

KILLER JOE

screenplay by

Tracy Letts

June 1, 2009

BLACK SCREEN.

SOUNDS:

WHITE NOISE, a TV, tuned to snow...

...and RAINFALL. A full thirty seconds.

Then, a LOW, DISTANT RUMBLE of thunder...

...A SNARLING pit bull...

...APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS on gravel....

...CHAIN unwinding, uncoiling...

THE PIT BULL ERUPTS, barking, slobbering, threatening.

FOOTSTEPS on metal stairs: one, two, three.

TAP on an aluminum siding door.

CHRIS (O.S.)

Dottie?

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

First IMAGE...a VISUAL pop: a television, topped by a snarled antennae made of coat hangers and tin foil, tuned to snow.

WE SLOWLY TRACK through the shadowy trailer home, illuminated only by the streetlight that bleeds through the window shades and by the TV

The furnishings and decorations are seedy and cheap: ugly wood paneling; a vinyl couch, stained, torn, burned with cigarettes; a coffee table covered with fast-food debris, empty beer bottles, and overflowing ashtrays.

Chris's shape is briefly visible through the opaque window set in the door.

CHRIS (O.S.)

Dottie, wake up. It's me.

Now WE'RE in the kitchen, filled with dirty, mismatched cups and utensils, many of them fast-food giveaways. Chris' voice and his tap on the door grow louder.

CHRIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Come on, Dottie, it's me. Let me in.
I'm cold. I gotta piss.

WE'RE moving down the hall, past the bathroom with its cracked, blackened fixtures. The pit bull continues to bark.

CHRIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Shut up, T-Bone. Dottie, goddamn it, wake up! Don't make me wake up the whole goddamn neighborhood! I'm about to piss my pants!

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

And now WE'RE in Dottie's bedroom...comic books, dollies, Malibu Barbie's beach house. The walls are covered with photos cut out of teen magazines. One might imagine it's the bedroom of a twelve year-old girl.

But now we see DOTTIE SMITH, Chris' sister, and she's a beautiful, ethereal twenty year-old girl, lying in bed, staring implacably at the ceiling.

Chris' voice now bellows and the walls in Dottie's bedroom shake with the force of his pounding on the front door.

CHRIS (O.S.)
GODDAMN IT, OPEN THIS GODDAMN DOOR!

EXT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

CHRIS SMITH, 22 years old, a rangy, long-haired, unshaven, good-looking loser, entrepreneur, idea man, pounds on the door. He's drenched, exhausted, infuriated.

CHRIS
GET OUTTA THAT FUCKIN' BED, RIGHT!
FUCKIN'! NOW!

From inside, WE HEAR movement, then:

SHARLA (O.S.)
Hold on, hold on --

Chains and locks, door swings wide, and Chris, from his position on the stairs rising to the door, finds himself staring at a woman's naked pudendum. He looks up, sees his stepmother, SHARLA SMITH, late thirties, clad only in a man's sweat-stained tee-shirt. Chris pushes past her, into the trailer.

CHRIS
Put some clothes on, for Christ's sake.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

SHARLA

Well, hell, I didn't know who you were.

He's gone, down the hall. Sharla pads into the kitchen, searches for a cigarette. WE HEAR Chris' urine splashing in the toilet bowl.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

Close the goddamn door!

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dottie lies in bed, listening to the conversation outside her door.

CHRIS (O.S.)

You answer the door like that if you don't know --

SHARLA (O.S.)

Nothin' you haven't seen before.

CHRIS (O.S.)

Nothin' half of Dallas County hasn't seen before --

SHARLA (O.S.)

Shut up!

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Chris zips up and WE FOLLOW him, back down the hall, into the kitchen, where Sharla stands, drinking a beer and smoking.

CHRIS

Dad here?

SHARLA

He's asleep.

CHRIS

Dottie's here, isn't she?

SHARLA

Adele throw you out?

CHRIS

I need to talk to Dad.

SHARLA

Why'd she throw you out? Did you hit her again?

Chris sits on the couch, finds himself face-to-face, so to speak, with Sharla's pussy again.

CHRIS

No, I didn't -- look, will you please put some clothes on?

SHARLA

My God, I never heard so much --

CHRIS

Bit distractin', your bush staring me in the face.

SHARLA

All right! Jesus --

ANSEL SMITH, 38, Chris' father, a bearded, long-haired blob of a man, wearing just his underwear, enters from the hallway. Sharla whacks him as she exits.

Chris has grabbed a beer from the fridge and pulled the marijuana stash from under the couch. He lights a joint.

ANSEL

Help yourself.

CHRIS

What'd you do, chop up some clover?
Where'd you get this shit?

ANSEL

I bought it from you.

CHRIS

This is that?

ANSEL

What are you doin' here?

SHARLA (O.S.)

Adele threw him out!

CHRIS

I need a place to stay, all right?

ANSEL

How come she threw you out?

CHRIS

It's a long story.

ANSEL

Sharla! Get me a beer.

Ansel flips channels, finds a monster truck rally.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
(to Chris)
You didn't hit her again, did you?

CHRIS
No, goddamn it, I didn't hit her --

Sharla reenter, wearing a nightie.

SHARLA
It's not like you never hit her before.

CHRIS
This ain't none of your goddamn business,
Sharla --

SHARLA
Hey! I live here --!

ANSEL
Calm down --

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Christ, Dad, I gotta listen to your naked
wife givin' me the third degree?

SHARLA
I'm not naked.

CHRIS
Why do you let her walk around here like
that?

SHARLA
Like what?

ANSEL
It's the middle of the --

CHRIS (CONT'D)
She answered the door with her beaver
puckered out like it was tryin' to shake
my hand --

SHARLA
Hush your mouth --

ANSEL
She didn't know who you were --

CHRIS
That ain't the point, goddamn it. I
don't want Dottie lookin' at her own
stepmother's pussy.

SHARLA
That's it. I'm goin' to bed. I've heard
all --

CHRIS
Good night.

For some reason, that's the flash point. Sharla attacks Chris. He jumps off the couch, right back at her. Ansel wades between them, tries to keep them separated.

SHARLA
You listen to me --!

CHRIS
Good night. Sweet dreams.

SHARLA ANSEL
Ansel --! Hey, now --

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Don't let the bedbugs bite.

ANSEL
(between Chris and Sharla)
Stop it, Chris --!

SHARLA
He can stay here tonight --!

ANSEL CHRIS
Sharla, honey, now don't get Hey, I'll stay as long as I
like that --! by God feel like!

SHARLA (CONT'D)
-- but if he stays any longer, I'm liable
to hurt the little bastard!

ANSEL
Don't go to bed all mad --!

SHARLA
Good night!

She exits.

CHRIS
(calling to her)
Don't die in your sleep!

SHARLA (O.S.)
GODDAMN HICK!

ANSEL
Now look what you did. I'm in the
doghouse.

CHRIS
Put some pants on. I need to talk to you
about somethin'.

ANSEL
And I need pants for that?

CHRIS
So we can get out of here.

ANSEL
I ain't goin' out.

CHRIS
This is private stuff.

ANSEL
Then whisper.

Chris puts his arm around Ansel, whispers in his ear.

CHRIS
I need you to put some pants on.
Ansel tries to pull away, Chris gets him in a headlock.

ANSEL
Goddamn it --

CHRIS
Half an hour. We can toss the baseball,
like when I was a kid.

Ansel backs up, flattens Chris against the wall. Chris grabs
Ansel's nipple, twists it.

ANSEL
Chris --

CHRIS
Let's get you some pants.

ANSEL
Leggo!

Chris twists his nipple harder.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
Ow!

INT. ANSEL'S PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

Ansel, now dressed, slams the door, Chris beside him. Rain continues to fall.

CHRIS

I need six thousand dollars, or some guys are gonna kill me.

ANSEL

Better get out of town. Quick.

CHRIS

If you could just give me a thousand.

ANSEL

-- I don't have it --

CHRIS

I could hold 'em off with a thousand --

ANSEL

Chris. I don't have it.

Ansel starts the truck. Chris stares out the window.

EXT. RED BARN SALOON - NIGHT

Chris and Ansel sit at a table, nursing beers. A trashy, bruised STRIPPER with 56-inch breasts dances unrhythmically on a platform near them.

CHRIS

Wouldn't be in this mess weren't for Mom. Then she goes and kicks me out.

ANSEL

You hit her, didn't you?

CHRIS

Goddamn it, NO! I didn't hit her, I told you-

ANSEL

Then why'd she kick you out?

CHRIS

I threw her up against the fridge.

(off Ansel's look)

She stole two ounces of coke from me.

ANSEL

Bullshit. Adele don't snort cocaine.

CHRIS

She sold it, or gave it away to that goddamn rex. Cause the shit's gone. She's the only other one knew where it was. Then tonight she comes up to the house with the Pinto runnin' like a watch.

ANSEL

You're shittin' me. That piece of shit ain't run in years--

CHRIS

What'd I tell you? So my blow's gone, and now these guys're going to kill me. My ow mother, for Chrissake.

Chris stares at his father, who offers no reaction. As WE SLOWLY TRACK CLOSER, into Chris and Ansel, the SOUND in the club gradually mutes....and WE HEAR only their conversation, almost whispered...

CHRIS (CONT'D)

So?

ANSEL

Hm? What?

CHRIS

You gonna loan me the money?

ANSEL

No.

CHRIS

You're a regular what's-his-name. I'm fucked--

ANSEL

I ain't had a thousand dollars in my life--

CHRIS

How'd you like to? How'd you like to have fifteen thousand dollars?

ANSEL

Jesus, another one of your stupid--

CHRIS

Just hear me out--

ANSEL

Every goddamn time. How about that farm--

CHRIS

Leave the farm out of it. I'm talkin' about somethin' easier than that.

ANSEL

This oughtta be good--

CHRIS

You ever hear of Killer Joe Cooper?

ANSEL

Huh-uh.

CHRIS

He's a cop. A detective, actually.

ANSEL

Yeah?

CHRIS

He's got a little business on the side.

ANSEL

What's he do?

CHRIS

He's a killer. He kills people.

ANSEL

Yeah? So?

CHRIS

Mom's got a fifty-thousand dollar life insurance policy.

The song finishes. SOUNDS of the club return to normal as the Stripper scrambles to pick up a handful of loose singles.

Chris catches Ansel staring at him.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Don't look at me like that.

EXT. RED BARN SALOON PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Chris and Angel trudge through the rain to Ansel's pickup.

ANSEL

Who's the...?

CHRIS

Beneficiary. Dottie.

ANSEL
The whole thing? All fifty thousand?

CHRIS
Yep.

ANSEL
She didn't leave nothin' to me?

CHRIS
Of course not, you dipshit. Why would she do that?

ANSEL
I'm her ex-husband.

CHRIS
She hates you, Dad. You know that.

INT. GIT 'N GO - NIGHT

Ansel fills his arms with snack food. Chris trails behind.

ANSEL
How much does a thing like that cost?

CHRIS
I hear he charges twenty.

ANSEL
Thousand Jesus Christ--

CHRIS
This really isn't somethin' we can cut corners on. I'd say it's worth it not to get caught. Killer Joe's a professional. He'll do this right.

ANSEL
How do you know? Who told you about this?

CHRIS
Never mind that.

Ansel carries his food to the counter where the Pakistani NIGHT CLERK rings it up. Chris grabs a Slim Jim, adds it to the pile.

ANSEL
You got money for that?

CHRIS
It's a lousy Slim Jim.

ANSEL

You can't afford to pay for your little
snausage, but you wanna hire a hit man
for twenty grand?

The night clerk hives them a look. Chris smiles at him.

EXT. GIT 'N GO - NIGHT

As Chris and Ansel exit the store, they pass two uniform COPS
entering. Chris keeps his voice low, but Ansel is oblivious.
Still raining.

CHRIS

I wanna hire him on spec. Ask him to do
it for free, then give him a cut of the
insurance money.

ANSEL

Look, after you pay this guy, you're only
clearing...

ANSEL (CONT'D)

...thirty thousand. Split
that four ways--

CHRIS

...thirty thousand.

CHRIS

Three ways.

ANSEL

How do you figure?

CHRIS

You, me, and Dottie.

ANSEL

What about Sharla?

CHRIS

What about her?

ANSEL

She gets a cut.

CHRIS

The hell she does. She ain't family.

ANSEL

She's been my wife longer than Adele has.

CHRIS

It's less money.

ANSEL
It's less money for you.

CHRIS
And it's more money for you.

They've arrived at the pick up. Ansel grabs Chris's collar, pulls him close, hisses:

ANSEL
I am the father here, y'know. She's my ex-wife. I found her. Not you, not Dottie.

CHRIS
Okay, fine, we can split it four ways --

ANSEL
I ain't agreed to nothin'. 'S murder we're talkin' about. I'm not just gonna stand here, noddin' my head...

INT. ANSEL'S PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

Ansel pulls up to the trailer, cuts the engine. The cab of the truck fills with smoke as Chris and Ansel share a joint. Rain pelts the windshield.

CHRIS
Look at it this way. Is she doin' anybody any good?

ANSEL
Whattaya mean?

CHRIS
Is anybody gonna care if Mom's not around anymore?

ANSEL
Rex.

CHRIS
Son-of-a-bitch screws anything draws breath --

ANSEL
That don't mean he don't care --

CHRIS
He'd be tickled pink. You should see how she treats that poor bastard.

ANSEL

'Bout like she treated me, I bet.

CHRIS

Anyway, who gives a fuck about Rex?

ANSEL

Right --

CHRIS

Who else?

Ansel lowers his head, struggles to relight the roach.

ANSEL

Dottie, maybe.

Chris leans in.

CHRIS

What's better for Dottie: havin' ten thousand dollars so she can go to that Amazon school, or havin' a beat-up, old, ugly, naggy, alcoholic mother for another twenty years or so?

ANSEL

I see what you're sayin' --

CHRIS

Exactly. So as long as Dottie never knows what we're talkin' about...we're really doin' her a favor.

ANSEL

Yeah...

Chris leans back...and Dottie stands by the truck, looking at him through his window, her hair and nightgown soaked. Chris sees her, jumps, screams. Ansel jumps, screams. Chris rolls down his window.

DOTTIE

What are you doin' here?

CHRIS

I got in a fight with Mom.

DOTTIE

You build this city all by yourself?

CHRIS

Uh, yeah. Sure did. Brick by brick.

DOTTIE

I heard that at the wedding...

She drifts away from the truck, back toward the trailer.

CHRIS

Scared the shit outta me. That sleep-talkin' gives me the creeps.

ANSEL

Gotten worse. 'Bout every night now.

CHRIS

She's not seein' anybody yet.

ANSEL

Don't hold your breath. Wanna know the truth, I think she's still...you know.

From Chris's POV, WE SEE Dottie enter the trailer.

CHRIS

What. A virgin?

EXT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

T-Bone barks crazily. Ansel thumbs through his keys.

CHRIS

Let me just call him. Let's just set up a meetin', talk to the guy. We don't gotta decide anything right now.

ANSEL

Okay.

CHRIS

Okay. Okay. Okay, good.

Ansel opens the door. WE FOLLOW as they step into the trailer, flip on the light, and reveal Dottie, who stands in the living room, staring at them.

DOTTIE

I heard y'all talkin' about killin' Momma.

She heads back to her room, passing between Chris and Ansel...

DOTTIE (CONT'D)

I think it's a good idea.

...and she's gone. Long pause.

CHRIS
There you go.

ANSEL
Yeah...

EXT. DALLAS SKYLINE - NIGHT

Lightning flashes. A serious electrical storm.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Chris, covered with a dirty Afghan, sleeps restlessly on the couch. He moans, twists his body. Lightning strikes nearby, followed immediately by a boom of thunder.

We slowly MOVE IN on Chris, as the lightning and thunder crescendo, and his tossing and turning become more violent.

Now we're CLOSE on Chris...lightning cracks...the thunder explodes...he cries out, sits bolt upright on the couch...

...and sees Dottie, standing in the living room, staring at him, illuminated only briefly by the flashes of thunder.

Another flash of lightning and we...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. KILLER JOE COOPER'S CAR - DAY

A quick series of CLOSE-UPS:

THE TRAILER HOME, now in daylight, is reflected in the lens of a pair of mirrored shades. A misting rain falls.

KEYS dangling from the ignition.

A TANNED, WEATHERED HAND rests on a steering wheel.

A GLOCK, strapped in its holster.

A BLACK FELT COWBOY HAT rests in the passenger seat. A hand grabs the hat.

A HAND grabbing the door handle, opening the door.

A BLACK, PEBBLE GRAIN, OSTRICH SKIN COWBOY BOOT crunches gravel outside the car.

AND WE FOLLOW the hat, from the man's hand by his side to his head...the hat is fit in place, with a slight, subtle, snap of the brim.

AND NOW WE FOLLOW the boots, moving from the car to the trailer.

From inside the trailer, WE HEAR the SOUNDS of a poorly dubbed karate movie.

A HAND reaches out, raps lightly on the door.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - DAY

Dottie is alone, "exercising," matches moves with a karate movie on TV. The volume is ear-splitting.

KILLER JOE COOPER, 40's, chiseled, stoic, enters the trailer. Dottie does not hear him. He shuts the door, stands motionless, watches her.

JOE
(shouting over TV)
Looks hard.

She screams, sucks in her breath, runs into the kitchen. They shout to be heard over the television.

JOE (CONT'D)
I didn't mean --

DOTTIE
Who are you?!

JOE
Joe Cooper, I'm --! Joe Cooper --!
Excuse me!
(turns off TV)
Joe Cooper, I'm --

DOTTIE
You scared me to death.

JOE
And I apologize. I knocked, but you had the TV too loud to hear me. I decided not to stand in the rain.

DOTTIE
That's okay. It's okay.

JOE
Looks hard. From the TV like that. You should get a teacher.
(extends his hand)
I'm Joe Cooper.

They shake hands.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'm supposed to meet Chris here at 10:30.

DOTTIE
He's not here.

JOE
I'm a little early.

DOTTIE
He's usually late.

Joe takes in the place...looks at Dottie for an uncomfortable moment.

JOE
Could I trouble you for a cup of coffee,
or --?

DOTTIE
Oh, yeah, sure. I'm sorry. Why'n'tcha
sit down? Can I take your --?

Joe removes his raincoat and hands it to Dottie, who drapes it over the back of a chair. She prepares a pot of coffee.

JOE
Can I ask your name?

DOTTIE
I'm Dottie.

JOE
Hello, Dottie.

DOTTIE
Hi.

He stands, stares at her. She feels his eyes on her, wheels, faces him.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)
What.

Joe shrugs: "Nothing." Silence.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)
What are you? I mean, what do you do?

JOE
I'm a detective.

DOTTIE
Really? Like Mannix?

JOE
No, he's a private detective. I'm in the
Dallas Police Department.

DOTTIE
He's not real, either.

JOE
No, I'm real.

DOTTIE
I read it's nothin' like the shows, with
car chases and all.

JOE
Lot of paperwork.

DOTTIE
I read some policemen go their whole
lives without shooting their guns.

JOE
Probably true.

DOTTIE
Have you ever drawn your gun?

JOE
Oh, sure.

DOTTIE
You ever shot anybody?

JOE
Yes.

DOTTIE
Who?

JOE
Nobody you'd know.

DOTTIE
Did they die?

JOE
They have, yes.

DOTTIE
Wow. I bet you don't like to talk about
it.

JOE
No, no. Not that I like to talk about
it, but it doesn't keep me up nights.
You know.

DOTTIE
Yeah...what's the most exciting thing
that ever happened?

INT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

The grease pit of a cinder block auto repair show. Chris
screams to be heard over the sound of Ansel removing the
tires from a rusty El Camino.

CHRIS
HE'S WAITING ON US!

No response. Chris paces.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
YOU'RE SCREWIN' UP MY PLAN HERE!

ANSEL
FUCK YOUR PLAN! I GOTTA DO THIS WORK!

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - DAY

Joe and Dottie sit at the kitchen table, drinking coffee.

JOE
...I went in the house...heard this awful
screaming from inside.

DOTTIE
Wow.

JOE
Pitch dark. I followed this scream to
the back bedroom. I didn't know what the
hell to expect --

DOTTIE
-- yeah --

JOE
I open the door. Suddenly this huge guy
is on top of me, knocks me to the floor,
screaming, clawing at me --

DOTTIE
Oh my God --

JOE

Then it turns out...there's no one else even there. And he wasn't trying to hurt me...he wanted me to help him.

DOTTIE

Why?

JOE

He was in terrible pain. He'd gotten into a fight with his girlfriend. She'd been having an affair...so in order to "teach her a lesson," (that's what he said, "teach her a lesson") he had doused his genitals with lighter fluid, and set them on fire.

Dottie stares at Joe. He laughs. She joins in the laughter.

JOE (CONT'D)

Do you believe that? That poor bastard set his genitals on fire to teach his girlfriend a lesson. Guess he showed her. I wonder if she ever got over it.

Her laughter dies. His continues.

DOTTIE

Was he all right?

JOE

No. No, he wasn't all right. He set his genitals on fire.

The telephone rings.

DOTTIE

I had an aunt who set herself on fire --

JOE

Yeah, okay --

DOTTIE

-- but not on purpose. She was wearin' a long lace dress and she got it caught in the furnace and she died before they put out the fire.

Another ring.

JOE

Really.

DOTTIE

They say she's the one in the family I
look most like.

Another ring.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)

Her name was Viva. Isn't that a great
name? She never got married, I don't
think.

Another ring. Dottie doesn't acknowledge it.

JOE

Are you going to answer it?

DOTTIE

It's for you.

INT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

Chris, on a pay phone, plugs his ear, screams to be heard.
Ansel continues his work in the background.

CHRIS

My dad couldn't get away from work! I
was wondering if you could meet us here!
(beat)
Bring Dottie, she'll show you the way!

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - DAY

Joe stands in the kitchen, talks quietly on the phone.

JOE

Is there someplace private we can talk?
(beat)
Don't change plans on me again.

Joe hangs up, turns...Dottie stands in front of him.

DOTTIE

Are you gonna kill my momma?

JOE

I'm not sure. Why?

DOTTIE

Just curious.

INT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

Chris turns from the phone as Ansel completes his work.

CHRIS

Could you make a little more noise?!

ANSEL

Could you kiss my ass?!

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - DAY

Joe and Dottie, their eyes locked...

DOTTIE

My momma tried to kill me. When I was a baby. She put a pillow over my face 'cause she cared more about herself than her little baby, and she didn't love me like a mother loves a little baby. And she thought she'd done it, and she was happy, 'cause then I couldn't grow into a better thing than she had been, had ever been. But she hadn't done it, she didn't give me back to Him, she only made me sick, made me not be for a while, but then I was and she was sad that I was, and I always would be.

JOE

How do you know that?

DOTTIE

Know what?

JOE

That your mother tried to kill you.

DOTTIE

'Cause I remember.

INT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER, BATHROOM - DAY

Ansel sits on the pot. A knock on the door.

CHRIS (O.S.)

He's here.

ANSEL

I'll be out in a second.

Ansel reaches for the toilet paper, but the roll is empty. He looks around: no suitable substitute. Feels in his pockets: only lint. Finally, he removes his cap...

INT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER, GREASE PIT - DAY

Chris leans against the El Camino, drinking a beer, a six-pack beside him. Joe stands, taking in the surroundings with quiet discomfort. Ansel enters from the bathroom, without his cap.

CHRIS
This's my father, Ansel.

JOE
Ansel.

ANSEL
Hey, there.

CHRIS
Like a beer?

JOE
No. No, listen, I don't have a lot of time--

Ansel takes a seat on a workbench, picks up a half-eaten sandwich, munches on it. Chris scoots him over, sits beside him. Joe remains standing.

CHRIS
All right, sir, let's get down to it.

JOE
If that's all right --

CHRIS
First off, me and my father've never done nothing like this before. We don't wanna do it, but it's gotta be done.

JOE
That has nothing to do with me.

CHRIS
Okay. Well, sir, instead of me kickin' this off, maybe you could tell us the questions we need to ask, or --

JOE
It's pretty simple. You'll pay me for a service I'm going to perform.

CHRIS
Uh-huh.

JOE

You'll give me particulars about her schedule, her habits; I'll act on them accordingly. I won't give you many details about my activities, because the less you know, the better for everyone concerned.

CHRIS

All right --

JOE

I only have a couple of rules that I insist on sticking to. Insist.

CHRIS

Okay, yeah --

JOE

If you're caught, if you are implicated in this crime, you are not, under any circumstance, to reveal my identity or my participation.

CHRIS

Oh, of course --

JOE

If you break this rule, you'll be killed. Do you understand?

CHRIS

I --

JOE

I don't mean to sound melodramatic, and I don't want our business relationship to get off on the wrong foot, but I want to be absolutely clear on this point.

CHRIS

I understand.

JOE

(to Ansel)

Do you understand?

Ansel gets caught with his mouth full, drops the remainder of his sandwich in a garbage can.

ANSEL

Yeah.

EXT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

The rain has stopped. A blue racer lizard darts across the hot gravel outside the garage. A hand claps over the lizard...another hand cups it...

WE FOLLOW the hands up...Dottie peers into her hands...gently blows her breath into them...

INT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

JOE

My payment is twenty-five thousand dollars, in cash, in advance. No exceptions.

ANSEL

Twenty-five.

JOE

Yes, sir.

ANSEL

(to Chris)

You told me twenty.

CHRIS

(to Ansel)

I was told twenty.

JOE

Twenty-five. Is that a problem?

CHRIS

Don't have a problem with twenty-five --

ANSEL

Now hold on a second here --

CHRIS

We don't have a problem with twenty-five.
That's not our problem.

JOE

What is your problem?

CHRIS

We have a problem with the advance.

JOE

No exceptions.

CHRIS

Sir, let me explain, one reason we're interested in having this done is my mother holds a very large insurance policy --

JOE

(moving to leave)

They usually do.

CHRIS

--we thought if we guaranteed payment after the policy had been covered--

JOE

This really isn't open to discussion. Our conversation is finished.

Joe moves for the door. Chris reaches for him...

CHRIS

Please, this is important --

...Joe turns and fires:

JOE

What did you think this was, "Let's Make a Deal"? This is serious business you're fuckin' with here, boy --

CHRIS

I'm aware of that --

JOE

I don't think you are. I don't take you seriously.

CHRIS

This is gonna get done, one way or another --

JOE

Our conversation...is finished. I never met you. You never met me.

Joe opens the door.

EXT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

Joe stands in the doorway of the garage, sees Dottie leaning against his car, still cupping the lizard in her hands. She turns, looks at Joe...

They stare at one another. Long pause. She returns her attention to the lizard.

He slowly steps back into the garage, closes the door...

INT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

Joe closes the door, turns to face Chris and Ansel.

JOE

Of course, we never discussed the possibility of a retainer.

CHRIS

Whattaya mean?

JOE

You know how to reach me. Call me if she's interested.

Again, he reaches for the doorknob.

CHRIS

Hey, man, you talking about my sister?

JOE

Is that who she is?

Joe opens the door again.

EXT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

Joe steps back into the doorway. Dottie is gone. An enigmatic smile crosses Joe's face...

INT. ARTURO TIRE AND MUFFLER - DAY

The door closes...Joe is gone.

CHRIS

Jesus...

Ansel checks Joe from the window, lights a cigarette.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Jesus --

ANSEL

What's he mean, "retainer?"

CHRIS

Whattaya think he means? He means Dottie.

ANSEL
Yeah, but retain what, exactly?

CHRIS
Just how stupid are you? Are you really
that stupid?

Ansel grabs a wrench, hurls it at Chris' head. Chris dodges,
and the wrench smashes into the wall.

ANSEL
You watch your goddamn mouth!

CHRIS
What are we gonna do, Dad? We gotta
think of somethin'.

ANSEL
We could do it ourselves.

CHRIS
You gonna kill somebody? You can't even
tell time.

ANSEL
What do you think we should do, smart
ass?

CHRIS
We can forget about the whole thing, or
we can...give him Dottie.

A long silence as Chris and Ansel stare at the floor. Then:

ANSEL
Y'know, it might just do her some good.

EXT. WEST DALLAS STREETS - DAY

Dottie, walking home, heads across an empty lot...the skies
behind her roil with threatening rain clouds...

EXT. DALLAS SKYLINE - NIGHT

TIME-LAPSE: Driving MUSIC accompanies a series of ominous
SHOTS of the Dallas Skyline...anonymous glass towers,
reflecting gathering storms and skies filled with
lightning...

INT. PIZZA HUT - DAY

Sharla, wearing a waitress' uniform, talks on the telephone,
examining a sheaf of photographs. The restaurant MANAGER
lurks in the background.

SHARLA

Don't be silly, nobody's gonna see 'em.

(beat)

Why're you so worried? It's not like you
can see your face in any of 'em.

She laughs. The Manager approaches.

MANAGER

Personal call?

SHARLA

(to phone)

Uh-huh, two extra large with cheese...

Sharla moves away from him, stretches the phone cord around
the corner.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

(to phone)

That photo shack in front of the mall.

She peers around the corner, looking for the manager.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

You worry too much. Just some little
pimple-faced girl, never saw one before
in her life.

(leers at a photo)

None that big, anyway.

(nasty laugh)

What time are you gonna pick me up?

8:30? What do you expect me to --?

She peers around the corner again, comes face to face with
Dottie. Sharla catches her breath, startled, and casually
puts the photographs in a rainbow-colored packet.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

Hold on, Jennie.

She covers the phone.

DOTTIE

I need some money so I can fix supper.

SHARLA

(back to phone)

Jennie? I'll call you after my shift...

I can't, I have to -- yeah, you me, too.

She hangs up.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

Walk with me.

Dottie follows Sharla as she collects a pizza from the oven and slices it.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

What're you fixin'?

DOTTIE

Just some casserole.

SHARLA

You gonna make a salad?

Dottie shrugs.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

Why don't I give you a few extra dollars?
Get yourself a new dress. We're havin' a
guest for supper.

DOTTIE

We have to dress up?

SHARLA

I just think you'd look real pretty in a
dress.

Sharla slides the pizza onto a tray, carries it to a table,
Dottie following.

DOTTIE

Was that your boyfriend on the phone?

SHARLA

What do you mean?

DOTTIE

Wasn't that your boyfriend?

SHARLA

I'm married, silly.

DOTTIE

I won't tell Daddy.

SHARLA

I don't know what you're talkin' about.
That was Jennie, my friend from high
school.

The PIZZA PATRON studies the pie, looks up:

PIZZA PATRON

I said no black olives.

Sharla picks up the pizza, takes Dottie by the wrist, pulls her to an empty booth. Dottie slides in and Sharla places the pizza in front of her. Sharla crosses to the kitchen, grabs a plate, fork, napkin, talks to the cook:

SHARLA

Fire another supreme, no black olives.

She peels off her apron, grabs her purse from under the counter, speaks to the manager.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

I'm taking my break.

Sharla rejoins Dottie at the booth, puts the table setting in front of her.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

Eat.

Dottie eats while Sharla dumps out her purse, lights a cig, reapplies her makeup.

DOTTIE

Is he cute?

SHARLA

Stop talkin' like that.

DOTTIE

You should have a cute boyfriend. I had a boyfriend in the third grade, but I never told nobody. His name was Marshall and he was fat. But he loved me.

SHARLA

You should go out more often --

Sharla pulls Dottie's face to her, applies makeup to Dottie.

DOTTIE

No one ever knew we were goin' together. We never saw each other at recess and we didn't have lunch together and we didn't write notes and he didn't walk me home from school.

SHARLA

When would you see him?

DOTTIE
In class. At school.

SHARLA
I mean alone.

DOTTIE
That would've spoiled the secret.

SHARLA
How'd you know you were goin' together if
you never spent any time alone?

DOTTIE
We just knew. If we talked about it, it
wouldn't have been what it was, which was
true.

SHARLA
What was true?

DOTTIE
Love. We loved each other.

SHARLA
How do you know he loved you if y'all
never talked about it?

DOTTIE
He loved me with a pure love.

SHARLA
Not many like that around, I guess.

Dottie pulls away from Sharla. Unseen by Dottie or Sharla,
Ansel's pickup pulls into the parking lot, grabs a space just
beyond the window over their booth. Ansel bumbles out of the
truck and heads toward the restaurant entrance.

DOTTIE
It's Joe, isn't it? Joe's comin' over.

SHARLA
Joe who?

DOTTIE
I don't remember. His eyes hurt.

SHARLA
Huh?

DOTTIE
What?

SHARLA

I don't remember his name. You met him?

DOTTIE

Uh-huh.

SHARLA

What's he like?

DOTTIE

He told me I should get a teacher for my kung fu.

SHARLA

Yeah...

DOTTIE

He had me make him some coffee.

SHARLA

What's he like?

DOTTIE

I don't know...

Ansel approaches their booth from behind Sharla.

SHARLA

You just forget about Jennie. She's an old friend and I don't need any trouble with your daddy over an old friend.

DOTTIE

You should have a cute boyfriend.

Ansel slides into the booth next to Sharla, grabs a slice of pizza with grease-stained fingers.

SHARLA

I bet your ears were burnin'.

ANSEL

Y'all talkin' about me?

DOTTIE

No, sir.

SHARLA

I was just tellin' Dottie how pretty she'd look in a new dress.

ANSEL

You wanna toss your bike in the truck?
I'll ride you over to the Target.

DOTTIE
Is everybody dressin' up?

ANSEL
Yeah, we're all gonna dress up.

Sharla peels off a couple of bills, presses them into Dottie's hand. They look at each other for a moment: recognition? Sadness? Ansel is, of course, oblivious.

Dottie leaves and Sharla swats her on the butt. Ansel rises, wipes his hands on his shirt, and belches.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
Gimme some money. We're out of beer.

SHARLA
I might have more money in back...

INT. PIZZA HUT, STOCKROOM - DAY

Ansel enters the stockroom and Sharla closes the door behind him. Attack.

SHARLA
When are you gonna tell that girl it's just gonna be her and Joe?

ANSEL
She'll figure it out --

SHARLA
You gotta tell her. That girl's not like other people, goddamn it. She don't put two and two together, like you and me and Chris --

ANSEL
There's nothing to get worried over --

SHARLA
She's never been on a date before --

ANSEL
It ain't a date --

SHARLA
Closest thing she ever had to one 'cept for some fat kid, didn't even know it --

ANSEL
What fat kid?

SHARLA

You talk to that girl 'cause you're liable to blow this thing real good --

ANSEL

What'm I gonna say?

SHARLA

Tell her the story, for God's sake. Don't make everything so complicated --

ANSEL

What story?

SHARLA

The situation. Tell her why he's comin' over tonight.

ANSEL

How the hell am I supposed to --?

SHARLA

If she doesn't know what's expected of her, she might disappoint him --

ANSEL

I'm takin' her to the Target, ain't I?!

She whacks him, slings open the stockroom door--

ANSEL (CONT'D)

What about my beer money? Sharla --

--and slams the door on him. Ansel throws the door open, heading after her.

ANSEL (CONT'D)

What fat kid?!

EXT. TARGET - DAY

Dottie stands outside Ansel's parked truck, looking confused, maybe a little frightened. He sits behind the wheel, ball game blaring on the radio.

ANSEL

Y'know. Somethin' kinda...like from your magazines. Gitcha somethin' Vanna might wear.

She stares at the Target. He opens a beer, turns up the radio.

INT. TARGET - DAY

Dottie steps gingerly past racks of clothing, trying to disappear, barely able to focus on her task. A stern SALESLADY has her eye on Dottie. Muzak tinkles over the store speakers.

Dottie finally pulls a dress off the rack, awkwardly holds it at arm's length. The saleslady approaches.

SALESLADY
That's a real sweet color for you,
honey...

INT. TARGET - LATER

A dress falls in a discard pile. The saleslady waits outside a changing room, holding on to several more dresses.

SALESLADY
Hon? How you comin' along in there?

INT. TARGET CHANGING ROOM - DAY

Dottie looks at herself in the mirror, but her focus is not on the dress she's wearing. She stares at the reflection of her eyes. Her expression is impenetrable, but something is happening to her....

WE SLOWLY PUSH IN on her reflection as the VOLUME of the Muzak increases, distorts, fuzzes...

Now WE become aware of another SOUND: Ansel arguing with the saleslady.

SALESLADY (O.S.)
Excuse me, sir? Sir--!

ANSEL (O.S.)
I'm just looking for my girl--

SALESLADY (O.S.)
You can't go in there--!

ANSEL (O.S.)
Dottie? What the hell are you doin'--?

SALESLADY (O.S.)
She'll be right out--!

ANSEL (O.S.)
Lady, mind your own fuckin' business.
Dottie, get the hell outta there!

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - EVENING

NASCAR racing blares from the television. Ansel sits on the couch, finishing the last of a six pack.

Dottie enters from the hallway, wearing a sexy black evening dress. Although she looks quite beautiful, something about the dress seems not quite suited to her personality.

DOTTIE

Daddy?

Ansel turns, sees her.

ANSEL

You look like a goddamn movie star. Turn around.

She does. He struggles off the couch, sways to her.

ANSEL (CONT'D)

Like a goddamn movie star.

DOTTIE

I feel funny.

ANSEL

Don't feel funny. You're beautiful.

DOTTIE

My butt's too big.

ANSEL

Let me let you in on a little secret: guys like big butts.

DOTTIE

They do not.

ANSEL

(feeling her butt)

I'm speakin' from experience.

DOTTIE

Sharla doesn't have a big butt.

ANSEL

Give her some time.

DOTTIE

Why aren't you dressed yet?

ANSEL

I'm not gonna stay for this dinner.

DOTTIE
What do you mean?

ANSEL
Me and Chris got business to tend to --

DOTTIE
Where's Chris?

ANSEL
-- so it's just gonna be you and Joe for dinner.

DOTTIE
(beat)
I should change.

ANSEL
No --

DOTTIE
Yeah, I should --

ANSEL
I think it'd be nice for Joe if he --

DOTTIE
Yeah, I'm gonna go change --

She heads back to the bedroom. Ansel grabs her arm.

ANSEL
Whoa, whoa, hold up, honey --

DOTTIE
Let me go, I need to change --

ANSEL
Just listen for a second --

DOTTIE
I have to change --

She tries to pull away, but Ansel grabs her around the waist.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)
I have to change, I have to change, I
have to change --

ANSEL
Now, calm down, Dottie, just --

She wrenches free, runs down the hall.

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Dottie enters her bedroom, tries to shut the door. Ansel wedges his body in, pushes the door open, grabs her arm. T-Bone barks.

ANSEL
Goddamn it--

DOTTIE
(backing away)
I have to change, I have to change --

SOUND of the trailer door banging open. Ansel jerks Dottie's arm violently, smothers her with a bear hug.

ANSEL
Hold still, you little bitch --!

DOTTIE
(hysterical)
I HAVE TO CHANGE!

Chris bursts in, rips Dottie from Ansel's grip. She collapses on her bed.

CHRIS
What the hell's goin' on --?!

ANSEL
She wants to get out of her dress!

CHRIS
So?!

ANSEL
I thought it'd be nice for Joe if --!

CHRIS
Let her change if she wants!

ANSEL
Don't you think she looks nice?!

CHRIS
(to Dottie)
You put on whatever you like --

ANSEL
Now wait a goddamn second --!

CHRIS
Let her change, Dad --

ANSEL

Who the hell do you think --?!

Chris violently shoves Ansel against the wall.

CHRIS

LET HER CHANGE!

(to Dottie)

Change.

Chris pushes Ansel out the door, follows, closes the door behind him. Dottie stares at the ceiling.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - EVENING

Chris enters the kitchen, grabs a beer, Ansel trailing.

ANSEL

You listen to me --

CHRIS

This whole thing makes me sick.

ANSEL

This is my home --

CHRIS

You don't have a home --

ANSEL

-- and I call the shots around here --

CHRIS

Shut up.

ANSEL

Look, are you ready? Joe said to be gone half an hour ago.

CHRIS

Fuck Joe.

ANSEL

He's runnin' this show, ain't he?

CHRIS

I'll leave when I by God feel like it.

ANSEL

Chris...? If we're gonna do this, we should do it right.

CHRIS

Yeah, okay.

A knock at the door.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Poop.

ANSEL

Dottie?

DOTTIE (O.S.)

I'm not ready!

CHRIS

Answer the door, for God's sake.

Ansel opens the door and Killer Joe enters, wearing a double-breasted suit, a new cowboy hat, and a pair of lizard-skin boots. He carries a bouquet of spring flowers.

JOE

What are you doing here?

CHRIS

We're on our way out.

JOE

We discussed this --

CHRIS

Don't push it, we're leavin' --

JOE

That's right, Junior. Don't push it. We make arrangements, I expect you to pay some attention to the details.

CHRIS

Let's go, Dad.

JOE

You understand me?

CHRIS

Yeah...

JOE

Good boy. Where is she?

CHRIS

She's changing.

Chris and Ansel leave. T-Bone barks. Joe takes off his hat, holds it, calls into Dottie's bedroom.

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dottie, still in the dress, lies on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

JOE (O.S.)

Dottie? It's me. Joe Cooper. We're alone now.

(beat)

It's okay, you don't want to come out. You stay in there as long as you like.

EXT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - DAY

Chris and Ansel approach Chris's car, a 1976 vinyl-topped, orange Mercury Cougar, beat to shit, of course. The driver's side window has been shattered; a black plastic garbage bag has been taped over the hole.

CHRIS

Too bad he didn't meet Sharla first. He coulda dated her, I wouldn'ta minded so much--

ANSEL

That's my wife you're talkin' about.

CHRIS

Yeah, right.

They get in the car. Chris slams his door.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Joe hangs his hat, turns off the TV, puts down the flowers, lights a cigarette. Goes to the kitchen, checks the food in the oven.

JOE

Your casserole smells nice. I think you got a good scald on it.

(beat)

I wish I had a funny story about blind dates or casseroles, but I don't.

(beat)

Maybe one will come to me later.

(beat; to himself)

Maybe not.

He finds a radio on the kitchen counter, turns it on, flips the dial, finds a Hank Williams song.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hank Williams. From Oklahoma. I don't
have a funny story about Hank Williams,
either. Or Oklahoma.

(beat)
Well, Oklahoma's kinda funny anyway,
right?

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Dottie slowly sits up on the bed, listens to Joe.

JOE (O.S.)
I grew up lookin' at Oklahoma. From the
South bank of the Red River. That's
where I grew up.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - EVENING

JOE
See, when I was a boy, the border between
Texas and Oklahoma was actually the
middle of the river. If you fished on
the North bank, you caught Okie fish.
But I caught Texas fish.

Probably tasted the same.

Some time since then, we gave our half of
the river away. Now the whole damn thing
belongs to Oklahoma. South bank: that's
the border.

I'm not sure why we did that, but it
makes me mad. Kind of like giving away
your...your front porch.

Dottie emerges from her bedroom, wearing her jeans and
sweatshirt.

JOE (CONT'D)
Good evening.

She moves past him, into the kitchen, checks the food in the
oven.

DOTTIE
You said it was scalded.

JOE
No, I said, "You got a good scald on it."
Just an expression.

(beat)
How are you?

Fine. DOTTIE

JOE
Do you want to know how I am?

DOTTIE
How are you?

JOE
I'm fine, thank you.

Joe gets the flowers, gives them to Dottie.

JOE (CONT'D)
You look very nice.

DOTTIE
Thank you.

JOE
You're welcome.

DOTTIE
I changed.
(beat)
I didn't know just you and me were gonna
have dinner.

JOE
Somebody should've told you.

DOTTIE
They did. Just now.

Dottie pours some water in a ceramic vase, puts in the
flowers.

JOE
What did you change from?

DOTTIE
A dress.

JOE
I'd love to see it.

DOTTIE
Are you hungry?

JOE
Famished.
(beat)
Yes, hungry.

DOTTIE
Are you ready to eat?

JOE
Whenever you are.

DOTTIE
Your eyes hurt.

JOE
I beg your pardon.

DOTTIE
Huh?

JOE
May I have a beer?

DOTTIE
Oh, sure.

JOE
I'll get it.

He gets a beer from the refrigerator.

DOTTIE
Well...I'll set the table.

JOE
That would be lovely.

DOTTIE
What did you say?

JOE
I said, "That would be lovely."

EXT. PIZZA HUT - NIGHT

Sharla anxiously waits on the street outside the Pizza Hut. A car pulls up (obscured by the headlights pointing at US) and the passenger door opens. Sharla smiles, laughs, says something inaudible to the driver. She climbs in and the car pulls away.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Dottie sets the table for two.

JOE
How old are you?

DOTTIE
Twenty.

JOE
And Chris...?

DOTTIE
Twenty-two.
(beat)
You're wondering about Daddy.

JOE
Hm?

DOTTIE
Daddy was sixteen when Chris was born.
Mamma was fifteen.

JOE
So young.

DOTTIE
It was an accident.

JOE
Really.

DOTTIE
They didn't want to get married.

JOE
Why did they?

DOTTIE
I don't know. That's just what they
always said. "We didn't want to get
married."

JOE
Do you trust me?

DOTTIE
Not quite.

JOE
Good.

DOTTIE
Have you ever been married?

JOE
Maybe.

DOTTIE
What does that mean?

 JOE
It means no.

 DOTTIE
How come?

 JOE
Because women are deceitful, and
manipulative, and vicious, and
vituperative, and black-hearted, and
evil, and old.

 DOTTIE
 (beat)
Yeah...

 JOE
What are you drinking?

 DOTTIE
Nothing.

 JOE
Can I get you something?

 DOTTIE
No, thank you.

 JOE
A tall glass of cold beer, perhaps?

 DOTTIE
No, thank you.

She takes the casserole from the oven, places it in the
center of the table. She and Joe stand, motionless. They
look at the table, then at each other.

 JOE
Lovely.

 DOTTIE
I'm a virgin.

 JOE
I know.

 DOTTIE
Okay.

INT. RED BARN SALOON - NIGHT

Chris and Ansel sit at their same table. The same stripper dances horribly before them. Her arm is now in a cast.

Chris drains his beer, gets up, goes to the bar. A DRINKER finishes his beer, fishes a couple of bucks out of his jean jacket, drops them on the bar as a tip, and leaves. Chris glances up to see that the BARTENDER isn't looking, then slides the money over in front of him. The Bartender turns around.

CHRIS
Another Coors.

Chris now becomes aware of a quiet conversation between two BIKERS sitting beside him.

BIKER #1
You know about Peabo.

BIKER #2
I heard he got married.

BIKER #1
No, Peabo's dead, man.

BIKER #2
Fuck you. He just got married.

BIKER #1
Then he got dead. Fucker got jammed up with Digger Soames, for about ten K. Digger warned his ass; he didn't believe Digger'd really do it. Went to sleep one night, woke up six feet under. They found him a couple of months later. Like this:

Chris can't resist stealing a look as the Biker mimics the position of a man found buried alive: hands hooked into claws, eyes and mouth wide open. The Bikers laugh.

BIKER #2
No shit.

BIKER #1
No shit, man. Don't fuck with Digger.

Chris casts his eyes to the floor, as the Bartender delivers his beer and takes his money.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Joe and Dottie eat dinner. He has lit a candle and turned off the lights.

JOE
Delicious.

DOTTIE
Thank you.

JOE
Thank you.

A long silence. Joe catches Dottie stealing a glance at him.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'd really like to see that dress.

DOTTIE
It wasn't right.

JOE
May I see anyway?

DOTTIE
How are you gonna kill Momma?

JOE
Ohhh...that's not...appropriate dinner conversation.

DOTTIE
Not unless you poison her.

He freezes, food in his mouth. She laughs.

JOE
I'm not sure I'm going to kill your mother.

DOTTIE
How come?

JOE
Because I rarely do that sort of thing. I have operatives.

DOTTIE
What's an operative?

JOE
An agent. An assistant.

DOTTIE

Oh.

JOE

Yes, someone else will take care of it.

(beat)

Unless, of course, I do it myself.

DOTTIE

How will you do it? Or the operatives?

JOE

Well...well, it'll be taken care of.

DOTTIE

When?

JOE

I don't know.

DOTTIE

Will you be the detective who investigates?

JOE

Probably not, but sometimes.

DOTTIE

Is that a problem?

JOE

That's a convenience.

DOTTIE

That's a convenience.

JOE

Yes.

DOTTIE

So are homes.

JOE

Yes.

INT. RED BARN SALOON - NIGHT

Chris has returned to his seat beside Ansel. He drains another beer, stands...

ANSEL

Chris...don't go over there...

...and leaves. Ansel, bleary with drink, lights a smoke, stares at the stripper.

EXT. RIVIERA MOTEL - NIGHT

Sharla waits outside a room, holding a bottle of booze in a paper sack. A tall MAN in a cowboy hat, his back to US, strides down the walkway, meets her at the door. She smiles at him, opens the door, pulls him inside...

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

WE'RE BEHIND the sink...Dottie approaches US, carrying dishes...Joe looms up behind her, about to touch her arms. She speaks softly, knows he's right there.

DOTTIE

I love my brother. I remember Momma and Daddy havin' a divorce, and Momma'd just told us (she was drunk), "I don't love your Daddy no more. I never loved him," and I screamed somethin' didn't make any sense, and I ran out of the house, and into the yard, under the streetlight, and I was cryin', Chris came out (he hadn't said anything), and he just...laid on me. He stretched his body out and laid on me, till I stopped cryin' --

JOE

Dottie --

DOTTIE

-- and we haven't talked about it, ever.

JOE

Bring the dress.

DOTTIE

Now.

JOE

Yes.

She turns, faces him...exits. He moves to the table, takes a drink of beer, pushes his chair in. A moment later, she enters, carrying the dress on a hanger.

JOE (CONT'D)

Why wouldn't you wear that for me?

DOTTIE

It's not me.

JOE
Not when you're not in it.

DOTTIE
I once had a boyfriend --

JOE
Put it on.

DOTTIE
(beat)
All right.

She heads for the bedroom.

JOE
Where are you going?

DOTTIE
I'm going to put the dress on --

JOE
I said put it on.

DOTTIE
I was --

JOE
Here.

DOTTIE
I --

JOE
Put it on, please.

She hesitates.

JOE (CONT'D)
Put it on, Dottie.

She lays down the dress, takes off her sweatshirt, hesitates again.

JOE (CONT'D)
I want to see you put it on.

She takes off her tennis shoes. He stares at her. She peels off her jeans.

JOE (CONT'D)
Stop.

She stops.

JOE (CONT'D)
Take off your socks.

She does. He turns his back to her.

JOE (CONT'D)
Take off your brassiere.

She hesitates.

JOE (CONT'D)
Take off your brassiere.

She does...lets the brassiere fall to the floor...covers her breasts...then drops her arms to her side.

JOE (CONT'D)
Take off your underwear.

She does.

DOTTIE
(very softly)
Babies.

His back is still turned to her.

JOE
Put on the dress.

She pulls the dress over her head.

JOE (CONT'D)
Come here. Right behind me.

She does. He unfastens his belt and opens his pants.

JOE (CONT'D)
Reach around and put your hand in my pants.

She does.

DOTTIE
I don't remember...

JOE
Do you feel that?

DOTTIE
Yes...

JOE
What does that feel like?

DOTTIE
I don't remember...

JOE
How old are you?

DOTTIE
Twelve.

JOE
So am I.

Stillness, then:

JOE (CONT'D)
Switch places with me.

She moves in front of him. Their eyes do not meet.

JOE (CONT'D)
Your boyfriend?

DOTTIE
Marshall.

JOE
Marshall.

DOTTIE
He was fat...

JOE
Uh-huh...

DOTTIE
He loved me. With a pure love.

Joe slowly begins to lift her skirt.

DOTTIE (CONT'D)
Our secret.

JOE
Nobody.

DOTTIE
Home.

She snuffs out the candle flame with her fingers.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RIVIERA MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sharla lays in bed, a sleeping man's arm draped around her. She stares out the window, her face illuminated by blinking neon lights...WE SLOWLY PULL BACK...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RED BARN SALOON - NIGHT

Ansel sits alone at his table, nursing his ninth beer, chin in his hand, falling asleep...WE SLOWLY PULL BACK...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

The darkened trailer, SEEN from across the road...WE PULL BACK...BEHIND Chris, over his shoulder, as he watches...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. "SPORT OF KINGS" OFF-TRACK BETTING PARLOR - DAY

A smoke-filled, windowless, cinder block room with an array of television monitors lining the walls. A motley bunch of REDNECKS and RETIREES sit at long tables, working racing forms, filling out betting slips, etc.

Chris stands, a betting ticket in his hand, watching a dog race stretch drive.

CHRIS

Come on, Edelberg, move it...they're
gainin' on you! Where's the wire?!

Where's the wire?!

His face falls in disappointment as he crumples his ticket...

...turns and bumps into G-MAN, a wiry Latino wearing a leather jacket and bright red cowboy boots.

G-MAN

Time's up, brother.

Chris bolts for the exit.

EXT. "SPORT OF KINGS" OFF-TRACK BETTING PARLOR - DAY

Chris hits the sidewalk in front of the O.T.B. and finds himself surrounded. Two BIKER THUGS block his path on either side of the sidewalk and in front of him, in the passenger seat of a shiny red Chevy pickup, sits DIGGER SOAMES, 55, a leathery, slit-eyed, evil son-of-a-bitch.

G-Man exits the O.T.B., appears on the street behind Chris.

G-MAN

You asked for an extra week ten days ago,
man. You told me you had a plan.

(points to the O.T.B.)

Was this the plan?

The thugs slowly approach from either side. Chris casually walks toward the truck, then darts to the side, head-fakes his way past a thug, and hauls ass down the sidewalk.

The thugs jump on a motorcycle...Digger gives the nod to the thug driving his truck...G-Man pursues on foot.

EXT. DALLAS STREET - DAY

Chris tears down the sidewalk, knocking over passers-by, running in front of traffic, G-Man on his heels.

Chris darts into an adult video shop.

INT. JIMMIE'S ADULT VIDEOS - DAY

Now WE'RE FOLLOWING Chris as he runs through the store, toppling a rack of videos to obstruct G-Man's path.

EXT. DALLAS ALLEY - DAY

STILL FOLLOWING, Chris dashes across the alley, jumps a fence, and now he's in someone's backyard, tearing through a laundry line, leaping a car engine, up the steps, through the door and--

INT. STRANGER'S HOUSE - DAY

A Latino TEENAGE COUPLE jump off their couch as Chris tears through the house, down the hall, out the front door, and--

EXT. DALLAS STREET - DAY

STILL FOLLOWING, WE'RE in the front yard and Chris races through another yard, over a fence, into another alley, up against a high wooden fence...no place to go but up. He jumps, climbs, throws a leg over--

EXT. SHIP DRIVE-IN - DAY

--and falls onto the expansive lot of a drive-in movie theater. He runs across the lot, toward the exit.

The roar of an engine. The motorcycle and Digger's truck zoom into the lot, gun for Chris. He turns, runs toward the movie screen.

The two thugs zoom up behind him on the motorcycle. The thug on the back of the bike wields a bike chain, slashes Chris on the back of his legs. He cries out, stumbles, gets up, keeps running.

Running, limping, Chris turns, looks for the bike...and runs into a speaker pole, hard. Hits the ground.

And there's the truck, thundering for his prone body. The brakes squeal and the front tire screeches to a stop, inches from Chris' head.

Motors cut off. Doors open. Digger steps out. Chris struggles to his feet. A thug clubs Chris across the face with a sap. He falls back to the ground, blood pouring from his nose.

Digger strolls to Chris, hitches his hands in the back of his belt, looks around.

DIGGER

Chris.

CHRIS

Hi, Digger.

DIGGER

How you been?

CHRIS

Pretty good. How 'bout yourself?

DIGGER

Okay.

(taps his chest)

Blood pressure.

CHRIS

You takin' medicine?

DIGGER

Yeah, all of that. No salt, low stress. Ronnie keeps makin' that fried chicken, though, and you know I can't resist it.

CHRIS

How is Ronnie?

DIGGER

Well...she's all busted up right at the moment. You remember Buster, that old blue tick we had?

CHRIS
Oh, yeah, sure.

DIGGER
We had him put to sleep yesterday morning.

CHRIS
Oh, no...

DIGGER
Yep...

CHRIS
What happened, just old age?

DIGGER
Yeah. Sixteen years old.

CHRIS
I knew you'd had him a long time.

DIGGER
That's a sad thing, losin' a pet.

CHRIS
Sure it is.

DIGGER
It's a good thing Ronnie was there with me at the vet, or I woulda backed out.

CHRIS
Really.

DIGGER
Aw, hell, yes. I mean, it's the best thing. Ain't right to let an animal suffer like that. But I swear, I looked down into that dog's eyes...

Digger's eyes well up. G-Man hands him a tissue.

DIGGER (CONT'D)
I said to Ronnie, "I ain't gonna make it." But you know...we got through it.

CHRIS
He's better off.

DIGGER
I know it. I know he is.
(blows his nose; new subject:)
(MORE)

DIGGER (CONT'D)

Hey, you missed a helluva party coupla weeks back.

CHRIS

I'm sorry I missed your birthday.

DIGGER

I'm glad you missed my birthday, but I wish you hadn't missed the party.

(laughs)

How many people you think we had out to the place, G-Man?

G-MAN

Couple hundred.

DIGGER

No, it wasn't that many.

G-MAN

One-fifty, anyway.

DIGGER

Was it really? Shit, I got so drunk, we coulda had Lynryd Skynyrd there and I wouldn'ta known it.

CHRIS

Sorry I missed it.

DIGGER

Yessir, a good old party. Lotta barbecue. G-Man here played the accordion.

G-MAN

That's right...

DIGGER

Hey, wasn't that gal out there?

G-MAN

What gal?

DIGGER

You know, who was always sniffin' around Chris.

(no response)

Shit. What is her name? With the great big caboose.

CHRIS

Arlene.

DIGGER

Arrr-lene.

(laughs)

You better look out for her, boy. She may just be too much woman for you.

CHRIS

She better stay away from the barbecue, or she'll be too much woman to fit through the door.

Digger cracks up.

DIGGER

Damn, you make me laugh. Listen, I'm just gonna have the boys here kick the shit out of you. But if you don't pay me my money in a couple of days, I'm gonna wrap you up in electrician's tape and bury you in a coffin about ten feet deep. I'll run an air hose down to it, so you don't suffocate...just starve to death...could take weeks.

Digger signals his driver and heads for the truck.

DIGGER (CONT'D)

I'll tell Ronnie you asked about her. That'll make her smile.

He climbs in the truck and takes off. Chris looks up to G-Man.

G-MAN

He really likes you.

And with that, he pulls back his shiny red cowboy boot and kicks Chris in the face...

EXT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Thunder. Lightning. T-Bone. A torrential rain. WE FOLLOW Chris to the door, but he's staggering, barely able to keep his feet. His clothes hang off him in wet rags.

He tries the door: locked. He knocks weakly, then, fuck it: he takes a step back, rams straight through the door.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Chris stumbles into the trailer. Killer Joe, naked, holding a gun, grabs Chris' hair from behind and forces him down on the floor.

JOE CHRIS

GET DOWN THERE! GET DOWN! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

Joe relaxes, his foot planted in Chris' back.

Chris... JOE

Sharla, wearing a tee-shirt and a pair of men's underwear, runs in from the hallway. Ansel is behind her. She turns on the light and Chris's condition is visible to all of them: his face is pretty much caved in.

SHARLA
Good God, what happened --?

ANSEL
You look rough, boy--

JOE
Excuse me.

Joe exits to Dottie's bedroom. Sharla and Ansel keep their distance from Chris, examining him from across the room.

ANSEL
Them old boys caught up to you.

CHRIS
Dad, I think they broke my hand --

ANSEL
What'd they do to your face --?

SHARLA
Jesus --

ANSEL
You wanna go to the hospital --?

SHARLA
I think he better --

CHRIS
I got beat up --

ANSEL
I can see that --

Dottie enters, wearing a robe. She rushes to Chris. Joe emerges again, now wearing a pair of slacks.

DOTTIE
What happened to you?

CHRIS
I got beat up --

DOTTIE
(to Sharla)
Will you get a wet rag?

Sharla gets a dishrag, soaks it, wrings it out.

ANSEL
They do all they were goin' to, or --?

JOE
It they wanted to kill him, he'd be dead.

Sharla gives the dishrag to Dottie, who gently wipes blood from Chris' face.

DOTTIE
Your nose is broken --

JOE
Is that all?

ANSEL
What'd they say to you?

CHRIS
What the fuck you think they said?

ANSEL
They want their money.

CHRIS
No shit.

SHARLA
You want a beer?

JOE
Where'd they find you?

CHRIS
Sport of Kings.

ANSEL
(stepping over Chris to turn on
TV)
D'ja see Bill there?

CHRIS
I don't...I don't know, why?

ANSEL
He owes me ten bucks.

CHRIS
Christ --

SHARLA
I'm goin' back to bed. C'mon, Ansel --

DOTTIE
(to Chris)
You should go to the hospital.

JOE
He's fine. He just got a whipping.

CHRIS
Listen, buddy, I'm --

JOE
No, I mean it could happen to anybody --

SHARLA
Ansel, come on --

ANSEL
We'll turn in then, I guess --

Sharla exits.

DOTTIE
That cut on your head looks deep --

CHRIS
Dottie, I didn't mean --

JOE
Dottie, you should get back in bed.

CHRIS
Wait just a minute here --

SHARLA (O.S.)
ANSEL!

ANSEL
Okay, goddamn it, I'm comin'.

Ansel exits.

JOE
Come on, Dottie.

CHRIS
I need to tell you: I never meant --

JOE
Dottie.

She stands and exits without turning back.

JOE (CONT'D)
(to Chris)
Good night.

Joe turns off the light and goes to bed. Chris is left in the middle of the floor, bleeding by the light of the TV

CHRIS
(calling off)
Joe?! We need to talk!

JOE (O.S.)
Tomorrow.

CHRIS
Now.

JOE (O.S.)
It can wait.

CHRIS
Right now!

Joe reenters, turns on the light, turns off the TV

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I wanna know what kinda progress you're making on your job.

JOE
It's being taken care of.

CHRIS
Yeah, right. You been here a week, fuckin' my sister, and my mother's a helluva lot healthier than me at the moment.

JOE
Cut to the chase, Junior.

CHRIS
I'm havin' second thoughts.

JOE
You want me off the job? Say the word.

CHRIS

Huh?

JOE

Say the word. Your call.

CHRIS

When are you plannin' on doin' it?

JOE

Tomorrow.

CHRIS

Really.

JOE

Yes.

CHRIS

How?

JOE

I won't tell you.

CHRIS

Where?

JOE

I won't tell you.

CHRIS

Am I the customer here?

JOE

Tomorrow. That's all you need to know.

CHRIS

So you'll be leavin' tomorrow.

JOE

Of course not. The retainer's for the money. I'm not leaving until I get my money.

CHRIS

I don't like that. I don't want you near my sister.

JOE

I don't care.

CHRIS

And if I tell you the deal's off --

JOE
I'll leave right now and you'll never see
me again. Your call.

Chris considers.

JOE (CONT'D)
Who are you into for this money?

CHRIS
I won't tell you.

JOE
Digger Soames?

CHRIS
How'd you know that?

JOE
What did he say he'd do to you if you
don't pay him?

CHRIS
You know that too?

JOE
(emphatic)
He'll do it.

CHRIS
Aren't you supposed to arrest people who
commit murder?

JOE
I like Digger.

Chris broods.

CHRIS
Do it.

JOE
Don't be around here tomorrow.

CHRIS
I'll be wherever the hell I feel like --

JOE
For the safety of the job...make yourself
scarce. Do you understand.

CHRIS
You'll never get my mother to set foot in
this trailer --

JOE
Do you understand?

CHRIS
Yeah, but you'll never get my mother to
set foot in this trailer.

JOE
You let me worry about that.

CHRIS
Okay.

JOE
Okay. Get some sleep.

Joe starts for the bedroom.

CHRIS
Joe?

Joe stops, turns.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
You better not hurt my sister.

Joe laughs.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
What's so funny?

JOE
I don't know. That just...struck me.

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dottie lays in the bed, staring at the ceiling. The door opens, and now WE SEE from her POV, Joe entering the bedroom, silhouetted. The image is askew, maybe a little frightening. In fact, maybe it's not even Joe; maybe it's a memory...

EXT. HARVEY BALLBANGER'S XXX ADULT MOVIE PALACE - DAY

Chris, both eyes blackened, bandages across his nose and forehead, shuffles inside the movie theater.

INT. HARVEY BALLBANGER'S LOBBY - DAY

Chris approaches the ticket counter, grabs a box of Milk Duds, shoves a few crumpled dollars to the immense, possibly female TICKET TAKER. He heads into the theatre.

TICKET TAKER
You need tissues?

CHRIS
Why, is it sad?

INT. HARVEY BALLBANGER'S AUDITORIUM - DAY

Movie in progress. Only one other patron in the twenty-seat theater.

Chris shuffles to a seat, collapses, opens a box of Milk Duds...and discovers it's empty. Turns toward the back as if he might do something about it, but why? He scrunches in his seat, closes his eyes to sleep.

WE HEAR sounds of the porno movie: the purple music, the woman's moans of ecstasy, and the PORNO ACTOR's dialog:

PORNO ACTOR (O.S.)
Yeah, bitch...yeah, that's right...mm,
take it...take it all, bitch...

ANOTHER ANGLE. Chris shifts in his seat, squints his eyes against the movie screen light.

PORNO ACTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...move your all, you bitch...hump it.

ANOTHER ANGLE. Chris shifts again...his head drops.

PORNO ACTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Here I come...here I come...here I come,
Dottie.

Chris's eyes snap open.

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM (PORNO MOVIE) - DAY

WE'RE SEEING the porno movie now, as the CAMERA PANS down the man's sweat-sleeked body to reveal the face of his paramour: Dottie. She looks straight into the CAMERA, into the theater, at US, at Chris, as her ON-SCREEN lover reaches release.

INT. HARVEY BALLBANGER'S AUDITORIUM - DAY

BACK to Chris as he straightens in his seat, watching the porno movie with grim fascination.

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM (PORNO MOVIE) - DAY

BACK to the porno movie. Dottie lays nude on the bed, stroking her body in kittenish satisfaction. Her man stands beside the bed, dressing. The CAMERA AWKWARDLY PANS UP and ZOOMS IN to reveal Joe, putting on his cowboy hat, looking down at Dottie.

JOE
Funeral's in half an hour.

INT. HARVEY BALLBANGER'S AUDITORIUM - DAY

BACK to Chris watching this very bizarre movie.

EXT. CEMETERY (PORNO MOVIE) - DAY

A small cluster of mourners stand around a graveside.

ANOTHER ANGLE. The CAMERA PANS across the sad faces of the mourners...first, Sharla, a half-smile on her face...Ansel, drinking a beer...Joe...Dottie...and finally, ADELE, the mother...

ADELE
Rot in hell, boy.

ANOTHER ANGLE: the headstone: "Chris Smith." An eerie
SOUND: Chris' distant, terrified cries for help.

The CAMERA PANS, reveals a hole in the earth, maybe only four inches in diameter. And now WE travel down the hole, down, down, down, until WE'RE INSIDE...

INT. CHRIS' CASKET - DAY

The thinnest shaft of light reveals Chris, buried alive, his body mummified in electrician's tape...

The FILM seems to BURN AWAY into a quick succession of blurred, hallucinatory IMAGES and SOUNDS:

Chris's POV as he's kicked in the head at the drive-in--

SOUND: A ROARING FIRE.

A train approaching--

Sharla, bent-over, skirt hiked up, looking over her shoulder in some honky-tonk bathroom--

A crack pipe being fired up--

SOUND: POINT-BLANK GUNSHOTS.

Inside of the Smith family's refrigerator as the contents spill to the floor--

SOUND: HIGH-PITCHED SCREAMING.

Some kind of animal, bloody, screaming--

Chris between Dottie's legs in her bedroom--

A CLOSER IMAGE of the animal, screaming, hissing--

INT. HARVEY BALLBANGER'S AUDITORIUM - DAY

Chris jolts awake in the movie theater, sweat pouring off of him. SOUNDS of a good, old-fashioned porno movie.

For the first time, Chris seems to notice the other patron in the theatre: a small, hunched figure sitting in the front row, wearing some kind of hood. Chris leans forward to get a better look...but all he can see is the movie screen's glow reflecting off the side of the theatergoer's pasty white skin...

EXT. HARVEY BALLBANGER'S XXX ADULT MOVIE PALACE - DAY

Chris races blindly out of the movie theater, past the ticket taker, sprints down the sidewalk.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - DAY

SERIES OF QUICK CUTS:

Killer Joe tugs on a pair of black racing gloves...

...zips up the front of his leather jacket...

...snaps a phone beeper on his belt...

...checks his watch...

...slaps a clip in his gun...

...holsters the weapon...

...puts on his mirror sunglasses...

His beeper goes off. He punches a button, shutting it off.

T-Bone barks crazily. Joe backs away from the door, raises his gun, cocks it.

CHRIS (O.S.)

Joe?! Joe?!

Joe holsters his gun. Chris rushes in, sweating, out of breath, panicked.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Thank God! I was afraid I wouldn't get here...I'd be too late...thank God.

Listen...we gotta stop this. I been in a lotta trouble, all my life, but I never did nothin' like this before.

Sorry, didn't mean to waste your time.

Joe moves past Chris, exits the trailer. Chris follows.

EXT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - DAY

Chris and Joe walk around the trailer to Joe's car.

CHRIS

I hate that bitch. I always hated her. I just can't be the one, y'know?

Chris does a double-take at the remarkably docile T-Bone.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

But the main thing really, is, is, is Dottie. My sister never did nothin' to nobody. I just...can't be responsible.

You can't have her. I can't let you have her. You gotta give her up, 'cause I can't look her in the eyes otherwise.

Joe reaches his car, unlocks the door.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Where are you goin'? What are you doin'?

EXT. ENCHANTED CASTLE TRAILER PARK - DAY

Joe's car winds through the gravel roads of the trailer park.

INT. JOE'S CAR - DAY

CHRIS

I don't want Dottie to see you again. I don't think you're a good influence. I mean, you kill people for Chrissake.

No offense. It's not like me and Dad or Mom've been good influences. But Dottie turned out all right anyway. Best thing I can do for her now is keep her away from people who won't do her any good.

So I think you and me should just shake hands, forget any of us ever met.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Is that okay? We're no better off, but we're really no worse off, either.

EXT. I-35 FREEWAY - DAY

Joe's car heads out of town, zooming through the light mid-morning traffic.

INT. JOE'S CAR - DAY

CHRIS

Six thousand dollars. I'll never have that kind of money, not ever.

Chris lights the filter end of his cigarette, tosses it out the window.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Even if I had it, wouldn't that suck, handin' it over to these guys? I'd wanna keep that money, try to make somethin' with it.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Joe's car glides along the farm-to-market blacktop.

CHRIS (O.S.)

I started a farm once.

INT. JOE'S CAR - DAY

CHRIS

Seemed like the life I want. Work for myself, outside a lot, make my own hours, live in the country, smoke dope, watch TV. That's all I really want.

Joe turns the wheel. They're now travelling a bumpy dirt road.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

So I started a rabbit farm. Built the whole thing, by myself. I lived with a coupla guys, out near Mesquite, but they didn't help me; I built it, with my own two hands. Lumber, chicken wire, water bottles, pellets. Rabbits. I loved those little bastards. They smell like shit, and they fuck all the time, but they're awful easy-goin' animals.

Joe pulls the car to the side of the road, cuts the engine, rolls down his window, lights a couple of smokes, gives one to Chris.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I left for a coupla weeks 'cause of this girl in Corpus. I got back, a rat, a skunk, or somethin' had got in the pen. It was rabid. Awful hot out, too.

They just tore each other up. Their eyes rollin', foamin' at the mouth, and screamin'. You know rabbits scream? They sound just like little girls.

It was disturbing.

I started sellin' dope for a living. I knew more about it.

So I can't pay this guy, and I don't even really want to.

You gotta get out, Joe. Gotta leave my sister alone, forever. Otherwise...you and me're gonna have some trouble. Do you understand?

Joe gets out of the car.

EXT. DIRT ROAD, TEXAS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Chris throws open his door, gets out of the car, screams at Joe across the hood.

CHRIS

Do you understand?!

Joe cuts his eyes to the road in front of the car. Chris turns, looks...and there, not twenty feet in front of him, parked on the dirt road, is a metallic gold '74 Pinto. In front of that, another twenty feet or so, a railroad crossing.

Chris' mouth hangs open. He steps toward the Pinto, not understanding. He turns to ask Joe, but Joe is now at the back of his own car, flipping through his keys.

WE FOLLOW Chris, toward Joe, to the back of Joe's car, where Joe is unlocking his trunk, and now opening the trunk, and now removing a blanket, just as WE ARRIVE and just as WE LOOK past Chris, and just as WE SEE what Chris sees: Adele, deader than hell, her pallid face frozen in a gruesome death mask.

AERIAL VIEW: Chris falls to his knees, pukes on the road. Joe raises his head, listens to the SOUND of a train whistle, checks his watch.

JOE

You want to help me get her in the car?

EXT. DIRT ROAD, TEXAS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Later. Chris and Joe are gone. Adele's car sits on the railroad tracks. The train is much louder now.

WE SLOWLY TRACK from behind the car to beside it, looking through the passenger window. Adele's corpse sits behind the wheel. SOUND of buzzing flies.

Now a train rounds a bend in the tracks, maybe eighty yards distant. Shrill whistles, blaring horn, squealing brakes, but the train is coming much too fast.

WE TRACK FORWARD, CLOSER on Adele, as the train approaches.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - DAY

A Road Runner cartoon plays on the TV behind the counter of an almost empty greasy spoon. The volume seems extremely loud.

Chris and Dottie sit on opposite sides of a booth. He wears a jacket; she wears a dress. He watches her; she watches the cartoon.

CHRIS' POV: Across the street, nestled in a strip mall: KILPATRICK INSURANCE, a glass-windowed storefront.

Chris fidgets, tense. He spills some of his water, mops it up with napkins. Puts too much sugar in his coffee, stirs it frantically.

Chris reaches his limit, walks behind the counter, snaps off the television.

CHRIS

Goddamn coyote!

DOTTIE

I was watchin' that, Chris...

CHRIS

(returning to the booth)

Listen, honey --

DOTTIE
I was watchin' the show.

CHRIS
I know --

DOTTIE
I wanted to see how it turned out.

CHRIS
(explodes)
HE DON'T CATCH THE BIRD, OKAY?! IT JUST
GOES ON AND ON AND ON!

DOTTIE
Yeah?

A haggard WAITRESS and a couple of TRUCKERS at a nearby booth
eye Chris cautiously. He lowers his voice.

CHRIS
Listen: I know you know what's goin' on.
I don't gotta tell you; you know.

DOTTIE
Uh-huh.

CHRIS
But you gotta understand: I never meant
to hurt you.

DOTTIE
Yeah...

CHRIS
Arrangements just kinda broke funny...if
I'd known how all this'd fall out, I
might've done things different.

DOTTIE
No...

CHRIS
Maybe not, but I might've. Anyway...
this's about over. He'll be gone soon.

DOTTIE
He will?

CHRIS
Soon as this money comes through, and we
pay the son-of-a-bitch --

DOTTIE

He won't pay them today, will he?

CHRIS

Nah, they're just goin' over the policy --

INT. KILPATRICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Ansel and Sharla sit stiffly in front of a desk in a small, wood-paneled office. She wears a black sequined mini-dress and high heels; he wears a shit-brown suit with matching baseball cap. The waffle house can be seen through a large picture window behind them.

A long silence.

Sharla notices a loose thread on the shoulder of Ansel's coat, reaches up, pulls it. The thread quickly unravels and Ansel's sleeve falls off. He stares at her.

The door opens and KILPATRICK enters, early 60's, crew-cut. He carries a file, takes the seat behind his desk, opens the file, reads it. Clicks his pen.

KILPATRICK

What was her maiden name, Ansel? I just need it for the file.

ANSEL

Rogers. Adele Carolyne Rogers.

Kilpatrick makes a note, puts his pen down, looks up at Ansel and Sharla, smiles warmly...

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - DAY

DOTTIE

Joe's not leavin' just yet, right?

CHRIS

Soon. Then you'll never have to see him again.

DOTTIE

See him...

CHRIS

We'll be better off after this. I'll get outta this trouble, set things right. Get a job, get married. Do things right, from now on. Gotta pay for things I done wrong. You don't pay for that stuff, it comes back to you. Always.

DOTTIE

Uh-huh...

CHRIS

Dad'll be able to...I don't know, you know Dad.

DOTTIE

Yeah.

CHRIS

And you'll finally go to that modelin' school. Remember, you always wanted to do that? Like the girls in the thing?

DOTTIE

Christie Brinkley...

Their eyes meet. Something unspeakable passes between them. She gets up from the booth, tries to leave. Chris grabs her from behind, pulls her into another booth, holds her too tight. The Waitress watches from a safe distance.

CHRIS

Maybe you don't like me anymore. Maybe you don't think I did right by you. By God, I did the best I could. Nobody can accuse me of not havin' people's best interests at mind. People do the best they can. Anybody says he doesn't's lyin'.

She cries out, tries to pull away from him. He holds her face tightly.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I did the best I could. I didn't want to hurt anybody. Ever.

He buries his head in her lap, sobs. She holds him, soothes him, and stares defiantly at the Waitress and the Truckers who continue to study them.

EXT. KILPATRICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Ansel and Sharla step into the sunlight, take a moment to collect themselves (his sleeve has been reattached with safety pins), give each other a look, then head across the street.

INT. WAFFLE HOUSE - DAY

Dottie continues to console Chris.

DOTTIE
Will there be a trial?

CHRIS
Huh? I don't know. I doubt it. Joe
knows what he's doin' --

DOTTIE
I never been to a trial.

CHRIS
See the shot in the paper? Her car? He
knows what he's doin', all right. They
couldn't do no autopsy cause there wasn't
much left to speak of --

Ansel and Sharla enter the restaurant, stride to the table.
They stand, staring at Chris, who fidgets in his seat.

SHARLA
(quietly, to Ansel)
Let's just get outside...

CHRIS
How'd it go?

ANSEL
You little son-of-a-bitch...

CHRIS
What's the matter?

ANSEL
I'm not talkin' in front of Dottie --

SHARLA
Oh, hell, she knows what's goin' on --

ANSEL
I'm not talkin' in front of her.

CHRIS
What happened with Kilpatrick?

ANSEL
Sharla, take Dottie for a drive --

SHARLA
Can we all just get out of here --?

CHRIS
Will you please tell me --

ANSEL
I'm not talkin' in front of --

DOTTIE
They're not gonna pay you the money, are they?

Silence.

CHRIS
Dad?

Ansel grabs Chris' collar, turns and walks for the exit. Chris is dragged behind him, overturning a table. Sharla scurries behind them as Dottie quickly pays the check.

SHARLA
Ansel, calm down --

CHRIS
Dad?!

SHARLA
Ansel, don't make a scene --!

The Waitress joins the Truckers to look out the window as Ansel exits the restaurant, pulling Chris behind him. Sharla, then Dottie, follow.

EXT. WAFFLE HOUSE PARKING LOT - DAY

Ansel hurls Chris against the pickup truck.

ANSEL
Who told you about Adele's policy?

CHRIS
Rex. Rex told me. He just mentioned it, in conversation. Will you for the love of God tell me --?

ANSEL
When did he tell you?

CHRIS
In conversation --

ANSEL
Not how! WHEN!

CHRIS
A coupla weeks ago. Me and Mom just had a big fight --

ANSEL
Oh, Christ --

SHARLA
I told you, Ansel.

CHRIS
What happened?

SHARLA
I told you from the start --

CHRIS
Shut UP --!

SHARLA
Don't tell me to shut up, I'm not the one
who blew this thing --!

CHRIS
What happened, Dad?

SHARLA
-- come into our place, tell people what
to do, how we're all gonna see a hundred
grand --!

CHRIS
(advancing on Ansel)
Goddamn it, you tell me, right now --

ANSEL
Dottie's not the beneficiary. Rex is the
beneficiary.

CHRIS
I don't understand.

ANSEL
It's not real tough --

CHRIS
Explain it to me.

ANSEL
Dottie does not get the money. Rex gets
the money.

CHRIS
Wait --

ANSEL

Dottie does not get the fifty thousand dollars. Rex...

Ansel explodes, grabs Chris' lapels, shakes him.

ANSEL (CONT'D)

Rex gets fifty thousand dollars!

CHRIS

That's not right.

ANSEL

That's the way it is!

CHRIS

That can't be.

ANSEL

Go talk to Kilpatrick yourself.

Ansel points across the street.

INT. KILPATRICK'S OFFICE - DAY

Through the window of Kilpatrick's office, WE SEE the four family members squabbling and screaming in the parking lot across the street.

EXT. WAFFLE HOUSE PARKING LOT - DAY

The Waitress and the Truckers continue to gawk out the window as the fight rages on.

CHRIS

I was told! Because...because Rex told me! He told me! Rex told me!

DOTTIE

Rex was Momma's boyfriend --

CHRIS

JUST -- SHUT UP, DOTTIE! He told me --

SHARLA

He was lyin'.

CHRIS

Why would he do that?

SHARLA

Why do you think?

CHRIS
No, no, he couldn't've known I'd do this!

ANSEL
Who told you about Killer Joe?

CHRIS
(it hits him)
Oh...oh, God...

SHARLA
(to Ansel)
I told you. Did I tell you?

ANSEL
Yeah...

CHRIS
Oh my God...I'm fucked...piece of fucking
fuck suck cake...

ANSEL
He played you like an accordion fish,
didn't he, boy?

Sharla climbs into Ansel's truck.

SHARLA
(to Chris)
You make me sick.

CHRIS
I don't believe you, God --

Ansel grabs Chris, shoves him, holds him.

ANSEL
You better believe it. Sooner you
believe it, sooner you can figure how to
pay Killer Joe his money --

SHARLA
(from inside the truck)
We gotta get goin' --

ANSEL
-- not to mention Digger Soames --

SHARLA
We gotta get goin', y'all.

ANSEL
What for?!

SHARLA

Funeral's in half an hour.

Chris cracks up, laughing, out of his mind. Sharla uncaps a cheap bottle of perfume, sprays herself.

CHRIS

Y'all go ahead. I gotta think of somethin'.

ANSEL

I wish you would. We always seem so much better off when you do.

DOTTIE

Where's Joe? He's comin' back, isn't he?

CHRIS

Yeah...yeah, he's comin' back, all right.

ANSEL

Oh, he's comin' back.

ANSEL

Let's hit it. We gotta get your mother in the ground.

CHRIS

I'll take Dottie.

ANSEL

Dottie?

DOTTIE

We'll be along.

ANSEL

All right. Mrs. Smith?

Sharla is spraying her thighs with some cheap perfume.

ANSEL (CONT'D)

When you're done fumigatin' the Gates of Hell.

She slams her door. Ansel climbs in the truck, slams his door, rolls down the window, to Chris:

ANSEL (CONT'D)

Hey. Why don't you do us all a big favor and kill yourself?

The truck screeches out of the parking lot. Chris and Dottie stand, frozen. A long silence. Finally he shuffles out of the parking lot, staring straight ahead, his mouth hanging open.

Dottie waits to see where he's headed...then realizes he's leaving. She scurries after him.

EXT. WEST DALLAS SIDEWALK - DAY

Chris trudges along the sidewalk, stops at a traffic light. Dottie catches up. A long silence.

DOTTIE

You feel bad.

CHRIS

Yeah...I think maybe I'm not supposed to be on Earth or somethin'...

DOTTIE

You remember those shows you used to put on? With your knees?

CHRIS

Hm?

DOTTIE

We'd be layin' in bed, and you'd get a flashlight, and put your knees up, and you'd put sunglasses on one knee, and some kind of hat on the other?

The light changes. They cross the street, keep walking.

CHRIS

Yeah...

DOTTIE

You'd put on a little show. "The Greatest Show on Earth" is what you called it.

CHRIS

Yeah...

DOTTIE

"Into Time and Forever From Now On. No Ventures, or Time-Outs, or King's-X's, Everlasting, One More Than You Can Say, Into Infinity, and Outer Space. Amen."

CHRIS

Nothin's worse than regrets. Not cancer, not bein' eaten by a shark, nothin'.

DOTTIE

Joe is comin' back, isn't he? 'Cause I --

Chris stops walking.

CHRIS
I'm leaving.

DOTTIE
I think maybe I'm --

CHRIS
I want you to come with me.

DOTTIE
Where?

CHRIS
Mexico. No. Further. Peru. In South
America.

DOTTIE
How do we get there?

CHRIS
We'll drive. We can drive it.

He grabs her by the wrist, starts pulling her back toward the
waffle house.

DOTTIE
Chris --

CHRIS
Do you like Texas? I never liked this
goddamn state.
(screams at passing cars)
These people talk about it like it's such
a great place and all, but it's really
just a bunch of goddamn hicks and
rednecks with too much space to walk
around in!

DOTTIE
It's warm.

CHRIS
Let's go. Let's just...go. Now.

DOTTIE
To the funeral.

CHRIS
Hey, if we're gonna pull this off, we
gotta gas up --

She tries to pull away. They have a tug of war on the sidewalk.

DOTTIE
I have to see Joe.

CHRIS
No, Dottie, if we see Joe --

DOTTIE
I have to see him.

CHRIS
(muscling her)
We have to go to Peru now.

She throws him up against a chain-link fence.

DOTTIE
Then you go by yourself! I have to see Joe!

She stalks down the sidewalk, again headed away from the waffle house.

EXT. WEST DALLAS CHURCH OF CHRIST - DAY

A light rain has begun to fall. Ansel and Sharla smoke cigarettes in front of the church as a handful of disinterested MOURNERS make their way inside.

ANSEL
Let's get this thing started.

She nods. Ansel flips his cigarette butt into the weeds, straightens his tie.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
You'd think Rex mighta showed, just for appearances. Shit, I guess he picked up the check and blew town.

He heads inside. Sharla continues to survey the crowd.

EXT. WEST DALLAS STREET - DAY

Dottie makes her way down the sidewalk on foot. Chris pulls up in his Cougar, coasts alongside her. He punches a hole in the plastic bag covering the driver's side window so he can talk to her.

CHRIS
I'll make you a deal. We'll go to the funeral, and you can see Joe after.

She eyes him suspiciously, keeps walking.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
No funny stuff. I promise.

She stops. He puts on the brakes.

DOTTIE
You swear?

CHRIS
I swear. No crossing counts, nothing
counts but the swear.

She gets in the car.

INT. CHRIS'S CAR - DAY

Chris keeps the car parked. Rain begins to splash the
windshield.

CHRIS
Here's the deal: you can't tell Joe
we're goin' to Peru, okay? You can't
tell him good-bye. Not outright.

DOTTIE
Okie-doke.

CHRIS
And you can't tell Dad or Sharla either,
'cause they're mad at me right now and
they might try to screw up our trip.

DOTTIE
I understand.

CHRIS
Are you excited? Do you want to go?

DOTTIE
I'm always excited.

CHRIS
We can do this.
(puts the car in gear)
We can pull it off.

DOTTIE
Not if somebody makes me mad.

CHRIS

What?

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVESIDE - DAY

A casket is lowered into the earth.

ANOTHER ANGLE. A cluster of mourners stand around the graveside as an insincere PREACHER recites passages from the Bible in monotone. Rain is falling. The only mourners without umbrellas are the Smiths: Ansel, confused; Sharla, distracted; Dottie, respectful; and Chris, who sobs and wails at such a loud volume that the other mourners turn and look at him.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

The mourning party seen from a distance. WE PULL BACK to reveal Joe, sitting in his car, watching the services. He speaks briefly into his radio, then takes off.

EXT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - DAY

Chris's Cougar pulls up...Dottie gets out...Chris pulls away from the trailer...Dottie watches him go...

EXT. DALLAS STREETS - DAY

Joe sits in his car, waiting at a light. Again, he speaks into his radio...

INT. WILD BILL'S - DAY

Chris leans over the bar, sharing a private conversation with the bartender. The bartender grabs a phone from behind the bar, punches in a number, and hands the phone to Chris...

INT. ALL RIGHT LIQUORS - DAY

Ansel stands at the counter, buying a pint of bourbon...

EXT. ALL RIGHT LIQUORS - DAY

Sharla waits in the truck, watching rain hit the window...

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Dottie sits on the edge of her bed, staring straight ahead, having an intense conversation...with no one...

EXT. DALLAS STREETS - EVENING

Joe's car zooms over rain-slicked streets in a nearly deserted, industrial part of town...

EXT. WILD BILL'S - EVENING

In an empty parking lot across the street from Wild Bill's, Chris stands behind a station wagon, listening to a short, bandy-legged SALESMAN. The Salesman opens the back of the station wagon and hands Chris a paper sack...

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

We slowly PUSH IN on Dottie as her solo conversation becomes even more intense, more adamant...

EXT. FARM-TO-MARKET ROAD - EVENING

A beat-up, yellow Corvette is parked by the side of the road. The DRIVER's face is obscured by the rain. Joe's car is parked behind, cherry top flashing. Joe, wearing his raincoat and cowboy hat, slowly gets out of his car and approaches the Corvette. He taps on the window. The window rolls down.

JOE

Step out of car, please.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. DALLAS SKYLINE - NIGHT

An Olympian thunderbolt streaks the night sky, followed by a tremendous boom of thunder.

EXT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Rain pours. WE SEE Ansel's and Sharla's feet pick through the muck on their way to the front door of the trailer.

ANSEL

It's dark.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Ansel and Sharla enter, still wearing their funeral clothes. Sharla carries a bucket of fried chicken.

SHARLA

Dottie?! It's us!

ANSEL
(feeling along the wall)
I can't find the light.

Sharla turns on the lights, sets the chicken down in the kitchen. Ansel discovers the light switch on the opposite side of the door where, of course, it's always been.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
Christ...

He empties his pockets of keys, wrappers, lint, a pint bottle, and a mountain of change onto the kitchen table...

SHARLA
Stopped by the K-Fry-C! You hungry?!

Ansel struggles out of his coat and shirt, revealing a grease-covered tee-shirt underneath...

SHARLA (CONT'D)
Dottie?! Chris?!

ANSEL
Fetch me a beer.

Ansel turns on the TV Joe emerges from Dottie's bedroom.

JOE
He's not here.

ANSEL
Hi, Joe --

SHARLA
Is Dottie here?

JOE
She's asleep.

SHARLA
Where's Chris?

Joe sits on the couch, pulls on his boots.

JOE
I don't know.

SHARLA
You want some chicken? Stopped by the K-Fry-C.

JOE
Yes, please.

SHARLA
Help yourself. It's on the stove --

ANSEL
Get it for him, would you, hon?

SHARLA
Sure. White or dark?

JOE
Leg.

She wraps a chicken leg in a paper towel, carries it to the couch, presents it to him with the merest hint of sarcasm.

ANSEL
Want a beer?

JOE
Yes, please.

She gets beers for Ansel and Joe, gets a chicken breast for herself. Ansel grabs his pint, offers it to Joe.

SHARLA
Funerals make people hungry for some reason.

JOE
Hm.

SHARLA
I'm starvin'.

Sharla sits at the table, eats ravenously. Long silence.

SHARLA (CONT'D)
You know about the insurance.

ANSEL
Sharla...

JOE
Yes. I do.

ANSEL
I don't know what to say.

SHARLA
Then don't to say anything. Not your fault.

ANSEL
Yeah, but --

SHARLA

(to Joe)

Chris. That Chris is so stupid. I
coulda told you he'd fuck this up.

JOE

Why didn't you?

SHARLA

Why didn't I?

ANSEL

Just an expression, really.

JOE

What is?

ANSEL

What she said. She coulda told you he'd
fuck it up.

JOE

I've never heard that expression.

ANSEL

Manner of speakin', is what I mean --

SHARLA

I never liked that little bastard.

JOE

You haven't.

During the following, Joe collects Ansel's discarded
clothing. WE FOLLOW him as he carries it down the hall...

SHARLA (O.S.)

Can't trust him. He's just no good.

ANSEL (O.S.)

They never really hit it off --

SHARLA (O.S.)

All he cares about is himself.

ANSEL (O.S.)

That's not fair, really --

SHARLA (O.S.)

Bullshit fair. It's true.

WE FOLLOW Joe into Ansel's and Sharla's bedroom. He throws
Ansel's clothes on his bed. WE FOLLOW him as he returns down
the hall...

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe's shadow is visible in the strip of light under Dottie's door. Dottie lays on the bed, her back to us...

ANSEL (O.S.)

That's all anybody really cares about,
isn't it?

SHARLA (O.S.)

No wonder.

ANSEL (O.S.)

No wonder what?

SHARLA (O.S.)

No wonder Chris wound up like he did.

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Ansel hisses at Sharla, very conscious of Joe's presence down the hall.

ANSEL (O.S.)

What did I do?

SHARLA (O.S.)

Just shut up --

Joe reenters the living room.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

(to Joe)

I mean, how stupid do you have to be to
let an idiot like Rex take advantage --

JOE

Rex.

SHARLA

Yeah, Rex...

JOE

What about Rex?

SHARLA

I said...I said, "How stupid do you have
to be to let an idiot Rex --"

JOE

Yes, I heard what you said. Tell me
about Rex.

ANSEL
Rex is Adele's boyfriend.

JOE
Was.

ANSEL
Was Adele's boyfriend --

JOE
Tell me about Rex.

ANSEL
What do you want to know --?

JOE
(to Ansel)
Not you.
(to Sharla)
You.

SHARLA
What.

JOE
You. Tell me about Rex.

SHARLA
What do you mean?

JOE
You know the man, right? I mean, you've met him.

SHARLA
Yeah, of course --

JOE
Tell me about him.

SHARLA
I don't know what you --

JOE
Is he tall? Is he fat? Is he Chinese?
Where does he work? How old is he? Do
his ears hang low?

Ansel laughs nervously; Joe marks it, moves on.

JOE (CONT'D)
Is he unlike other men? Tell me about
Rex.

SHARLA

Rex is...I don't get this, really --

She gets up from the table and carries her plate of food into the kitchen.

JOE

Who told you about our arrangement?

SHARLA

What arrangement?

JOE

The contract made between myself and this family. Who told you about it?

SHARLA

Ansel.

JOE

Why?

ANSEL

Joe, she's my wife, you know --

JOE

I wasn't addressing you, sir.

ANSEL

Okay...

JOE

Why did he tell you?

SHARLA

'Cause I'm his wife, like he said --

JOE

You going to get a cut of this money?

SHARLA

Sure --

JOE

Why?

SHARLA

'Cause I'm his wife, like he said --

JOE

Did you advise Ansel against the idea?

SHARLA

No --

JOE
Why? You could've told him Chris would
fuck it up.

SHARLA
It's none of my business --

She moves for the living room. Joe casually blocks her path.

JOE
But it is, isn't it? It is your
business.

SHARLA
Look, what is this all --?

JOE
If you were going to share in the money,
it is your business. Isn't it?

SHARLA
Yeah, I don't know --

JOE
Yet you didn't advise against it.

SHARLA
I wanted some of that money, all right?
I mean, if, if Chris could pull this off -
-

JOE
Would you split Ansel's third, or would
the four of you split it up evenly?

SHARLA
We didn't discuss that --

JOE
I'm sure you did. You're a practical
woman.

SHARLA
I assumed I would take...a fourth --

JOE
Not one-half of one-third --

SHARLA
No, one fourth, four ways --

JOE
-- instead of one sixth --

ANSEL
-- one sixth --

Joe and Sharla each give Ansel a quick look.

SHARLA
No, four ways --

JOE
So then the four of you would --

SHARLA
-- right --

JOE
-- split the remainder of the money,
after I had been paid my fee --

SHARLA
Right --

JOE
-- twenty-five thousand dollars --

SHARLA
-- uh-huh, after you were covered --

JOE
Which means, equal shares. What would
those four equal shares come out to --

SHARLA
I haven't done the math --

JOE
Well, then, do it with me, now.

Joe takes a seat at the kitchen table. Sharla reluctantly joins him. During the following, Joe uses Ansel's pile of change to visualize his calculation.

JOE (CONT'D)
Insurance policy gets covered, the agent,
Kilpatrick, cuts Ansel a check --

SHARLA
-- Dottie, that would be --

JOE
-- right, best of all worlds, Dottie --

SHARLA
I don't even know why we're goin' over
all this, since we're not --

JOE
Just watch my feet here, all right --?

SHARLA
All right --

JOE
So Ansel get the --

SHARLA
Dottie --

JOE
-- Dottie --

SHARLA
If the check is for a hundred, we pay you
twenty-five --

JOE
How much?

SHARLA
-- twenty-five --

JOE
But how much, the policy was for --?

SHARLA
However much.
(to Ansel)
How much?

JOE
Fifty thousand.

SHARLA
That much. Fifty, minus your money --

JOE
Right, minus my twenty-five, but you said
a hundred, didn't you?

SHARLA
A hundred what.

JOE
You said a hundred, the check is for a
hundred --

SHARLA
However much, minus your twenty-five --

JOE
But you said a hundred.

SHARLA
Yeah. However much.

Ansel springs up from the couch, rifles through the change for a couple of quarters, slaps them on the table.

ANSEL
She was mistaken. It's fifty.

JOE
Is it.

ANSEL
Yeah.

A long silence. Ansel, then Sharla, then Joe watch TV Joe rises, snaps off the television, turns to face Ansel.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
Idn't it?

JOE
No.

ANSEL
Wait a minute...

JOE
In case of accidental death...the figures double.

SHARLA
Right, Kilpatrick told us that this morning. Didn't he, Ansel?

ANSEL
Huh-uh.

SHARLA
Yeah, I think he did.

JOE
Ansel? Did he?

ANSEL
No.

SHARLA
I think he did --

ANSEL
So...it's not...fifty.

JOE
No.
(to Sharla)
It's a hundred.

Joe and Sharla lock eyes. He approaches her. Right now, for them, Ansel does not exist.

SHARLA
Like I say. However much.

JOE
However much.

SHARLA
(rising from the table)
Look, what are you gettin' at?

JOE
What do you mean?

SHARLA
I made a mistake, all right --?

JOE
Yes, you did --

SHARLA
-- it's fifty, or a hundred, however
much --

ANSEL
Hey, you all don't do this now --

Ansel retreats to the couch.

JOE
You said you never cared for Chris --

SHARLA
-- and I haven't. I don't --

JOE
-- and you said Rex is an idiot --

SHARLA
-- uh-huh, right --

JOE
-- and you said, "the check is for a
hundred" --

SHARLA

-- "or however much" --

JOE

-- and I was just wondering --

SHARLA

-- what are you gettin' at --?

Joe reaches in his pocket, takes out the rainbow-colored packet of photos that Sharla had with her at the Pizza Hut.

SHARLA (CONT'D)

-- oh, fuck --

He removes the sheaf of photos and shows one to Sharla.

JOE

Whose dick is that?

INT. DOTTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dottie lies on the bed, motionless, her back to US.

SHARLA (O.S.)

Where'd you get those?

JOE (O.S.)

That's not Ansel's dick. Is that your dick?

ANSEL (O.S.)

No.

SHARLA (O.S.)

Yes it is, darlin', you were drunk --

JOE (O.S.)

How about that one?

INT. SMITH FAMILY TRAILER - NIGHT

Joe sits with Ansel on the couch, showing him the photos.

ANSEL

No.

JOE

That one? Make sure now. Might've been drunk.

Ansel shakes his head.

JOE (CONT'D)
(examining a photo)
So, then, whose dick is that?

SHARLA
Just stop it --

JOE
That must belong to your boyfriend --

SHARLA
Please --

JOE
To your boyfriend: Rex: "That idiot."

SHARLA
Please, now, just --

JOE
The man who's getting all that money.

SHARLA
I didn't --

JOE
All "hundred grand."

SHARLA
I said stop it --

JOE
That's a nice photo, really. You should
frame that.
(to Ansel)
What do you think? Look nice on the
bedroom dresser?

SHARLA
I didn't know, I swear --

JOE
(to Ansel)
Were you aware of this?

ANSEL
I'm never aware --

JOE
Of course not.

Joe drops the photos in Ansel's lap, rises from the couch,
approaches Sharla.

JOE (CONT'D)
Whose is it?

SHARLA
You son-of-a-bitch --

Joe grabs her by the throat with one hand.

JOE
No need for name-calling. I haven't called you any names. You be polite to me. I'm a guest. Now tell me whose little dickie that is, and don't lie to me or by God it'll be the last lie you ever tell.

SHARLA
Rex. It's Rex.

JOE
Correct.

SHARLA
Ansel, please --

JOE
Ansel isn't too inclined to assist you at this point in time. Are you, Ansel?

ANSEL
No, I'm not.

JOE
In fact, you're content to just sit there, aren't you?

ANSEL
Yes, sir.

JOE
That's what I thought.

SHARLA
Let me go, you motherfucker --

Joe tightens his grip on her throat.

JOE
What did I say about insulting me?

Sharla's face turns blue as she struggles for breath. Joe drops her to the floor.

SHARLA

We'll give you the money. I swear, I'll talk to Rex and we'll give you as much of the money as you want.

JOE

I'm afraid that's impossible.

SHARLA

No, it's not --

Ansel moves to the television.

JOE

Rex picked up the settlement this afternoon.

SHARLA

What?

JOE

(as Ansel reaches the TV)

DON'T TOUCH THAT TELEVISION!

Ansel retreats to the couch. Joe takes a cashier's check from his pocket.

JOE (CONT'D)

He gave it to me before he left.

(hands check to Ansel)

"A hundred grand."

ANSEL

God amighty...

SHARLA

Where did he go?

JOE

Worthless, of course. Made out to Rex.

SHARLA

Where did he say he was goin'?

JOE

He was unavailable for comment.

CLOSE UP: Joe peels off his watch, pockets it.

ANOTHER ANGLE: WE FOLLOW Joe as he approaches Sharla.

SHARLA

I don't understand, why didn't you get him to --? I can...I can get him to sign it over --

He punches her squarely in the face.

ANOTHER ANGLE: FROM THE FLOOR now, Sharla's panicked face suddenly FILLS THE FRAME as she falls to her knees. Blood trickles from her nose.

JOE

Looks like you need a new boyfriend.

She crawls away from him, toward Ansel, toward the living room. Joe looms behind her, follows, puts the toe of his boot in her ass, pushes her down.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'll be your boyfriend. Just for a little while.

She looks to Ansel.

ANSEL

(terrified whispers)

Stay down...just stay down there...

Ansel cuts his eyes to the kitchen...

Joe strides to the kitchen, grabs another chicken leg, comes back to Sharla.

Ansel shreds the check: a plead with Joe.

Joe stands above Sharla, holds the chicken leg in front of his crotch.

JOE

Suck this.

SHARLA

Go fuck yourself --

Joe reaches down, one-handed, grabs her hair, slams her head onto the floor, screams in her face:

JOE

You insult me again, I'll cut your face off and wear it over my own! Do you understand?!

SHARLA
(crying)
Ansel --!

Ansel rockets off the couch, about to attack. Joe drops Sharla, spins to face Ansel, who quickly retreats to the kitchen sink.

ANSEL
Hey, you made your bed --

JOE
That's right. Now lie in it.

SHARLA
Ansel, please --

JOE
(grabbing her hair again)
Are you going to insult me again?! Do
you want me to wear your face?!

Holding her head with one hand, the chicken leg in front of his crotch with the other.

JOE (CONT'D)
Now suck it.

Shaking, crying, she hesitantly takes the end of the chicken leg in her mouth.

ANOTHER ANGLE: Ansel's trembling hands rake a few dishes into the kitchen sink, then turn on the water.

WE MOVE UP from the hands, past his body, until WE'RE in a CLOSE-UP of Ansel. Behind him, WE SEE Sharla on her knees, her face buried in Joe's crotch.

JOE (CONT'D)
Ohhhh, yes...
(to Ansel)
Hey.

ANOTHER CLOSE-UP: Ansel turns off the water, turns to Joe.

JOE (CONT'D)
What do you think?

ANSEL
I don't.

ANOTHER ANGLE: Joe bobs Sharla's head back and forth on the chicken leg.

JOE

Listen carefully, both of you. I performed a service for this family, and I deserve my payment in full. As a result of the misunderstanding regarding the insurance, I won't receive any cash for my services. That's unfair.

ANOTHER ANGLE: Ansel, standing in the kitchen, forced to watch.

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I don't care to hear excuses, or the placement of blame. I hold you all equally responsible.

ANOTHER ANGLE: Joe and Sharla.

JOE (CONT'D)

Reach around and grab my ass.

She does.

JOE (CONT'D)

I was fortunate, however, in thinking ahead. I secured a retainer for my services. Since I fulfilled my obligation, and since my cash is not forthcoming, that retainer is now mine. It belongs to me. And I'm taking it with me when I leave.

ANOTHER ANGLE: Sharla sobbing, sucking the chicken leg as he bucks his hips, jams the bone further into her mouth.

JOE (CONT'D)

You're very good at this. Please moan.

She begins an awkward humming.

CLOSE-UP: Ansel's horrified reaction...

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Chris doesn't agree with the concept of the retainer. He's coming back here tonight to attempt to take it with him.

CLOSE-UP: Joe, building, spiraling, exploding...

JOE (CONT'D)

I can't allow him to do that! This family...

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Sharla sucking the chicken leg...

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...can't...

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Ansel watching...

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...allow...

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Joe, sweating, red-faced...

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...him...

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Sharla sucking the chicken leg up to its hilt, her lips caked with grease and crust and blood...

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...to do that!

A TIGHT, SKEWED ANGLE, SEEN FROM THE FLOOR: Joe groans and pushes the chicken leg all the way in. She gags. He gasps, shoves her head away. She falls to the floor, coughs out the leg.

He towers above her, ABOVE US...he thunders:

JOE (CONT'D)
Do you understand? If this family allows
Chris to leave this trailer, I'll
slaughter all of you! Like pigs!

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Ansel, shaking, weeping...

JOE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Do you believe I'd do that?!

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Sharla, petrified. Joe drops to the floor, straddling her, muscling his way INTO THE FRAME. She screams.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'm asking for your help. Will you give
it to me?

She nods.

JOE (CONT'D)
Ansel?

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Ansel.

ANSEL
Yes, sir.

JOE

Good.

ANOTHER ANGLE: Joe traces a finger around Sharla's breasts.

JOE (CONT'D)

You know, you're a very beautiful woman.

(to Ansel)

Don't you think so?

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Ansel.

ANSEL

I haven't given it much thought --

ANOTHER ANGLE: Joe picks Sharla up by her head, about to snap her neck.

JOE

No. Wrong answer.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP: Ansel, weeping.

ANSEL

Yes. She is a very beautiful woman.

MEDIUM CLOSE-UP: Joe and Sharla.

JOE

(to Sharla)

That's sweet. Don't you think so?

She nods. He grabs her under the arms, hoists her to her feet.

JOE (CONT'D)

Now get your ass in that kitchen and set the table for a proper meal. Then we'll all sit down and eat. Just the four of us. Just the family.

She moves away slowly. He playfully whacks her on the ass; she runs to the kitchen sink and vomits.

Ansel sits at the kitchen table.

Joe grabs a couple of beers from the fridge, tosses one to Ansel, lights a cigarette, takes a long drink.

JOE (CONT'D)

How are you, guy?

ANSEL

Where'd you get them photographs?

JOE
Oh, that's hardly important.

ANSEL
I guess...

JOE
All she did was suck his cock and try to steal your money. Could've been worse.

ANSEL
How?

JOE
(beat)
Well, no. I suppose that's about as bad as it gets.
(then, privately:)
Spend time with your wife.

Joe exits down the hallway.

ANSEL
Sharla...

SHARLA
Yes?

ANSEL
Are you okay?

SHARLA
Yes, Ansel, I'm fine.

ANSEL
Are you sure?

SHARLA
Yes, I'm sure.

ANSEL
Okay.

He weeps. T-Bone barks.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
He's home.

Chris enters the trailer.

CHRIS
Hey there.

ANSEL
Hello, son.

CHRIS
Dottie here?

ANSEL
She's in the bedroom.

CHRIS
(eyeing the chicken bucket)
Thank God, I'm starvin'. You hear from
Joe?

ANSEL
He's in his bedroom.

Chris picks up the chicken leg from the floor, carries it
into the kitchen.

CHRIS
(to Sharla)
You eat already?

Dottie appears from the hallway. Her eyes look empty and
lifeless; she seems a little more spaced-out than usual.

DOTTIE
Hi, Chris.

Joe appears from the hallway, puts his arm around Dottie's
waist.

JOE
Junior! You're home!

CHRIS
Hi, Joe.

JOE
Hey, I heard about the money, and I gotta
tell you, I'm all broke up things didn't
work out --

CHRIS
Yeah, me too --

JOE
That's the way the world turns, right?

CHRIS
Huh --?

JOE
That's the way the cookie crumbles?

CHRIS
Yeah, okay --

JOE
Caveat emptor, you know what I mean?
Sharla rakes change, keys, everything from the kitchen table
onto the floor.

JOE (CONT'D)
A place for everything.
(extends his arm to Dottie)
Shall we dine?

She takes his arm and he ushers her to the table. Sharla
sets the table with paper plates and the bucket of chicken.

JOE (CONT'D)
It smells heavenly. Ansel? Chris? "K-
Fry-C?"

ANSEL
I'm not hungry, really...

JOE
You should join us, though. All of us.

The family gathers at the table and takes their seats.
Sharla continues setting the table with paper towels and
plastic silverware.

JOE (CONT'D)
Sharla, take your seat.

She does.

JOE (CONT'D)
Maybe I can scare us up some music.

He turns on the radio, finds some country-and-western music.
Stands back, observes the family at the table.

JOE (CONT'D)
This is lovely.
(takes his seat)
Who would like to say grace?

No response.

JOE (CONT'D)
Dottie? Will you do the honors?

The family clasps their hands, lowers their heads. They do not close their eyes.

DOTTIE

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for all the food. Thank you that we're all here together, and safe. We're sorry Momma's dead. We hope you'll give her a place to stay in Heaven. Please forgive us for anything we did wrong. We would all like a place to stay in Heaven, too.

In the Lord's name which is Jesus Christ, we say, "Amen."

JOE

Amen.

(to Dottie, privately)

That was beautiful.

DOTTIE

Thank you.

JOE

(to all)

Let's eat. Sharla, we need some drinks, please.

They eat. Sharla gets drinks. The others pass chicken, mashed potatoes, coleslaw. Joe directs, asking for iced tea, commenting on the meal, directing Sharla to finally sit and eat.

Finally, Joe taps his iced tea with a plastic "spork," stands, and extends his cup.

JOE (CONT'D)

I have an announcement to make:

You've all probably noticed Dottie and I have been spending an awful lot of time together. Fact is: We've fallen in love. So it's my privilege to tell you that I've asked her to be my bride. And she has accepted. Isn't that true, dear?

DOTTIE

Yes.

Silence.

ANSEL

Well, I, for one, am very happy for --

CHRIS

Shut up.

JOE

A toast: to my future wife.

Joe drinks. All but Chris follow suit.

CHRIS

When's all this supposed to take place?

JOE

(taking his seat)

We're leaving after this delicious meal.

CHRIS

(to Dottie)

Is that right?

DOTTIE

Yes.

CHRIS

You can't have my sister, Joe.

JOE

What do you mean?

CHRIS

I mean I can't let it happen. You're not going to marry my sister.

ANSEL

I don't think it's up to you --

CHRIS

Shut up.

ANSEL

Don't tell me to shut up --

CHRIS

Say another word, old man, and I'll rip your head off your shoulders.

JOE

I can certainly appreciate your love for your sister, but you have to cut the old apron strings sometimes --

CHRIS

I'm not gonna discuss it. She's my sister. I'm takin' her with me. We're leavin' here.

JOE

Maybe we should let Dottie decide --

CHRIS

Dottie doesn't have a say in the matter.

JOE

I believe she does --

CHRIS

You believe wrong. Dottie, go get your stuff.

JOE

(to Dottie)

Stay seated.

CHRIS

Dottie?

JOE

Dottie.

She stands.

JOE (CONT'D)

Take your seat, Dottie.

CHRIS

Go get your stuff.

JOE

Take your seat.

CHRIS

Dottie?

She walks toward the bedroom.

JOE

Dottie.

CHRIS

Go on, Dottie --

JOE

Stop --

CHRIS

Dottie, go get your stuff, now --

JOE

Dottie.

CHRIS

That a girl --

She reaches the hallway.

JOE

DOTTIE!!!

She stops in the doorway.

JOE (CONT'D)

She's my retainer.

CHRIS

Deal's off. You're gonna have to eat this one.

JOE

You know...you know I'll kill you.

CHRIS

Go fuck yourself.

Silence.

Joe drops his napkin on his plate, slowly stands.

Chris raises his hand from beneath the table. He is holding a .45. Ansel and Sharla jump from the table, back into the kitchen. Chris cocks the gun, steadies it, aims at Joe's head.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Take your seat, Joe.

Joe slowly sits as Chris rises and backs around the table.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Get your stuff, Dot --

Sharla grabs a knife from the kitchen counter, screams, buries it in Chris' upper chest, near his shoulder. The knife handle snaps off in her hand. Chris reels, shocked. The gun fires, striking the floor.

Joe flips the table over, charges Chris, buries his shoulder in Chris' stomach, and drives him into the wall. The gun flips out of Chris' hand into the living room. Dottie picks it up.

DOTTIE

Stop it!

JOE
YOU'RE DEAD, MOTHERFUCKER! DEAD!

Joe grabs the lamp cord, wraps it around Chris' neck, and heaves. Choked, dazed, Chris flies into a kind of seizure, doing anything he can to get free.

DOTTIE
STOP IT, JOE! STOP IT!

JOE
ANSEL, GRAB HIS LEGS!

Ansel falls on Chris' kicking legs, holds them tight under his arm. The three men writhe toward the living room.

ANSEL	DOTTIE
I GOT HIM JOE --!	STOP IT, DADDY --!

Sharla grabs a potato peeler from the sink and charges at Chris, who tries to twist his body out of the path of the blade. She sticks the peeler blade in his side, one, two, three times.

Chris flails, kicks off Ansel. Joe flings him around the room by the cord, smashing him into cabinets, counter, table, television, refrigerator.

JOE (CONT'D)
DIE, MOTHERFUCKER, DIE!

DOTTIE
(hysterical)
STOP IT, STOP IT, GOD!

ANSEL
HOLD HIM STILL, GODDAMN IT!

Chris backs up suddenly, smashing Joe against the wall. Joe loosens his grip -- Chris elbows him in the ribs. Joe gasps, falls to the floor. Chris approaches Dottie.

CHRIS
Dottie, the gun --

Ansel grabs Chris from behind, picks him up, squeezes him, throws him into the kitchen. Sharla smashes a beer bottle over Chris' head. Ansel shoves him into the refrigerator, holding him down.

DOTTIE
GOD, STOP IT, PLEASE, STOP IT!

Chris flails inside the refrigerator. Shelves, beers, tumble out of the fridge.

ANSEL
JOE, KILL HIM! I GOT HIM!

Chris tries to struggle out of the refrigerator, but Joe is suddenly there, beating the hell out of Chris.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
SHARLA, GRAB HIM --!

JOE
GODDAMN YOU, DIE!

Sharla jumps on Chris' feet, pins them to the floor. Ansel holds Chris down while Joe continues beating on him.

ANSEL
DO IT, JOE, KILL HIM!

SHARLA
KILL HIM! KILL HIM!

DOTTIE
I'M GETTING ANGRY!

JOE
DIE, DIE, DIE!

Dottie fires the gun, striking the radio. Joe, Ansel and Sharla immediately roll out of the way and look at Dottie. Chris pulls himself out of the refrigerator and looks at her also. She points the gun at him.

CHRIS
Dottie?

She fires, strikes him squarely in the chest, rockets him back into the refrigerator. Sharla screams.

ANSEL
Jesus --

Dottie pivots, shoots Ansel in the stomach. He falls to his knees, clutching the hole in his stomach. Blood spills from his mouth. Sharla screams again.

ANSEL (CONT'D)
Oh, my Christ, honey...

SHARLA
(hysterical)
DON'T KILL ME, DOTTIE!

Sharla scrambles behind Ansel, wraps her arms around him.

SHARLA (CONT'D)
PLEASE DON'T LET HER KILL ME!

Joe starts toward Dottie. She pivots, points the gun at his head. He backs against the wall.

JOE
Now, Dottie...just take it easy.

She aims carefully.

JOE (CONT'D)
Hold on, now. Be safe.

She cocks the gun.

JOE (CONT'D)
Oh, God...

She tenses, squeezing the trigger slightly.

DOTTIE
I'm gonna have a baby.

Joe looks at her, uncertain.

JOE
A baby?
(beat)
A baby?

He smiles broadly, proudly...

JOE (CONT'D)
A baby!

FIVE CAMERA SHOTS, RAPID-FIRE CUTS:

Ansel holding his stomach.

Sharla crying behind him.

Chris dead in the refrigerator.

Joe smiling.

Dottie with her finger tensed on the trigger...

SMASH CUT TO:

BLACK.

END CREDITS.