

"DUST"

Pilot Episode

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TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. RAILROAD BOXCAR - NIGHT

RIVER, 26, dreadlocked with sunkissed skin and a septum piercing, SCREAMS in pain as the rickety boxcar races down the tracks. Lying on the dusty floor, her brow drenched with sweat, she arches her back in agony.

JO  
You gotta push, River.

JO, 31, Latina and tomboyish with a giant Virgin of Guadalupe TATTOO climbing up her arm, grabs River's crumbled dirty JEANS from the floor, using them to dab River's forehead.

RIVER  
I can't. I ca--

JO  
Fucking push.

She does, squeezing her eyes and screaming like an animal.

JO (CONT'D)  
Good. Breathe.

In the glow of a camping lantern, PICKET, 23, gangly with knotted hair and mud splattered across his weathered jeans, paces nervously by the door.

PICKET  
What are we gonna do?

JO  
(to Picket)  
Grab the shirt in my pack.

The car sways back and forth as Picket lunges for Jo's soot-covered KNAPSACK, digging in it for the shirt.

JO (CONT'D)  
And any water we got.

Picket hurries the stained SHIRT and a CANTEEN over to her, fighting to keep his balance as the train hits a curve. River WHIMPERS as the pull of the car sways her weak body.

PICKET

You're doing great, River. Just hang in there.

Jo pulls a BANDANA from around her neck and drenches it with water from the canteen, using it to wipe between River's hoisted legs. She brings it back up, revealing it's soaked with blood, and tosses it aside.

She quickly spreads the shirt on the ground for a landing zone.

RIVER

I can't do this. I can't do it.

JO

You're fine. Breathe.

Picket watches River wince and writhe in pain.

PICKET

Jo, I think--

Jo throws him the canteen.

JO

Just get more water.

Picket hurries to the door and heaves it open. Outside, rain pours as the moonlit backyards of rural Iowa fly past.

With one hand anchoring him to the car, Picket holds the canteen to a stream of runoff dribbling from the boxcar's roof, but the train hits a bump and sends the slippery canteen flying from his hand.

PICKET

Shit!

He watches the canteen clatter to its doom on the tracks before returning, empty-handed, to Jo. River screams even louder through another contraction.

JO

*Que la chingada.*

PICKET

(to Jo)

We gotta get help. I could climb to the front.

The train hits another curve, more violent than ever, knocking them all out of balance.

The jolt sends a lifeless BODY rolling towards them from across the floor. It collides with River, who turns to stare at the corpse's rugged, scruffy face as tears stream down her cheeks.

JO

(to Picket)

Yeah? How are you gonna explain  
him?

River and the body lie beside each other like lovers in a bed. The rain pours outside as River stares at the car's ceiling trying to breathe, when another contraction hits, and she screams, echoing into the night.

CUT TO BLACK.

ACT 1

EXT. INDUSTRIAL WAREHOUSE (AUSTIN, TX) - DAY

River dips a steel wool SPONGE into a mucky BUCKET of solvent and scrubs hard at GRAFFITI TAGS scrawled on a brick wall. Her dreads are tied back in a bandana, and her nose ring glints in the sun as she works.

A bead of sweat dances down her back as she erases the final tag and steps back to look at the long wall she's wiped clean. She breathes a heavy sigh, large pit stains drenching her baggy T-SHIRT.

INT. INDUSTRIAL WAREHOUSE - DAY

River lugs the sloshing bucket through the open back door, passing a haggard FOREMAN chewing TOBACCO in his makeshift office. She calls out to him as she drops the bucket.

RIVER  
I'm finished.

FOREMAN  
Took you long enough. Tomorrow you can start on the other side.

RIVER  
No, I'm actually not gonna be back again. I'm rolling outta town.

He steps out of the office.

FOREMAN  
Well, who's gonna do the other wall?

RIVER  
I can ask around. Maybe send someone your way.

He pulls a wad of CASH from his pocket and counts out twenty bucks for her. She stuffs it deep in her pocket.

FOREMAN  
Fine. But no weirdos.

The foreman grabs another ten dollar BILL, smiling through his missing teeth as he grabs a less-than-impressive bulge protruding from his grease-stained jeans.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)  
Wanna make a little extra? 'Fore  
you hit the road?

River hardly blinks before lifting her loose shirt to reveal a significant BABY BUMP. She's at least six months along. The foreman is surprised but not dissuaded.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)  
I don't mind that.

RIVER  
His dad might.

She undoes her bandana, shaking loose her long dreads as she strolls out the door.

EXT. STREET - DAY

River saunters down the gum-stained sidewalk of a dirty street as cars HONK impatiently at a traffic jam up ahead. She passes a hole-in-the-wall Italian restaurant and quickly ducks into the dark alleyway beside it.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY

River lifts open the sticky lid of a DUMPSTER, scavenging through bags of GARBAGE before she finds her jackpot: TWO LOAVES OF FOCACCIA BREAD, each only a little moldy.

She tears away the green, fuzzy pieces and flicks away an ANT or two from the crust. She's already scarfing down one of the prized loaves as she heads back to the street.

EXT. HOBO JUNGLE - EVENING

As she walks beneath an overpass, River veers off the sidewalk and heads towards a crowded collection of SHOPPING CARTS and TENTS where a dozen or so VAGRANTS roam about.

She steps over a few sleeping BODIES as she makes her way across the encampment, passing a wiry HOMELESS MAN who is lying on his side, carefully reading the label of a PILL BOTTLE.

After a couple more steps, River stops and turns back around, snatching the bottle from the man's hand.

HOMELESS MAN  
Hey! Those are mine!

RIVER  
Oh, really? You're knocked up?

She holds up the label to his face, revealing they are  
PRENATAL VITAMINS. The cheap, store-brand kind.

RIVER (CONT'D)  
Stay out of my shit.

EXT. SASS'S TENT - AUSTIN, TX - CONTINUOUS

River hurries over to a shabby green TENT pitched in the back  
of the hobo jungle. Inside the tent sits SASS, 22, Cambodian  
with a long asymmetrical haircut. She's busily cleaning dirt  
from under her nails.

RIVER  
Sass! I thought you were watching  
our stuff?

SASS  
(broken English)  
I do. I watch.

River JINGLES the prenatal vitamins.

RIVER  
Not very well. Did you leave?

Sass is busted.

SASS  
...I pee one time. Very fast.

RIVER  
How many times do I have to tell  
you? Just pee in front of them! No  
one cares!

River grabs her beat-up PACK from inside the tent, checking  
to see if anything else is missing while Sass scans the crowd  
of homeless faces.

SASS  
Who steal?

River juts her head towards the wiry man. Sass stands,  
yelling at him.

SASS (CONT'D)  
I kill you, you cunt!

River cracks a smile, tossing her pack to the ground.

RIVER

Your English is coming along great.

SASS

Thank you, cunt.

River rolls her eyes, handing Sass her remaining loaf of bread.

EXT. DOWNTOWN BRIDGE - EVENING

On a busy sidewalk, Picket strums a MANDOLIN and huskily sings the opening verse of The Steeldrivers' "If It Hadn't Been for Love." Jo accompanies beside him, pattering her thimble-covered fingers against a WASHBOARD.

A few PEDESTRIANS drop dollar BILLS into the mandolin CASE as they pass by.

Curls of smoke meander through the crowd from several feet away as Dust, 29, the dead man from the teaser, smokes a JOINT.

After a moment, a MAN holding the hand of a TODDLER wanders down the sidewalk. The toddler is rapt by the musicians, dazzled like it's a magic show. He GIGGLES, bobbing his wobbly knees to the beat of the song.

A wild grin spreads across Dust's face as he watches the child, whose little tongue sticks out as his clenched fists flail to the music. Dust gives him a little wave, reflecting on a life yet unscathed, still glowing with wonder.

The man notices Dust watching his child and gets uneasy, hurrying the toddler down the street as the song tapers to an end.

Picket and Jo pack up, counting their crumpled earnings.

JO

Seventeen.

PICKET

Next week we'll be sittin' on stacks. You know autumn's the best time to make money in Kansas.

JO

You make it sound like raking leaves and picking apples. Bitch, we're gonna be cleaning up cow shit again.

PICKET

Fuck yeah we are! Cow shit pays.

He turns to Dust.

PICKET (CONT'D)

Made about as much as River did at that crap job. She shoulda just spanged.

Dust takes one last hit and then flicks the roach over the bridge railing.

DUST

River doesn't like asking for money.

They start walking down the road.

JO

You better hope that normie sister of hers you're gonna live with can put some bread on the table.

DUST

Hey, no money, no problems. At least my ass will be indoors this winter.

They duck into a liquor store.

EXT. HOBO JUNGLE - NIGHT

River unties the long, stained SHOELACE of her beat up combat BOOT and pulls the lace out from the shoe entirely. She then weaves it through a handful of various TOURIST BROCHURES, SOUVENIR KEYCHAINS, TICKETS, etc., hanging them from the shoelace like a clothesline.

SASS

What is that?

RIVER

Where we've been.

River stares at them all, running her fingers over the tattered brochures' shiny pictures: purple mountains majesty and amber waves of grain.

Across the encampment comes the rambunctious SOUND of Dust, Picket, and Jo's return. They howl with laughter, carrying a well-loved 24-PACK of Pabst Blue Ribbon, already a few beers lighter.

River stands, watching them approach. She and Dust lock eyes.

EXT. HOBO JUNGLE - LATER

A fire crackles in a TRASHCAN behind them as Dust, Picket, Jo, and Sass sit in the dirt, sipping their beers. River stands above them with her string of souvenirs.

RIVER

It's a game.

(to Dust)

You're first. Close your eyes and put your hand in the air.

Dust does as instructed and River hands Sass the other end of her shoelace string. Together, they hold the trinkets above Dust's outstretched hand.

RIVER (CONT'D)

We're gonna move the string back and forth 'til you grab one. And then you have to tell a story about something you did there.

River and Sass see-saw the shoelace back and forth until Dust grabs a pamphlet. He opens his eyes to read it.

DUST

Baton Rouge.

(to River)

Something I did there?

RIVER

Yep.

DUST

Well...

Smiling mischievously, he leans over and points to River's belly.

DUST (CONT'D)

I did this in Baton Rouge.

The group breaks out into HOOTS and HOLLERS. River's face turns crimson as she smiles ear to ear, and Dust hops up to plant a big kiss on her lips amid the CHEERING.

MONTAGE - The game continues:

A) Picket grabs a keychain for North Carolina.

PICKET

(about Dust)

...That's where you were taking a piss outta the side of the boxcar when the wind changed direction, and it all came back in and hit Jo in the face!

Stone-faced, Jo gives Dust the finger.

B) Jo pulls a bus ticket from Nebraska.

JO

That's where we adopted Sass!

They all attack Sass with hugs and kisses, tickling her as she SQUEALS with laughter.

C) More beers are drunk and brochures are pulled. The stories overlap, too many to tell.

D) Dust chases River around the fire, they're laughing so hard that tears run down their cheeks.

INT. SASS'S TENT - NIGHT

River and Dust lie beside each other in the dark.

RIVER

I don't wanna do this.

He turns to look at her.

DUST

You mean go home?

She nods.

DUST (CONT'D)

We're gonna have this kid someplace safe.

RIVER

I know. With a doctor.

DUST

With a doctor. And then we'll figure it out. The road isn't going anywhere.

She smiles at him. He runs his fingers across her lips, slowly tracing her skin down to her navel, where he rests his calloused hand.

DUST (CONT'D)

"I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future."

RIVER

That another Jack Kerouac?

He nods.

RIVER (CONT'D)

Sounds about right. Straddling the fence, aren't we?

She curls into him, nose to nose. A contagious crooked-toothed smile spreads from his lips to hers.

RIVER (CONT'D)

Let's name the baby that. Kerouac. Or Jack.

DUST

Really?

RIVER

Yeah. You quote him all the time. The baby will feel very important.

DUST

Jack Redding?

River's smile fades a bit as she rolls onto her back.

RIVER

No. I don't want him to have my name.

DUST

...How about Ricker?

RIVER

That your last name?

He nods. River's smile spreads to Dust's lips, and she counts the stains on his teeth like they were stars.

RIVER (CONT'D)

Come to Colorado with me tomorrow.

DUST

I gotta go see Coats first. She made me promise.

RIVER

When am I gonna meet this Coats?

DUST

You'll meet her one day. This is just gonna be a quick trip though. I think she wants some one-on-one time to catch up.

RIVER

Is she pretty?

DUST

What? Coats is like sixty.

RIVER

Oh.

DUST

Did you think--?

RIVER

I don't know. The way you talk about her...

DUST

No, nothing like that. She showed me the ropes when I was first hopping. Had my back. She probably just wants to shower me with advice on how to not fuck up our kid.

RIVER

Well, can't hurt.

DUST

...Were you jealous?

RIVER

(too quickly)

No.

DUST

Well, that's a shame. They say if you're not jealous than you're not in love.

RIVER

(cracking a smile)

Fine, I was very jealous.

He smiles back and then kisses her, slow and deep. He leans down and whispers to her belly.

DUST  
 Good night, Jack.

He wraps his arms around her as they drift to sleep.

EXT. BNSF RAILROAD DEPARTURE YARD - DAY

River and Sass hide low in a cluster of TREES, watching as a long FREIGHT TRAIN slowly rolls out of the yard.

As the front engine passes around a curve, the girls grab their PACKS and hightail it for one of the paint-chipped INTERMODAL DOUBLE STACK cars.

Sass makes it to the track first, throwing her rucksack into the "bucket" at the rear of the car. The train is gaining speed, but she grabs the ladder with one hand, hops both feet onto the bottom rung, and climbs into the car.

The wind is already whipping her long hair as she turns to catch River's pack, and seconds later, River is pulling herself into the car.

EXT. BNSF INTERMODAL CAR (RURAL TEXAS) - AFTERNOON

A soft rain drizzles down as the train cuts through the endless flat that is northern Texas.

River has a PLASTIC BAG canopied over her head to keep herself dry as she watches the passing landscape. There's hardly more than a single tree or fence post between her and the horizon. A hand moves to her belly: the imminent anchor.

Beside her, Sass sleeps soundly.

INT. UNION PACIFIC BOXCAR (RURAL OKLAHOMA) - SUNSET

EMPTY BEER CANS are scattered across the floor of the car as Dust and Jo watch Picket stagger to his feet.

PICKET  
 (slurring)  
 Don't count as a bachelor party if  
 there ain't a stripper!

JO  
 No! No no no--

Picket begins HUMMING his own sensual underscoring as he performs a drunken burlesque, ripping off his shirt and waving it over his head.

Dust and Jo are screaming with laughter, covering their eyes.

DUST

Put it back on! Nobody wants it!

Picket's song hits a high note as he moons them both.

INT. UNION PACIFIC BOXCAR (SOUTHERN KANSAS) - NIGHT

By the glow of a camping LANTERN, Picket softly sings Anais Mitchell's "Young Man in America" as he strums his mandolin. Dust stares out the open boxcar door, smoking a JOINT and watching the moonlit hills of Kansas rolling past.

EXT. BNSF INTERMODAL CAR (DENVER, COLORADO) - MORNING

The train slows as it approaches a rail yard up ahead, passing trees speckled with the first traces of autumn's red and orange.

River and Sass stay as low in the bucket as they can. Sass nervously watches River, who quickly pops up, scanning the surroundings.

She spots a burly man in a security uniform, the yard's BULL, walking towards the track to meet the incoming train.

RIVER

Shit. There's a bull.

They girls snatch their packs, clamoring to disembark from the other side of the car before the train gets any closer.

EXT. RAIL YARD (DENVER, COLORADO) - CONTINUOUS

The train is still moving too fast, but River lunges her pack overboard and jumps to the ground. She skids on the gravel but remains upright.

Behind her, Sass is not so graceful, quickly crashing to her backside.

River pulls her to her feet and they dart towards the treeline, ducking into the brush just as the last train car slips past.

EXT. TREELINE - CONTINUOUS

The girls try to catch their breaths.

RIVER  
You alright?

Sass nods.

RIVER (CONT'D)  
You'll get it eventually.

SASS  
How you do with baby?

River shrugs. She paces a few feet back to peer through the trees, looking towards the rail yard as chews her lip and thinks.

RIVER  
I'm just gonna hitch from here. You know where you're going?

SASS  
Union Pacific. That way.

She points north. River nods and fishes in her pack for a CAN OF WASP SPRAY.

RIVER  
Here, take this. If anyone messes with you, aim for the face.

She hands it to Sass, and they hug.

SASS  
Thank you. For everything.

RIVER  
If you need anything, I'm just outside the town of Greeley. Up north.

River tousles Sass's hair before turning to trek through the trees. As she starts to disappear, Sass calls to her.

SASS  
River, you be good mama!

EXT. HIGHWAY ENTRANCE RAMP - NOON

River thumbs for a ride as CARS drive past. The rust-tinted, snow-dotted mountains of Colorado pierce the sky behind her.

A dirty red PICKUP TRUCK slows down for her, and she hops in.

EXT. MAIN STREET (GREELEY, COLORADO) - AFTERNOON

The pickup rolls through the quiet main drag of a small mountain town. From the passenger seat, River silently counts the boarded up shop windows.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - AFTERNOON

The truck drives along a barren rural road when a makeshift SIGN advertising a SCRAP YARD appears up ahead.

RIVER

This is me.

The DRIVER pulls up alongside the cluttered junk yard, grimacing at the mangy DOGS running among the countless BROKEN DOWN CARS. He turns to River, shaking his head.

DRIVER

Shoulda known you were a Redding.

Gritting her teeth, River hops out of the truck, and it speeds off.

Crestfallen, she stares at home sweet home.

EXT. REDDING DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

River trudges down the long memory lane, clocking the scattered OLD APPLIANCES and splintered LAWN FURNITURE that bookend both sides of the drive.

She treks down the muddy driveway for a couple acres, passing abandoned TRAILERS and a sloppy pile of FIREWOOD. Suddenly she hears the NOISE of someone cocking a SHOTGUN behind her.

VOICE

Get off my fuckin' property,  
hippie.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

EXT. REDDING DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

River turns to find JEAN REDDING, 31, wearing a Budweiser shirt under her timeworn military surplus JACKET and pointing shotgun at River's head. Suddenly, Jean's eyes widen and she lowers the gun.

JEAN

Abbey?

RIVER

Hi Jean.

Jean's gaze falls on River's swollen belly.

JEAN

Holy shit.

EXT. REDDING PROPERTY - AFTERNOON

Jean sucks on a CIGARETTE as she and River lumber across the scrap yard.

JEAN

You can stay in Mom and Dad's place. I finally kicked Dad out about a year ago.

River cocks an eyebrow.

RIVER

How'd that work?

JEAN

I reminded the son of a bitch that his name wasn't anywhere in Mom's will. Then I sold a couple of the back acres and gave him the cash so he'd quit whining. He's living in town now, above the bar.

River nods, passing an old SCHOOL BUS with weeds growing through its hood.

JEAN (CONT'D)

I drive into town once a week to let him see the boys. It's been good actually. He's not my problem anymore, and I'm not his. We're going tonight if--

RIVER

Nope. Just don't even tell him I'm here.

JEAN

I won't...

She nods towards two young BOYS with buzz cuts who are wrestling up ahead in the yard.

JEAN (CONT'D)

But if you think those two assholes are gonna keep quiet, you got another thing coming.

She shouts to the kids.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Boys, say hi to your Aunt Abbey.

They turn their heads. The younger one has blood trickling out of his nose. Neither of the boys seem to recognize River as she gives them a small smile.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Lyle, wipe your damn nose.

He wipes his nose on the back of his hand. Jean sighs as she leads River to a dingy PORTABLE HOME.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Nobody's been inside in a year. Not since the hospice people left.

RIVER

Jesus, it's been a year.

JEAN

Almost two since you been here.

They start to climb up the mud-covered front steps.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Guess that's how long it took you to grow that mop on your head.

INT. PORTABLE HOME - CONTINUOUS

Jean forces open the door, revealing a musty one bedroom home. ROTTEN FRUIT still sits on a small kitchen counter.

JEAN

Should be some of Mom's old clothes  
in here that you can wear.

She gestures to a dusty DRESSER. River drops her pack to the floor, looking around at the creaky BED covered in a raggedy old QUILT.

JEAN (CONT'D)

So... you're keeping it.

She nods her head to River's belly.

RIVER

A little far along to be asking  
that.

JEAN

Sorry, I hadn't exactly gotten an  
opportunity 'til now. You know  
whose it is?

RIVER

Yeah. ...And he's coming here.

JEAN

What?

RIVER

I told him he could. We're doing  
this together.

JEAN

...Alright. Okay. Land's half  
yours. I'm not gonna tell you what  
to do.

A pause.

JEAN (CONT'D)

What's his name?

RIVER

Dust.

JEAN

That short for something?

RIVER

Nope. Just Dust.

JEAN

...Lord Jesus.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS (KANSAS CITY, KANSAS) - AFTERNOON

Having just disembarked, Dust, Jo, and Picket walk away from the tracks as their train rolls away behind them. They trek through weeds towards a BARBED WIRE FENCE up ahead.

JO

(to Dust)

Thank God you know a place we can crash here because it's already fucking cold.

PICKET

That's cause you're from a city that's only fit for lizards.

JO

Talk shit about Phoenix one more time. See what happens.

Dust pulls a grungy old DOORMAT from his pack and unfurls it before he tosses his pack over the fence.

PICKET

(slapping his neck)

I'll give Arizona one thing: it's got less mosquitoes than Kansas.

Dust throws the doormat onto the barbed wire as a cover and starts to scale the fence.

JO

And the chicks are way hotter. I'm not into the whole farm girl thing. I mean, I'll do it, but really that's your jam.

PICKET

It is. 'Til they talk and you realize they're all savin' themselves for Jesus.

\*  
\*

JO

Not when I'm done with them.

Dust lands with a thud on the other side. Jo starts climbing the fence behind him.

The Kansas River flows in the distance, and a quiet feed supply store is just up ahead. Dust wanders towards it when a POLICE CAR pulls on to the street.

DUST

Shit!

Dust ducks behind a SEMI-TRUCK parked behind the feed store. Picket, just getting over the top of the fence, looks up to see the cop turn on its SIREN.

JO

Fuck.

Picket and Jo have nowhere to hide. The cop pulls right up to the fence and steps out of the car.

Behind the semi, Dust tries to catch his breath, peeking out to see Picket and Jo getting put into the back of the cop car. He anxiously watches it drive away before kicking the TIRE of the semi and pacing a moment before storming off.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - SUNSET

The sun sets behind Dust as he lights a cigarette. Still fuming, he wanders up an avenue downtown, passing faded brick buildings and withered oak trees, their fall leaves turning gold.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dust walks into the quiet lot sandwiched between slate gray apartment buildings. Illuminated by the streetlights, he makes a beeline to the lot's back corner.

He checks that the coast is clear before lifting open a ground floor WINDOW on one of the buildings and climbing inside.

INT. COATS'S SQUAT - NIGHT

Dust lands on the filthy floor of a dark apartment. FAST FOOD WRAPPERS and empty PACKS OF CIGARETTES are scattered across the floor.

He can hear VOICES coming from the other room, where light is pouring out from beneath the closed door.

INT. SQUAT KITCHEN - NIGHT

SLEEPING BAGS are strewn about the kitchen floor. Three CAMPING LANTERNS sit on the grimy counter, bathing a handful of motley SQUATTERS in fluorescent light.

The group is an endless stream of facial tattoos and infected piercings, yellow teeth and bloodshot eyes. Two GIRLS share a needle in the corner.

SQUATTER #1 warms a CAN OF SOUP over a lit STERNO HANDY FUEL when the door swings open, and the room falls quiet. Dust steps into the light.

SQUATTER #1  
Well, it's about time!

The room erupts into GREETINGS and CHEERS. A couple of the squatters hop off the counter or rise from their sleeping bags to give Dust a hug.

DUST  
Better late than never, right?

SQUATTER #1  
We heard you found yourself a lady friend.

Another squatter releases a CATCALL. Dust blushes a bit, nodding. More hoots and cheers.

SQUATTER #1 (CONT'D)  
You two gonna bring the kid on the road? You're all welcome here anytime.

DUST  
Thank you.

He looks around the room, his eye falling on a broken BOTTLE and a discarded SYRINGE.

DUST (CONT'D)  
(distracted)  
So this is the new place.

SQUATTER #1  
Eh, the old building was better, but when they decided to tear it down, there wasn't much left to do. "Squatters Rights" isn't a term you hear a lot in Kansas City.

SQUATTER #2, tweaking, steals a spoonful of soup before turning towards Dust to reveal that his left arm is amputated at the elbow.

SQUATTER #2  
We missed ya, Dust. It hasn't been the same without you 'round here. A couple of the gang from Baton Rouge came through a few weeks back and were sayin' how much they missed your little pow-wows.

Dust stares at Squatter #2, trying to hide the sorrow in his eyes.

DUST  
 ...Yeah, I've missed you guys too.  
 What happened to your arm, man?

SQUATTER #2  
 (embarrassed)  
 Caught a loaded car. It was dumb.  
 My first thought was "Ah man, Dust  
 taught you better than that!"

Dust just nods, brokenhearted.

DUST  
 ...It's okay. Now you've got a sort  
 of sexy pirate thing going, right?  
 Chicks dig that.

Squatter #2 laughs too loudly, fervently nodding up and down.

DUST (CONT'D)  
 (to the room)  
 So, where's Coats?

SQUATTER #1  
 She headed out a few days ago.

DUST  
 What? She said she wasn't skipping  
 town 'til the end of the month. I'm  
 two weeks ahead of the deadline.

SQUATTER #1  
 (shrugging)  
 She left you a note.

Squatter #2 grabs a greasy Styrofoam TO GO CONTAINER from the counter and tosses it to Dust. Dust opens it up to see a scribbled message. His eyes narrow as he reads: "Sorry to bolt. Enjoy Kansas. Get some barbecue."

INT. PORTABLE HOME BATHROOM (GREELEY, COLORADO) - EVENING

River stands in the shower, tile stained yellow and mold growing in the cracks. She revels in the warm water pouring down her face.

She grabs a practically empty bottle of dollar store brand SOAP and squeezes it repeatedly just to get a little in her hand. She takes a deep whiff, like it's aromatherapy from a five-star spa, and suds up.

INT. PORTABLE HOME BEDROOM - EVENING

River is wrapped in a towel, dreadlocks dripping, as she jerks open a rickety dresser drawer and sifts through her mother's old clothes. As she attempts to unfurl a ratty sweater, she uncovers a KEEPSAKE BOX wrapped up in it.

She opens the box, seeing at least a dozen LETTERS addressed between Betsy Redding and Sterling Correctional Facility. River's eyes narrow as she studies the letters. \*

INT. POLICE STATION HOLDING CELL (KANSAS CITY) - NIGHT

Picket nervously taps his foot as Jo stares angrily at the ceiling. They are alone in the cell when a DETECTIVE walks down the hall, calling to them.

DETECTIVE

Well, looks like the officer didn't actually see you get off the train. But I'm sure if we dig through some rail yard surveillance, we could catch you hopping. And that, I'm sure you are aware, is a federal crime. So, we can start looking at the tapes, or you can help us with these.

He holds up a FILE FOLDER, flipping it open to reveal it contains about forty PHOTOGRAPHS.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

Missing Persons. Believed to be jumping trains. You help us, and we'll help you.

JO

My guess is most of those guys want to stay missing.

DETECTIVE

If someone's filed a report, we have to assume there's a chance these people are in danger. Some of them are children. How do you know they weren't abducted?

Picket and Jo share a look, trying not to roll their eyes.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

Some people actually have families that look for them.

Jo locks eyes with the detective as she bites off her nail and spits it in front of her.

PICKET

Alright, let's see 'em.

MONTAGE - Detective shows them photographs of:

A) A shaggy-haired, angry-looking teenage boy. Both Picket and Jo shake their heads, not recognizing him.

B) A freckled 16-year-old with long red hair.

PICKET (CONT'D)

In New Orleans. Hair's purple now.  
She cut it short.

C) Two 17-year-old twin boys in ball caps. They don't recognize them.

D) A tubby twenty-something with a dozen lip piercings.

JO AND PICKET

Atlanta.

JO

Calls herself "Shark."

E) A Cherokee boy with a shaved head. Not recognized.

F) A middle-aged woman with a mom haircut and severe overbite.

JO (CONT'D)

Albuquerque. She was hooking.

G) The last picture: Sass in a white wedding dress. A sticky note on the photo reads, "Omaha, NE."

PICKET

...Never seen her.

JO

Me neither.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The detective walks Picket and Jo out the front door, handing them both a BUSINESS CARD with his number on it.

\*

DETECTIVE

If you two recognize anyone, give me a call. I'll make it worth your while.

After the detective heads back into the building, Picket crumples the card and chucks it at the door. \*

PICKET

Fuck Kansas.

EXT. DIVE BAR (GREELEY, COLORADO) - NIGHT

River follows Jean into the dimly lit bar. Behind the counter, TOM REDDING, 55, finishes pouring himself three fingers of amber WHISKEY.

Jean's boys race ahead, shouting hello to their grandpa. Tom chuckles at them as he sips his drink, when he turns to see River walking into the bar.

He gives her a long look as she shoves her hands deep into her pockets.

TOM

Where you been?

RIVER

...Kind of all over.

Tom frowns, shaking the ice in his drink.

RIVER (CONT'D)

The place looks good.

TOM

It better. I just spent a fortune replacing the roof on it.

River has nothing to say, really.

TOM (CONT'D)

So, what? You're back? You walk out for a couple years, miss your own mother's fucking funeral, and now we're all supposed to pretend everything's fine?

RIVER

I said bye to Mom in my own way--

TOM

That's horse shit.

His voice starts to rise, incensed, and the few grizzly PATRONS nudge each other with their elbows, turning to watch the scene Tom is making.

TOM (CONT'D)  
 How about your sister's wedding?  
 D'you celebrate that in your own  
 way too?

River rests a hand against the back of a chair as she stares at the floor. The movement opens her jacket just enough to reveal her baby bump, a detail that Tom doesn't miss.

TOM (CONT'D)  
 Where's the fella that did that to  
 you?

JEAN  
 Dad--

TOM  
 I'm just asking your sister a  
 question.  
 (to River)  
 Where's the father?

RIVER  
 He's coming. He'll be here in a  
 couple days.

TOM  
 Yeah, sure he will.

He downs the rest of his drink.

RIVER  
 Don't project your bullshit on me.

TOM  
*Project?* Who taught you that word,  
 Abbey? Real fancy crowd you've been  
 hanging with?

Tom's already refilling his glass.

RIVER  
 Oh, they're nothing compared to the  
 class act you are, Dad.

Some GUY in the corner WHISTLES.

TOM  
 (to Guy)  
 Get the fuck out of my bar!

River shakes her head and leaves, slamming the door behind her.

GUY

(to his buddies)

Been a while since I've seen a good Redding showdown. Not since his boy got locked up.

TOM

I said, get the fuck out!

Tom grabs an empty beer BOTTLE and hurls it against the back wall, where it SHATTERS into pieces. Jean's boys jump back a bit.

A brawny CUSTOMER shakes his head as he throws a few bucks on the bar and brusquely heads for the door. A few other customers, including Guy, follow suit.

JEAN

(to the patrons)

There's your fuckin' show! There's your show, alright? Did you like that?

As the bar continues to empty out, Jean moves to a stool and reaches across the counter to grab herself a beer.

JEAN (CONT'D)

(to her kids)

Boys, why don't you tell your grandpa about the bobcat you saw?

EXT. SQUAT KITCHEN (KANSAS CITY, KANSAS) - NIGHT

The room is pitch black now; dead quiet except for a chorus of squatters SNORING. Dust is curled up in a corner, seemingly asleep, when his eyes peek open.

He sits up, listening to the darkness around him, trying to make sure no one else is awake before he stands and grabs his pack.

Quietly stepping around the scattered beer cans, he passes the slumbering Squatter #2, his maimed arm hanging in the air. Dust gives him a final look of apology before he turns and sneaks out the door.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Dust hurries down the moonlit street, glancing twice over his shoulder to make sure he isn't being followed.

He approaches a downtown restaurant where a bright neon SIGN advertises "The Best Barbecue in Kansas." Dust opens a door beside the restaurant that leads into the dim lobby of an apartment building.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Dust makes his way to the tenant MAILBOXES at the end of the tiled hallway. He slips off one of his muddy BOOTS and peels back the sole inside the shoe to reveal a small rusty KEY.

He quickly unlocks one of the mailboxes, pulling out a water-spotted envelope. He tears it open, revealing a wad of CASH and three different FAKE IDs with Dust's picture on them.

Beneath all of these is a NOTE, in the same handwriting as the one at the squat, that reads: "LEAVE NOW. THEY KNOW."

Dust stares at it, terrified.

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

Dust sits at a corner table, trying to stop his hands from shaking as he brings a CUP of black coffee to his lips. His eyes dart around the busy room as his mind races, panicking.

A YOUNG WOMAN finishes ordering at the counter and moves to the table next to Dust. She pulls a LAPTOP out from her bag and places it on the table, opening it to begin some work. Dust watches her carefully.

The BARISTA calls out the woman's order, and she stands, walking the fifteen feet back to the counter to retrieve her drink.

When she turns around, the door to the coffee shop is slamming shut and both Dust and her computer are gone.

EXT. CITY STREET - MORNING

Dust hustles down the street, clutching the stolen laptop beneath his faded flannel shirt. He ducks into an alleyway just before the Young Woman steps out of the coffee shop behind him, hopelessly looking up and down the street.

EXT. RAIL YARD (CHEYENNE, WYOMING) - MORNING

The train starts to slow as it approaches the rail yard. Inside the car, Sass sheepishly looks both ways. Seeing nothing, she jumps and lands right on her feet.

SASS

Yes!

She starts to head away from the yard when someone TAPS her shoulder. She whips her head around to see BULL #2, sweat dripping down his oily face and shirt just barely staying buttoned over his protruding belly. He raises a bushy brow.

BULL #2

How was the ride?

She reaches for the wasp spray in her backpack, and just as her hand meets the bottle, Bull #2 grabs her by the arms and pulls her back toward the yard.

BULL #2 (CONT'D)

It's okay, honey. I'm not gonna hurt ya. You're just gonna get in a lotta trouble.

SASS

I-- I can do anything?

He slows down his pace. She knows what she's doing. His tongue grazes the corner of his mouth.

INT. WYOMING RAIL YARD SECURITY OFFICE - MORNING

Sass is on her knees as Bull #2 moans, sitting on a squeaky half-broken desk chair. From Bull #2's POV, we see Sass's face getting smacked by sweaty beer belly as she bobs up and down.

EXT. NARY CHEY'S HOUSE - DAY

Sass makes it to the front door, weary, hair a mess, mascara under her eyes. NARY CHEY, 41, youthful in a low-cut, A-line dress, opens the door.

SASS

(in Khmer)

Hi, Mama.

Nary just stares at her coldly. Sass goes to hug her, but she rejects the affection, instead turning back and going inside. Sass catches the door before it shuts and follows her mother into the house.

INT. NARY CHEY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

It is a modest but well-kept, clean home.

SASS

(in Khmer)

I wanted to see you. That's why I came.

NARY

(in Khmer)

You have embarrassed me! How dare you come here.

Nary is pacing back and forth, fuming, as Sass stares at her shoes.

SASS

(in Khmer)

If you just let me explain, I know you'll understand. I need your help.

NARY

(in Khmer)

I give you a chance at a good life and you throw it away. Why not just go back to Cambodia and starve again?

SASS

(in Khmer)

He-- he hits me, Mama.

NARY

(in Khmer)

What have you been doing to him?

SASS

(in Khmer)

What? I don't do anything!

NARY

(in Khmer)

Does he give you food and a nice home?

SASS

(in Khmer)

I guess, but I don't want to be afraid all the time!

NARY

(in Khmer)

Afraid? Afraid is when you walk the streets until five in the morning with the Cambodian mob on your back, and you pray you'll get a bowl of rice out of it.

Sass looks away.

NARY (CONT'D)

(in Khmer)

You ungrateful bitch.

She winces as her mother leaves the room. She sits down on the plastic covered sofa and picks up a FRAMED PICTURE on the end table beside her: a photo on a cruise ship of Nary and a 65-year-old with a white beard wearing a tacky gold watch.

Sass quickly puts the photo back as her mother re-enters with two BOWLS of food.

NARY (CONT'D)  
 (coolly, in Khmer)  
 You're probably hungry.

She hands Sass a bowl of *amok*, fish curry in banana leaves, and sits across from her on a lounge chair. Silence for a moment.

NARY (CONT'D)  
 (in Khmer)  
 How did you get here anyway?

SASS  
 (in Khmer)  
 Train.

NARY  
 (in Khmer)  
 You never get caught?

Sass hesitates, taking a bite of food.

SASS  
 (in Khmer)  
 No.

Sass wipes her mouth on her sleeve and continues eating.

NARY  
 (in Khmer)  
 You have to go back to Nebraska.

SASS  
 (in Khmer)  
 How can you say that when I just told you--?

NARY  
 (in Khmer)  
 I won't let him think I sold him a bad bride.

Suddenly not so hungry, Sass pushes the bowl away.

INT. JEAN'S BEDROOM (GREELEY, COLORADO) - AFTERNOON

Her back to River, Jean is wearing a very 1980s wedding dress, unzipped down to her hips.

JEAN

But you have to help me zip it up.

River is sitting on Jean's unmade bed in one of her mother's old sweaters and jeans. River reaches for the zipper.

JEAN (CONT'D)

It was Mom's.

RIVER

Looks like her taste.

Jean gives River a look as if to say, "Watch it," as River attempts to zip up the dress, but it won't close. River smirks as she tries again.

RIVER (CONT'D)

(giggling)

I can't get it to close.

JEAN

Shut up. Try again.

She's really laughing now.

RIVER

I can't!

JEAN

(starting to laugh too)

I'm gonna kill you.

River gives up on the zipper as they both surrender to the floor, in hysterics.

JEAN (CONT'D)

It fit on my wedding day, I swear.

They catch their breaths.

RIVER

When does Jed get back?

JEAN

Deployment ends in January. I'm just prayin' that after that, he never has to go back to the Middle East again.

RIVER

...I can't believe I didn't know you guys were getting married.

JEAN

Well, you didn't exactly leave a forwarding address.

River shakes her head, embarrassed.

RIVER

I know. It's my fault. If I had known, I would've been there.

JEAN

I thought about you a lot...

River holds her sister's hand. Jean's sleeve slips off her shoulder as she leans in.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Tell me about Dust.

RIVER

What about him?

JEAN

Are you in love?

River nods, trying to hide the wild smile spreading across her face. Jean raises her brow.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Is this pregnancy hormone shit or what?

RIVER

He's just... I mean, I've spent a lot of time feeling like the world was out there waiting for me to find it. And I still feel that way, but now I find that all of that magic and adventure and not knowing what's next... is inside of one person. And the life we're creating. I mean, literally creating life.

She places a hand on her belly.

JEAN

(laughing)

Look at you.

River buries her blushing face into a pillow.

RIVER  
He'll reach out when he's on his  
way. I gave him your number.

JEAN  
Oh, you still had that? Coulda  
fooled me.

River rolls her eyes at Jean, whose dress is practically  
falling off.

RIVER  
Put your tits away!

They laugh as Jean stretches the volumes of taffeta to cover  
her chest. When the laughter subsides, they sit in silence a  
moment.

JEAN  
Can I ask you somethin'?

RIVER  
What?

JEAN  
Why'd you leave? In the middle of  
everything?

River lowers her eyes.

RIVER  
Mom was already gone. Maybe she was  
still breathing, but she was gone.  
I came to terms with that, and then  
I-- I just couldn't be here.

JEAN  
That's not how life works. You  
can't just run away--

RIVER  
It's not like that. I-- I never  
belonged here.

Jean rolls her eyes.

JEAN  
Oh, but you belong out in the  
middle of nowhere? With people  
looking at you like you're a  
fucking bum?

River tries to busy herself with the yellowed lace on her  
sister's shoulder.

RIVER

I'd rather people look at me like a  
dirty hobo than the way they look  
at a Redding around here.

INT. OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE (CHEYENNE, WYOMING) - AFTERNOON

Nary, Sass, and LARRY FIELDER, 65 (the man from the  
photograph at Nary's house) sit at a table at the quiet  
restaurant.

Sass is dressed up in a bright dress with a full face of  
makeup that matches that of her mother.

Nary and Sass eat salad while Larry polishes off a BLOOMIN'  
ONION. They chew in silence for a beat.

LARRY

(speaking with a stutter)  
So, h-h-how do you say your n-n-  
name again?

SASS

Everyone call me Sass.

Nary glares at her.

NARY

Her name *Sorpheny*.

LARRY

S-S-Sass?

Sass nods. Awkward silence. Larry can barely look someone in  
the eye.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Your m-m-mom is very good to me.

Sass looks at her mom.

LARRY (CONT'D)

W-w-w-ish I coulda gotten her when  
she was your age though. M-m-m-my  
brother is a lucky man.

He winks at her and chuckles. Nary laughs, but she doesn't  
understand most of what he just said. Sass is not amused.

LARRY (CONT'D)

He got a great d-d-deal too, right,  
Nary?

Nary smiles and giggles more.

LARRY (CONT'D)  
F-f-f-family discount.

They all continue eating in silence.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY (KANSAS CITY, KANSAS) - AFTERNOON

Tucked away at a splintered desk in the stuffy old archives of the library, Dust works feverishly on his lifted laptop.

He hears the SOUND of footsteps approaching and immediately clicks to a different TAB on his web browser.

An ELDERLY LIBRARIAN walks past, shelving books. Dust waits until the librarian is far down the aisle before clicking back to what he was reading: a NEWS ARTICLE with the headline, "BODIES FOUND IN PROVIDENCE RIVER."

The article shows a PHOTO of a smiling middle-aged HUSBAND and WIFE.

Dust lowers the volume on the computer to the lowest setting, glancing around one last time before playing a VIDEO CLIP embedded in the article, in which a NEWSCASTER reports from a dock on the Providence River.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)  
Though it is too soon to confirm, there is speculation that the bodies found this morning are the remains of Emma and Kurt Vellenga, prominent residents who went missing nearly four years ago. Please be warned the footage we are about to show is rather graphic.

In a clip, two bodies are pulled out of the river, their swollen limbs tied to each other, gags in their mouths. The newscaster narrates over the footage.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)  
The bodies were discovered shackled to the south Water Street bridge after an anonymous tip was called in to the Providence Police. A spokesperson for the police department reports that they still do not have a suspect in this case.

The video ends, and Dust stares at the frozen image of the bodies on the screen, trying to steady his breath, when...

A CREAKING SOUND comes from the next aisle over. He freezes, waiting to hear the sound again.

After a few moments of tense silence, he slyly clears the computer's SEARCH HISTORY. He then gets up and looks down the next aisle, only to find it empty.

Shaky, he returns to the laptop and places it opened, facedown on the floor. He quickly stomps down on it, SNAPPING it into two useless halves.

He tucks the mangled computer under his shirt and hurries down the hall.

EXT. CITY STREET - AFTERNOON

Dust walks briskly, passing an urban park and a small cafe crowded with BUSINESS PEOPLE. He again keeps checking behind his back to ensure he isn't being followed.

Approaching a TRASH CAN on the sidewalk, he discreetly slips the laptop from under his shirt, tosses it into the garbage, and hurries off down the street.

As he disappears into the distance, Squatter #1 wanders over from a PARK BENCH where she's been watching, out of view.

As Dust disappears down the street, the squatter turns to the garbage can.

END OF ACT 3

ACT 4

INT. LIQUOR STORE - AFTERNOON

Dust carries a FIFTH OF WHISKEY up to the CASHIER and adds three of the miniature Jack Daniels BOTTLES to his purchase.

He pays in cash and is already downing one of the tiny bottles before he's out the door.

EXT. CITY HALL GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

On the steps of City Hall there is a bronze STATUE of Abraham Lincoln talking to a young boy. The boy, dripping with the idealism of youth, reaches for Lincoln's hand.

But Lincoln's stone face just stares at the child with pity. He knows well the America that the boy will inherit.

Against the statue's marble base leans Picket, who has one of his pant legs rolled up to the knee. He is busily examining a TICK that has buried itself into his hairy shin.

A few steps away, Jo rummages through a TRASH CAN, finding a string of USED DENTAL FLOSS. She wipes it clean on her shirt and returns to Picket.

She ties a loose knot in the floss, sliding it over the tick's body and pulling it tight. As she lightly tugs at the floss, the tick holds fast, stretching Picket's skin before finally popping free.

PICKET

Damn, he was stubborn fucker.

JO

You are what you eat.

Picket playfully swings at Jo as Dust approaches, watching his back as he makes his way over.

PICKET

Look who it is!

DUST

(still distracted)

I thought the next time I saw you guys, you'd be in jumpsuits trying not to drop any soap. What happened?

JO  
Nothing. Just cops being cops.

Dust pulls out the fifth of whiskey, handing it to them.

PICKET  
What? How'd you score that?

DUST  
Cashier wasn't looking.

Jo twists open the bottle cap and pours a splash on Picket's leg. It burns.

PICKET  
Ow!

JO  
Disinfectant. And remember this moment, because it's the last time I ever waste good liquor on your dumb ass.

She takes a big swig and passes the bottle to Picket. He swallows a mouthful, grinning ear-to-ear.

PICKET  
(to Dust)  
Sit down. Stay awhile.

Dust has been looking up and down the street.

DUST  
No, I'm catching out tonight.

What? JO What! PICKET

DUST  
Coats isn't here. She left town a couple days ago.

PICKET  
That's kind of a dick move. Wasn't she the one who told you to come?

DUST  
Yeah. Shit happens.

Picket hands the bottle to Dust, who takes a quick gulp.

DUST (CONT'D)  
Hey, you guys should come with me to Denver. Find work there instead.  
(MORE)

DUST (CONT'D)

The cops already know your faces here.

PICKET

Are you crazy?

DUST

Why not?

PICKET

Winter in Denver? I'd freeze my nuts off, that's why. Jo's nipples would turn into weapons.

Jo points to her boob.

JO

Below 30 degrees you can pick a lock with this shit.

PICKET

Yeah, no chance, man. We're stayin' here a couple months, makin' dough, and then catchin' out to Slab City for New Year's.

DUST

Slab City? That place is a fuckin' hobo orgy.

JO

It's an artist community.

PICKET

Who cares, it's California in January. And I love a good orgy.

Jo laughs and looks at Dust, who missed the joke because his mind is elsewhere.

JO

So, since we're staying here, what's up with that squat you said we could crash at?

DUST

What?

(urgent)

Oh, no. No, you don't wanna hang there.

PICKET

Why not?

DUST

The whole vibe's changed. It's all crusties, and the homebum's a fucking slave driver. Trust me. Just steer clear of those guys.

Jo and Picket are clearly bummed.

DUST (CONT'D)

(to Picket)

Can I borrow the phone?

Picket digs through his bag, pulling out a battered CELL PHONE.

PICKET

You two give me so much shit about having this thing, but you can thank your lucky stars that one of us has a mama who cares enough to keep paying his phone bill.

JO

Yeah, or she's using it to track you. Just wait, you're gonna be tripping on something one night and Mrs. Cleaver's gonna show up outta nowhere.

PICKET

Yeah well, my mom would just be mad I didn't save her any good drugs.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Dust has wandered further away with the phone, dialing a number. He waits as it rings.

JEAN (V.O.)

Hello?

DUST

Hi, is River there?

JEAN (V.O.)

Who?

INT. JEAN'S HOUSE (GREELEY, COLORADO) - EVENING

With her cell phone pressed to her ear, Jean stirs a Kraft cheese PACKET into a POT of macaroni.

DUST (V.O.)  
River? She gave me this number.

JEAN  
Oh shit! You mean Abbey! This must  
be Romeo calling.

Dust laughs over the phone as Jean opens her front door,  
calling to her kids in the yard.

JEAN (CONT'D)  
Boys, dinner time. Wash up.

As the boys tumble inside, Jean looks up and down the  
driveway for her sister.

JEAN (CONT'D)  
Listen, I don't see your lady  
anywhere. Can I have her call you  
back?

DUST (V.O.)  
That's okay, just tell her I'm  
catching a train tonight. I'll see  
you guys in a few days.

EXT. REDDING PROPERTY - EVENING

The Colorado sun sets behind chestnut peaks on the horizon as  
Jean lumbers through the junk yard wreckage. She squints to  
see River crouched down in the distance.

She approaches to find River building a mountain of STRAW and  
dry LEAVES with her hands.

JEAN  
The hell are you doin'?

RIVER  
Building a compost pile. All we do  
around here is trash things.  
Figured we could make something  
nice out of it once in a while.

Jean laughs to herself, shaking her head.

JEAN  
You're so fuckin' crunchy. Jed's  
gonna have a heart attack when he  
sees this.

RIVER  
Oh, yeah?

JEAN

He'll say you're pushing some liberal agenda again.

River smiles.

RIVER

Does he know I'm here yet?

JEAN

No, I gotta call him.

RIVER

You should tell him something that'll really freak him out. Like I'm transitioning or something.

JEAN

The fuck does that mean?

River laughs at her own joke.

RIVER

Never mind.

JEAN

Well, anyway, I was coming to tell you that your man called me. Said he'll be here in a few days.

A glow washes across River's face. Jean notices it.

JEAN (CONT'D)

You and that grin. I'll let you finish your-- thing.

She starts to walk away.

RIVER

Wait. You don't want to help?

JEAN

With that?

RIVER

I started a pile of vegetable waste in the kitchen. Will you grab it for me while I finish the dry layer?

Jean concedes with a giggle, shuffling over to River's portable.

INT. PORTABLE HOME - EVENING

Jean walks into the kitchen to see a PAPER BAG of miscellaneous orange peels, apple cores, and browning lettuce. She shakes her head as she picks it up, heading for the door, when... \*

Passing the cracked tile counter top, she notices a pile of letters and stops to look at them: the letters River had found in her mother's dresser earlier. \*

The door swings open behind her as River enters, heading for the SINK where she grabs a cheap plastic lemonade PITCHER and starts to fill it at the tap.

RIVER

I forgot we have to water it all down at the end--

She sees Jean with the letters and comes to a halt.

RIVER (CONT'D)

I didn't realize I left those out. I was gonna ask you--

JEAN

Ask me what?

RIVER

I don't know, if you knew about them?

JEAN

I told you I didn't really look through her things yet. Haven't felt up to it.

RIVER

...I can't believe they talked.

JEAN

Look, he was a rapist and a sick fuck, but he was still her son.

Jean folds the letters, returning them to the box.

RIVER

If one of your boys attacked all those girls like that, would you still talk to him?

JEAN

No. I'd kill him.

RIVER

Kinda always hoped his fellow inmates would take care of that.

JEAN

Don't say that. Jesus Christ.

Silence.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Benjamin got the sentence he deserved. And now he gets to waste away the best years of his life in there.

RIVER

...Dad still preaching about how those girls were all lying skanks?

Jean can't look her in the eye. She shakes her head, trying to forget, before pulling out a cigarette and heading for the door.

JEAN

There's mac and cheese at my place if you're hungry.

INT. NARY CHEY'S LIVING ROOM (CHEYENNE, WYOMING) - NIGHT

Nary and Larry sit together on the couch, and a sullen Sass sits in a chair off to the side as they watch "DEAL OR NO DEAL." Larry laughs at Howie Mandel's corny jokes. Nary laughs when Larry laughs but obviously has no idea what's going on.

Sass can't hang anymore and gets up.

INT. NARY CHEY'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sass walks inside. Looking in the mirror, her eye catches a framed PHOTO on the wall of Larry and another man on a boat, holding up a fish. The resemblance between the two men is uncanny.

Sass stares at it a moment before swiftly knocking it right off the wall. SMASH!

NARY (O.S.)

(in Khmer)

What was that?

SASS

Oopsie.

She smirks as she looks down at the SHARDS of glass and broken wood.

SASS (CONT'D)

(quietly to the picture)

Cunt! Cunt! Cunt!

She gives it the finger before walking out.

EXT. OVERPASS (KANSAS CITY, KANSAS) - NIGHT

Dust leans against the blackened railing of the overpass, smoking a joint as he watches the quiet spiderweb of railroad TRACKS that run beneath him.

He exhales a cloud of smoke. With a furrowed brow and flexing jaw, he is the portrait of a man on the run.

He watches as a TRAIN crawls into view, and flicking his joint to the shadows, he hurries down the road through the street lights' yellow glow.

He rounds a corner, disappearing down a side street when...

A dark silhouette of a FIGURE emerges from further down the overpass and follows Dust around the corner, hunting him down.

EXT. SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

Dust hastens down the quiet road, scanning the creeping train through a chain-link FENCE that stands between him and the yard.

He passes a small metalworking SHOP on the road when his eyes catch his reflection in the storefront window, and he freezes.

In the reflection, Dust sees the figure that's following him just as it slips back into the shadows of the street.

For a moment, Dust doesn't move a muscle. Then...

Dust bolts down the street, sharply cutting towards the chain-link fence. The figure is hot on his heels.

Dust scales the fence as fast as he can, but his pursuer latches onto one of his ankles, trying to pull him down.

Dust's grip slips, slamming his chin against the top of the fence, but he manages to kick himself free of his attacker. He struggles over the top of the fence and drops down to the other side.

EXT. DEPARTURE YARD - CONTINUOUS

Dust scrambles to his feet and sprints through the yard, racing for the leaving train. Sweat spills down his face as he fights to make it to the last car.

He's ten feet away from its ladder. Five feet. His outstretched arms desperately reach for the bottom rung but...

Dust is tackled to the ground, and the train barrels off without him, its WHISTLE calling into the dark.

END OF ACT 4

ACT 5

EXT. UNION PACIFIC RAIL YARD (GREELEY, COLORADO) - SUNSET

A handful of railroad WORKERS head to their various mud-splattered PICKUPS in the dirt parking lot as a train blows its WHISTLE behind them, rolling away on the tracks.

Across the street, River carefully watches the yard from inside a beat-up BUICK REGAL.

INT. BUICK - CONTINUOUS

River waits as the workers drive away one by one. She rests her head against the window, hoping for any sign of movement in the vacant yard.

But all stays quiet, the setting sun passing behind the clumps of aspen near the tracks.

River turns the key in the Buick, eventually getting the engine to start, and she drives away.

EXT. JEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

River sits on the splintered front steps of the portable, biting her lip as she makes a call on her sister's CELL.

PICKET (V.O.)

Hello?

RIVER

Hey, Picket. I'm trying to figure out where Dust is. He still hasn't shown.

PICKET (V.O.)

What?

EXT. HORSE STABLE (KANSAS CITY, KANSAS) - EVENING

Jo cleans out a stall, raking through the straw-covered floor for HORSE SHIT. Picket stands behind her, leaning against a PUSH BROOM as he talks on the phone.

PICKET

He left here six days ago. Shoulda made it there by Monday, Tuesday at the latest.

RIVER (V.O.)  
 ...I know. Do you think he got caught?

PICKET  
 Dust never gets caught.

Jo, concerned, stops shoveling and locks eyes with Picket.

PICKET (CONT'D)  
 He probably just had trouble catching a good car. It ain't always clockwork. Or maybe he took the scenic route or something. I'm sure he'll show up in a day or two.

RIVER (V.O.)  
 ...Yeah. Thanks.

The call ends.

JO  
 If that fucker got cold feet, I'll kill him.

PICKET  
 Dust's the most stand-up dude I know.

JO  
 I don't know. He was acting weird enough.

Picket just shakes his head, and they get back to work.

INT. WAITING ROOM (GREELEY, COLORADO) - MORNING

River and Jean sit on the rigid furniture of a room littered with various PARENTING MAGAZINES. A framed POSTER of a shirtless man holding a baby to his chest hangs on the wall behind them.

A NURSE opens the door to the waiting room, reading from the CHART she carries.

NURSE  
 Redding?

River hoists herself out of her chair, heading to the door with Jean in tow. The Nurse looks up from her chart, her eyes widening at the eccentric patient.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - GREELEY, COLORADO - MORNING

A DOCTOR runs an ULTRASOUND TRANSDUCER along River's stomach as they both carefully watch the IMAGE of the fetus on the screen.

DOCTOR

You've been careful about avoiding drugs, alcohol, secondhand smoke?

RIVER

Yeah. I went to a free clinic in New Orleans. They gave me some vitamins. I've been really good about taking those.

DOCTOR

Well, that's great. Your baby looks healthy as can be. Right where he should be at six months.

Across the room, Jean quietly breathes a sigh of relief.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

We'll give you a pamphlet that explains all the different options you have regarding the birth. There are some things you may want to talk over with family-- whoever you'll have with you on the big day.

River nods, lost in her thoughts.

INT. BUICK - SUNSET

River again waits across from the rail yard, scanning the tracks as the parking lot clears out. Restless, she shifts around in her seat, starting to panic. There is no Dust in sight.

EXT. RAIL YARD - NIGHT

River watches the yard like a bloodhound as she paces in front of the Buick trying to steady her trembling breath. Desperate, she calls into the dark.

RIVER

Dust! Dust!

The still of the night offers no reply and tears tumble from her heavy eyes as she turns to slam her fist against the hood of the car again. And again. And again.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Red-eyed, River enters the quiet station, shuffling towards an unmanned front desk. A uniformed OFFICER appears down the hallway, calling to her.

OFFICER  
Can I help you?

RIVER  
Yeah. I'm, uh, trying to find a friend of mine. He's missing.

The officer makes his way down the hall as he begins rolling out the routine questions.

OFFICER  
Okay. You know the last time anyone saw him?

RIVER  
Ten days ago. He was heading here from Kansas City.

The officer fishes behind the desk for a PEN and PAPER.

OFFICER  
Has anybody had contact with him since?

RIVER  
No. He doesn't have a phone or anything.

The officer jots down some notes as River watches him, suddenly recognizing the face.

RIVER (CONT'D)  
Adam?

The officer looks up, really seeing River for the first time.

OFFICER  
Holy shit. Abbey Redding?

A slight smile escapes from her lips as she shakes her head in disbelief.

RIVER  
Who the hell let Adam Moline become  
a cop?

Adam, aka the officer, laughs.

ADAM  
Desperate times, I guess.

RIVER  
Must be. A Moline's about the last  
person I'd have guessed to see in  
this place.

ADAM  
At least not in uniform.

RIVER  
Right... I guess our families have  
always had that in common.

Adam gives her a sad smile, shrugging his shoulders.

ADAM  
How have you been? You're having a  
baby?

RIVER  
I am. And, uh... been better.

ADAM  
Oh, of course.

He jumps back to business.

ADAM (CONT'D)  
Do you know how your friend was  
getting to town? Car? Bus?

RIVER  
(sweating a bit)  
Um, about that...

EXT. JEAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

River drives the old Buick down the driveway, coming to a  
stop as Jean steps out of her front door.

JEAN  
They know anything?

RIVER

They're gonna make some calls. They haven't caught anyone at the yard for a while, but it coulda happened anywhere between here and Kansas.

Jean nods, sucking her cigarette.

RIVER (CONT'D)

Did you know Adam Moline's a cop?

JEAN

You're shittin' me.

River shakes her head.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Damn, that boy can come over and handcuff me any time he wants.

River cracks a smile, rolling her eyes.

RIVER

You're married.

JEAN

Yeah, married. Not dead.

River laughs, trudging off. After a few steps, Jean calls to her.

JEAN (CONT'D)

Hey.

River turns back.

JEAN (CONT'D)

If he doesn't show, you're gonna be fine.

INT. PORTABLE HOME - NIGHT

River lies in bed, staring at the ceiling. She tosses and turns, kicking off the covers, trying in vain to get comfortable.

EXT. PORTABLE HOME - NIGHT

River creeps out the front door of the house carrying a BLANKET from the bed. She looks around the moonlit yard and makes her way towards a dilapidated old TRUCK that's missing all of its tires.

She climbs into the bed of the truck, wrapping the blanket around herself as her breath fogs up the night.

She looks around, cataloguing the life she's returned to. It's cold. Faded. A world for the forgotten.

RIVER  
(to her belly)  
Good night, Jack.

She lies back, watching the stars.

INT. NARY'S GUEST BEDROOM (CHEYENNE, WYOMING) - MORNING

Sass is fast asleep under a patterned quilt when Nary barges in wearing a full face of makeup and her signature flirty dress. She throws another silky DRESS onto the bed.

NARY  
(in Khmer)  
Wake up!

Sass groans.

NARY (CONT'D)  
(in Khmer)  
No time to be lazy.

Sass sleepily sits up in bed.

SASS  
(in Khmer)  
Where are we going?

NARY  
(in Khmer)  
To church.

SASS  
(in Khmer)  
In this?

Sass holds up the dress splayed across her ankles: a sexy, strappy number in aqua.

NARY  
(sarcastically, in Khmer)  
Do you have something better?

Sass rolls her eyes.

NARY (CONT'D)

(in Khmer)

There's a purse in the closet.  
Don't you dare take that knapsack.

She leaves and shuts the door.

Sass yawns, pulling the dress over her head. She shuffles over to the closet, opening it to find an old PURSE. She dumps the front pocket of her backpack into the purse absent-mindedly: Two DOLLAR BILLS, CHAPSTICK, the WASP SPRAY.

INT. NARY CHEY'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Early morning light beams through the vertical blinds swaying in the breeze of a ceiling fan. No one is there.

SASS

(in Khmer)

Mama? I thought you were in a  
hurry!

As she turns around to look for her mother, she almost runs into Nary. She starts to laugh, when...

Suddenly, SOMEONE behind her yanks her arms behind her back. Sass SCREAMS, but the stranger's hand covers her mouth. She struggles, SHRIEKING through his dirty fingers as she stares daggers in her mother's direction.

NARY

You go with husband now. Like good  
girl.

Sass glances up to see the man she knows well (the one from the fishing trip photo) and wriggles away enough to knee him right in the nuts.

As the man cowers in pain, Sass manages to make a quick dive for the WASP SPRAY. She pulls the can from her purse and sprays him right in the face.

Nary rushes to grab her, but Sass turns and shoots another blast, hitting her mother directly between the eyes.

Nary stumbles backwards, CRYING out in pain as Sass tears out the front door.

INT. ADAM'S OFFICE (GREELEY, COLORADO) - DAY

A heavy RAIN pours down outside the window as River sits waiting, gazing around at the office clutter: a framed DIPLOMA from the University of Colorado - Boulder, a PHOTOGRAPH of Adam and two other men camping, etc.

After a moment, Adam enters.

ADAM

Morning.

RIVER

Hey.

River's already searching his face for answers.

ADAM

I'm afraid no one's seen your friend. Two teens got kicked out of a yard yesterday in Topeka, but neither matched the description you gave me. So, unless he went a different route--

River shakes her head.

RIVER

No, Kansas City's a straight shot on Union Pacific. He would've taken it.

Adam gives her a nod, opening up the web browser on his COMPUTER and beginning to type.

ADAM

Let's try something. Maybe there's already an Missing Person's report out for him somewhere. What's your friend's name?

It takes a moment for River to remember.

RIVER

...Ricker. His last name's Ricker.

ADAM

Age?

RIVER

28?

ADAM

Okay, we'll go 25 to 35 and see  
what we get.

He hits the ENTER button and tilts the desktop monitor so River can see the MISSING PERSONS DATABASE.

After a moment, the site begins listing the SEARCH RESULTS. Adam clicks through various CASE PROFILES, most of which have pictures. River shakes her head at the photos until...

A PHOTOGRAPH of Dust appears. He is younger, clean-shaven, wearing a buttoned-up oxford shirt with his hair neatly combed back. A golden boy if ever there was one.

RIVER

That's him.

Adam shifts the screen back towards himself, reading it carefully.

ADAM

Mark Ricker. Last seen in  
Providence, Rhode Island. That was,  
let's see, three and a half years  
ago.

Adam continues scanning the report when his eyes narrow.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Damn, smart guy.

RIVER

Hmm?

ADAM

He was a PhD student at Brown  
University when he went missing.

RIVER

What? No...

River stands, leaning over the desk to get a better look. Adam points to a PICTURE of Dust on a BROWN UNIVERSITY STUDENT ID.

River stares at the photograph in disbelief.

EXT. PARK (KANSAS CITY, KANSAS) - DAY

Dark clouds loom above as Jo sits hunched over on a park BENCH. Nearby, Picket tunes his mandolin.

A cold wind whips through the air and Jo shivers, trying to rub away the goosebumps creeping up her tattooed arms as it starts to DRIZZLE.

Squatter #1 appears around the corner, walking towards them.

SQUATTER #1  
Hey, you're Dust's friends, right?

Picket's eyes narrow.

PICKET  
Who are you?

SQUATTER #1  
Oh, Dust and I go way back. What are you guys doing out in the rain? You should crash with us. We've got a great spot in town. There's plenty of room.

Jo's already packing up her things.

JO  
Dude, fuck yes.

Picket hesitates, but as the rain starts to pummel, he snaps his mandolin case closed and gives in. Squatter #1 smiles, showing off only a handful of teeth.

SQUATTER #1  
Any friend of Dust's is a friend of ours.

INT. STORAGE CONTAINER - SUNSET

A groggy Dust awakens on a rusty floor, finding his ankles bound and his wrists tied together behind his back. His mouth is gagged, muffling the sound as he starts to SCREAM, struggling in vain to untie himself.

EXT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Dust's cries can barely be heard outside the storage container belonging to the INTERMODAL DOUBLE STACK CAR of a moving train.

Pummeling through the desert, the train is at least ten cars long.

Twenty.

Fifty.

Dust's container is lost in the sea of steel and smoke.

THE END