the Dog bows its head and continues toward Blue.

BLUE (CONT'D)

There you go...

Blue reaches out a hand.

And as the Dog continues its approach --

-- he begins RAISING THE GUN.

STACY

Fuck you.

Then, as if cued by Stacy's words --

-- the Dog peels its lips back into a BLOODY SNARL.

AND LEAPS STRAIGHT FOR BLUE'S NECK.

The force of the impact sends Blue slamming to the floor --

-- the dog STRADDLING HIM and LUNGING FOR HIS THROAT.

Blue lifts the gun--

BANG! He fires a bullet into the dog's side --

-- but it keeps on going, TEARING INTO his neck.

BANG! Another shot --

-- but the dog will not be stopped. Blue struggles without screaming, gurgling as blood begins to erupt from his neck...

BANG! Another shot rips into the dog --

-- but it will not relent, BLOOD pouring through its jaws.

And finally, the gun slips from Blue's hand --

-- and he falls limp.

Blue is dead.

Stacy forces himself to his feet, crossing to the ailing Dog.

But it's too late.

Three bullet holes leak from the Dog's side.

Its remaining legs growing weak beneath it --

-- the Dog settles to the floor.

Looking up at Stacy.

Stacy slumps down beside him.

STACY (CONT'D)

Okay, boy...

He strokes the dog's bloody coat, its BREATHING LABORED.

STACY (CONT'D)

Okay, now...

Stacy rests his head on the dog, his own consciousness slipping now. And as the dog's BREATH SLOWS, we RISE.

SLOWER still, as Stacy weakly strokes his fur.

RISING.

Until we're looking down on Blue, Stacy, and the dog.

BREATH SLOWING.

And now all Stacy can do is whisper.

STACY (CONT'D)

*You're a good boy....*

And as the dog's BREATH FINALLY STOPS --

-- Stacy falls limp beside him.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - DUSK - PAST

The Girl stands in her bra, staring at herself in the mirror.

She turns sideways ever so slightly, and reaches down --

-- touching naked her belly.

On the sink is a plastic pregnancy test, results out of view.

She takes a breath.

Lifts her blouse and opens the door --

-- to reveal Young Stacy standing shirtless before the window as we first saw him. The sound of WAVES as he turns....

BACK TO:

EXT. TROPICAL BEACH - DAY

Waves crash along the perfect beach.

The little kids kick their worn soccer ball across the sand, laughing with delight -- as a final goal wins the game.

The Girl cheers, watching them now.

A little BOY emerges from the pack as he sees her.

Races toward her across the sand.

He looks about five.

As he gets closer, we see he isn't a local.

In fact, he looks a lot like Stacy.

He smiles as the Girl hands him the bag of strawberries.

But it fades as he sees the suitcase beside her.

BOY

Do we have to go?

The Girl looks up --

-- as a PLANE flies overhead.

She puts down the suitcase and lifts the boy.

GIRL

No, baby.

As he hugs her, delighted --

-- something catches the Girl's attention

Moving down from the market.

A man.

We can't see his face, but he walks with the slightest limp.

A little white puppy running alongside through the sand.

FADE OUT.

THE END.