

"We All Scream for Ice Cream"

1

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

1

FADE IN:

TIGHT on a melting ICE CREAM BAR on a stick. In a child's hand. Hot. DRIP ... DRIP ... DRIP.

KENT (O.S.)

Kenny? Son? Please don't.

A WASH of COLD FOG REVEALS KENT BAFLE (mid-40s), speaking TO CAMERA. Growing panic. Cold sweats. Entreating his 7-year-old son, KENNY. Desperate.

KENT (CONT'D)

This is your Dad talking, Kenny.
Don't eat that.

KENNY (O.S.)

Why?

KENT

It's really, really bad for you.

KENNY shakes his head no.

KENNY

Naah it isn't. They say this is the
best ice cream in the whole world.

PUSH IN AND HOLD on Kenny as he PEELS the pink-and-gold foil further down the melting ice cream bar. We don't see the BAR clearly ... YET. (All we see is a vague creamsicle.)

KENT

No! It's not! Kenny, honey -
(corrects)
-- son, please don't!

Kenny's expression DARKENS.

KENNY

You shouldn't have grounded me.

And ;CRUNCH! he takes a lusty BITE as Kent begins to SCREAM in pain o.s. HOLD ON KENNY as his POV slowly TILTS, as if his Dad is MELTING right before his eyes. Kenny SNICKERS.

And a blast wave of COLD FOG VAPOR ROLLS AROUND HIM.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

1

PAPA JOE (V.O.)

I'm not going to shovel up a lot of
horse pucky about how in the midst
of life we are in death --

2 **EXT. CEMETERY - DAY**

2

Kent's funeral. Headstone. About 20 mourners.

The unrehearsed, halting eulogy is being improvised by PAPA
JOE (50), a gruff, Hemingwayesque 300+ pounds.

PAPA JOE

-- but we sure did lose a good
friend in Kent Bafler.

*

Clear consternation from some of the more devout.

PAPA JOE (CONT'D)

I knew Kent since he was as tall as
his son Kenny, there.

A disconsolate DARLENE BAFLER stands by, holding KENNY's
hand. He looks mildly blank. Vaguely malevolent.

PAPA JOE (CONT'D)

We had an informal little gang. I
see Layne's with us today.

ON LAYNE BANNIXTER (late-40s), an engineer who has traveled
the world and settled for the small-town. Our principal.
Uncomfortable as eyes TURN to judge him.

As Papa Joe speechifies (BELOW), Layne GLIMPSES in the
distance near the treeline a LANKY MAN with a scraggly gray
BEARD. Bare-chested, wearing a hide vest. Just a blink and
he's GONE. A spy who did not wish to be seen.

PAPA JOE (CONT'D)

Called ourselves the West End Bunch
because of, y'know, that Wild Bunch
movie. Typical kid hijinks. But
time's passed while we weren't
looking, my friends, and Kent got
to be a daddy with his own kids,
and ...

(hitches in sorrow)

It seems to me to be way too soon
to be sending him down to meet the
earth.

KENNY's expression stays neutral, fixed. Creepy.

3

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY - LATER

3

Mourners are filing past tossing flowers into Kent's grave.
Papa Joe moves to Layne.

LAYNE

Guess Toot couldn't make it.

Papa Joe harrumphs, knowing better.

PAPA JOE

Guess Toot prefers to drink his
respects to the dead. That leaves
what, four out of the old Bunch?

LAYNE

You're forgetting Virg Constance.

PAPA JOE

Wish I could forget that nasty-ass,
good-for-nothing peckerwood.

LAYNE

He was here. I saw him. Guess he
still lives here, too?

WIND GUST. Unseasonably chilly. Collars turn up.

PAPA JOE

He never left.
(beat; brrrr!)
Damn but it sure got cold fast.

DARLENE sizes Layne up. Finds him lacking.

DARLENE

You shouldn't have moved back here.
(re: grave)
That should be you.

Layne's mouth is stalled in shock as MOURNERS ferry Darlene
away. All he can do is watch her exit.

*

4

EXT. BRIARWOOD STREET - DAY

4

Layne barrels home in his working-class plush Silverado full-
sized pickup. Turns off main drags to residential streets.

He STOPS at BRIARWOOD STREET. Looks UP the STEEP HILL.

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED:

4

He HEARS distant, tinkly NOTES OS (we will later learn to be the CHEERY-TYME ICE CREAM TRUCK THEME). Vague. He rolls down a window. The music evaporates. Maybe imaginary.

Then Layne notices a A KID (10 or 11, later PETEY EMBRY) at the corner. Practically STARING Layne down, like a dare. The kid FOLDS HIS ARMS defiantly. Same creepy feel as KENNY, earlier. Layne almost recognizes him. Not quite.

A tension BEAT before Layne zooms away.

5 **EXT. OAK HILL DRIVE - DAY**

5

Layne tools into his drive. An architect's house, the SOLD sign down (but not yet unearthed) in a large yard next to an abandoned Big Wheel. He parks alongside his wife's SUV.

He ENTERS through the kitchen side door. Boxes and detritus stacked outside the door indicate a major degree of UNPACKING still going on. A THERMOMETER posted on the door molding (OUTSIDE but visible from the kitchen) announces 72 degrees. But Layne is still cold.

LAYNE
(to thermometer)
You're shittin' me.

6 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

6

Layne's saucy wife ANGELA (late 30s) is at the sink.

ANGELA
Who's getting shat?

Layne is ecstatic to see his wife. Wraps her up in a big hug.

LAYNE
Well, you're warm. That thing says
72 degrees but it's freezing out
there.

She automatically feels his forehead.

ANGELA
Maybe you're getting sick, baby.
(beat)
So? How did it go?

LAYNE
It went. Kent went. Into the dirt.
I didn't stick around for the
finger food.

(CONTINUED)

He tries to pull back but Angela keeps him hugged.

ANGELA

I'm sorry I couldn't go. But you know: I had to pick up Toby and drop off MaryLyn and --

Layne waves this off. No worries.

TOBY (O.S.)

Hey Daddy.

TOBY (5) bounds down stairs to join in.

LAYNE

Hey boss.

TOBY

You bring ice cream?

Layne frowns, pats himself down. A trick question?

LAYNE

Uh ... nope?

TOBY

Then where were you?

Angela and Layne exchange a rueful glance.

LAYNE

I went to see an old friend of mine.

TOBY

How's he doing?

A real choke-up moment for Layne and Angela.

LAYNE

He's resting now, boss.

TOOT (V.O.)

Bang, one more dead soldier.

An old-school log-beam and animal-head liquor lounge/steak joint. TOOT EMBRY (mid-40s) has just turned over an empty shot glass. Six more on the bar. He chases it too fast with beer and slops it.

TOOT

Whoops.

A scary moment of lucidity as Toot leans forward and enumerates with his fingers. Sly, confidential, tipsy.

TOOT (CONT'D)

God's truth. Listen to me, now:
Skip was first. Then Kent.

PAPA JOE

Skip died in a car crash.

Toot is shaking his head grimly.

TOOT

See? That's why watching the news just makes you stupider. Skip Stockwell's car was found. Not wrecked. Parked at a curb. With just his clothing inside.

PAPA JOE

(trying for levity)
You mean there's a possibility that Skip might still be on the loose, naked? Man, I don't even want to picture that in my mind.

TOOT

Well, here's something you don't know, smartass: Did you look in Kent Bafler's casket today?

PAPA JOE

No. Closed box.

TOOT

Know why? 'Cos all that was left of him to bury was his clothes, too.

PAPA JOE

I just sense that deep down, there's a point to all this, right?

TOOT

It all happened since Layne moved back to town.

Papa Joe is boggled. Say what?!

(CONTINUED)

PAPA JOE

Layne ...?

TOOT

Layne.

Said just as LAYNE ENTERS. Both Papa Joe and Toot STARE as if Layne entered on cue and was PAGED.

LAYNE

What ...?

DISSOLVE off Layne's expression TO:

8 **INT. PAPA JOE'S COZY GRILL - DAY**

8 *

Neon SIGNS now lit. TOOT snoozing in a vacant booth. Layne into his third beer. Papa Joe tends customers and stops back to reminisce further.

LAYNE

I see Toot hasn't changed much.

PAPA JOE

He tried Jesus once and AA twice and failed at all three. He's just on your case because --

Layne SIGHS and takes a long pull of draft beer. Good.

LAYNE

(interposing; defensive)
-- because I left town. Now I'm back. So obviously I must be to blame for the old West End Bunch dying off? Toot shouldn't be pointing fingers.

PAPA JOE

Bad timing, I guess, Skip and Kent dying?

LAYNE

No it isn't. It's middle age, no mystery.

PAPA JOE

Sez you.

Joe ambles to a nearby table with a candle burning on it. Six vacant chairs, one tilted against the table.

(CONTINUED)

PAPA JOE (CONT'D)

Either way this kinda shit's all
over my idea we could have some
sort of half-assed reunion. You
know, to welcome you back.

*

Joe TILTS up a second chair (ie., Kent).

LAYNE

Well that's nice and morbid, Joe.

PAPA JOE

What in high holy hell has Darlene
Bafler got against you?

Layne shrugs. A mystery. Papa Joe leans close.

PAPA JOE (CONT'D)

Tell me true now, Layne old buddy:
You ain't one of them serial
killers, are you?

LAYNE

I hate cereal.

Papa Joe puffs up like a judge.

PAPA JOE

Good. Case closed. You're free to
go. Give Angela a big smooch for
me.

(punch line)

You know where.

LAYNE

In your wet dreams, big boy.

Layne glances at unconscious Toot. Concern lingers.

LAYNE (CONT'D)

You'll see him home?

PAPA JOE

Yeah, I'll get Buck to drive him.

Layne is homeward bound and it's about 11:30 P.M. LAYNE SEES
A KID IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

9 CONTINUED:

9

Five or six, trotting along ahead of him, sneakers reflecting in the dark. Holding a pink-and-gold foil-wrapped something in his hand.

The KID looks back. Sees Layne. And VEERS OFF into the bushes, melting from sight like a ninja.

Layne SLOWS and swivels a wing-mounted SEARCHLIGHT on the spot. Nothing. But further on, he SEES:

TWO MORE KIDS - PAM EMBRY (14) and JEREMY STOCKWELL (5), Toot's daughter and Skip's son. As Layne's truck PASSES on a slow cruise, Pam pulls Jeremy protectively closer, GLARING with adolescent disdain toward the truck. *

9A INT. LAYNE'S TRUCK - NIGHT - LATER

9A

Layne checks his watch against the dash clock. Almost midnight. Definitely odd. A GUST OF COLD FOGS the truck windshield and Layne punches the defogger.

LAYNE

Dammit ...

FURTHER ON - LAYNE MAKES THE TURN TO HIS HOUSE

As the windshield CLEARS:

LAYNE (CONT'D)

Fuck --!

He STANDS ON THE BRAKES. In the road ahead is TOBY on his determined way out. In his jammies.

Toby BLINKS in the headlights, almost nailed. Layne JUMPS from the truck. Paternal, firm, more frightened.

LAYNE (CONT'D)

What're you doing out here, boss?!

Holy shit, it's -

(oops, back up!)

I mean, holy cow, it's way past your ... does Mom know you're out here?!

Toby BLINKS as though up from a trance. Layne is kneeling, holding his by the arms. Toby's hand UNFURLS to reveal a shiny QUARTER.

(CONTINUED)

Distantly, the three-note "Cheery-Tyme" theme plays O.S. We can almost feel Layne's spit drying up, his gooseflesh.

TOBY WHISPERS, his eyes defocussed.

TOBY

I don't wanna miss him.

LAYNE

Who, boss?

TOBY

The man in the truck.

We can FEEL the temperature DROP as Layne's spine chills.

Then: the sound of a cheese-grater VOICE (later: the voice of BUSTER DOCKINS) on a loudspeaker, tinny, ECHOING like a ghost from the faraway past:

BUSTER (V.O.)

I scream!

An equally UNSEEN chorus of KIDS responds in kind:

KIDS (V.O.)

I scream!

BUSTER (V.O.)

You scream!

KIDS (V.O.)

You scream!

ON LAYNE as his lips quietly repeat an old mantra:

LAYNE

You scream ...

BUSTER (V.O.)

We all scream!

KIDS (V.O.)

We all scream!

TIGHT ON LAYNE

As the auditory hallucinations VANISH and he is left looking uncomprehendingly into the eyes of his son:

(CONTINUED)

TOBY
... for ice cream.

Layne is definitely shaken. He grabs Toby by the forearms. A bit too forcibly.

LAYNE
Where did you hear that?

10 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

10

Layne swigs water to rinse his mouth and pops a breath freshener. ANGELA bustles down the stairs B.G. in a flimsy bathrobe.

ANGELA
(apologetic)
Swear to god I don't know what happened, sweetie. He was in bed by nine. I must've dozed off or something ...

LAYNE
(almost accusatory)
"Dozed off?"

Angela is genuinely mystified. Gropes the air.

ANGELA
Well, your son is now sleeping like he's in a coma, and he's not running a fever, although I'm not so sure about you, big man.
(suddenly horrified)
Oh, god ... if ... he'd ... I don't know what happened. You know I'd never --

Layne collects her into his arms. Sigh of decompression.

LAYNE
I'm not angry. I'm rattled. And I'm scared to death. And I don't like being scared.
(beat)
What about MaryLyn?

ANGELA
Your daughter, with her amazing ability to make new friends at the speed of light, is having a sleep-over at some new buddy's house.

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

10

He indicates a Post-It on the fridge with a number for "Agnes Burke."

LAYNE

That the new buddy?

Angela NODS.

LAYNE (CONT'D)

Call and make sure she's there.

11 **EXT. ROAD - NIGHT**

11

Papa Joe's lovingly preserved maroon '62 Coupe de Ville barrels down the roadway.

12 **INT. CADDY - NIGHT - TRAVELING**

12

Papa Joe's son BUCK, a big high school footballer, at the wheel. Riding shotgun, a barely-conscious, thoroughly-lubricated TOOT, listing against the window.

The Cheery-Tyme theme is heard O.S. Just a few notes that cause Toot physical pain.

TOOT

Oh, jeezus, stop the music!

BUCK

What music?

Buck obviously does not hear the tune. Toot REALIZES this and tries to cover:

TOOT

What I mean, Buck, my young savior,
is I think you're gonna hafta pull
this beast over, double-quick.
Ulp! Stop, stop, stop!

13 **EXT. FLAT SHORES PARK - NIGHT**

13

A deserted small-town park. The Caddy HALTS in a dust cloud as Toot debarks and hustles for the treeline.

14 **EXT. BRIARWOOD STREET - NIGHT** 14

At the crest of the hill, in the middle of the night, stands PETEY EMBRY, a QUARTER in his grasp. Expectant. Chilly HEADLIGHTS illuminate him and we HEAR O.S. the "Cheery-Tyme" theme.

15 **EXT. FLAT SHORES PARK - NIGHT - RESUMING** 15

Buck steps out to lean against the Caddy. O.S. SOUNDS of Toot violently blowing breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert. Buck winces. Grabs his jacket. It's gotten COLD.

16 **EXT. BRIARWOOD STREET - NIGHT - RESUMING PETEY** 16

A bizarre, icy GLOW suffuses Petey's upturned face as a WHITE-GLOVED HAND rimed in ICE extends a pink-and-gold wrapped Cheery-Tyme ice cream bar to him. Condensation STEAMS off the odd treat.

BUSTER (O.S.)
Go ahead ... get even.

17 **EXT. FLAT SHORES PARK - NIGHT - RESUMING** 17

ON TOOT, leaning against a tree, looking UP to cough and spit and SEE:

VIRG CONSTANCE: Grubby, gamey, malnourished, flyblown beard, with the reedy strength of a crystal meth abuser. Fearsome. Just as we saw him in the cemetery. His eyes seem to iridesce in the dark.

Toot HOLLERS in sudden fright.

Buck turns back.

BUCK
Mr. Embry ... you okay?

WITH BUCK back into the treeline as he SEES:

TOOT'S CLOTHING -- a Toot shape -- COLLAPSES in a steaming flood of multicolored GLOP. A last watery RATTLE from Toot, or rather, from where Toot was just standing.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

17

BUCK'S POV: VIRG

Standing in the shadows just PAST where Toot was. Glaring.
A silhouette. Just a blink and he's GONE.

18 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

18

Angela ENTERS in a robe, reading glasses on her head.

ANGELA

Okay, bed check reveals MaryLyn and
Agnes all nestled where they're
supposed to be, visions of
sugarplums, all that jazz.

Layne has just dumped his change on the bureau. His
attention is fixated on a QUARTER there. As Angela SPEAKS he
subaurally repeats the old mantra:

LAYNE

We all scream ... for ice cream.

ANGELA

Say again?

LAYNE

Nothing.

Angela drifts up behind him. Sympathetic, slightly randy.

LAYNE (CONT'D)

I mean, it's weird. I saw other
kids out there too, and it's after
midnight. I'm pretty sure I saw
Skip's kid, whatsisname -

ANGELA

Jeremy.

LAYNE

Yeah. Standing in the yard with Pam
Embry, you know, her Grandma's
yard?

ANGELA

Beth moved their kids out again.
Toot's drinking - you know.

It's an old, sad story. Not the first time.

(CONTINUED)

LAYNE

Yeah, I got a load of him at Papa Joe's.

(beat)

And no, you don't have to worry. I would never get intoxicated enough to mow down my own son.

ANGELA

I didn't even think it. Say, does it feel cold to you all of a sudden?

She has a gamine gleam in her eye. She takes off her glasses.

LAYNE

Glasses on. It's sexier.

19 **EXT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

19

TIGHT on what looks like the side of a huge freezer. A layer of FROST FILLS FRAME. We HEAR a O.S. voice HUMMING the "Cheery-Tyme" theme: BUSTER's voice.

The white-gloved HAND we saw earlier WIPES across what we now realize is the side panel of a TRUCK. WIPES frost away to reveal a faded "Cheery-Tyme" LOGO.

BUSTER CHUCKLES O.S., dry and glottal.

LONG SHOT of the Truck (FROZEN VERSION) chuddering away from Layne's house slowly, exuding icy vapor.

20 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER**

20

Layne and Angela naked in subdued light. It has not gone well.

ANGELA

Talk now? Or do I tease you some more?

LAYNE

Sorry, babe. I had a weird kind of, I don't know, what would you call it? A flashback. Old stuff. Not nice stuff. The kind that doesn't go away.

Angela's reply is tolerant, sing-song, "I told you so."

(CONTINUED)

ANGELA

That's why I didn't want to move
back here ...

LAYNE

I know, I know.

Layne rummages in the night stand for an old, little-used
pack of smokes and lights one up to Angela's dismay.

ANGELA

You're supposed to do that after.
You know, to subtly indicate what
great sex you just had?
(off his frown)
Sorry.

The time is ripe for confessional but it is very difficult
for Layne. He tries.

LAYNE

When you were a kid, did you ever
tease other kids? I mean, in a bad
way, the kind you regret for the
rest of your life?

Angela is taken aback but ponders it. Indicates her GLASSES.

ANGELA

You mean like calling kids with
glasses "four eyes," shit like
that?

LAYNE

(understating)
Slightly worse.

ANGELA

Uh-oh.

LAYNE

Kent Bafler. Me, Toot, Papa Joe and
a kid named Skip Stockwell. We
were the West End Bunch.

TWO KIDS loiter curb side, peering up and down the street in
anticipation. (Hit the STREET SIGN again to cue us.)

(NB: AMBIENCE and WARDROBE should be period 1971; FILM STOCK possibly VARIANT or black-and-white.)

YOUNG LAYNE checks the QUARTER clutched in his hand. He checks the street. Nothing. Yet. His cohort is YOUNG TOOT.

YOUNG LAYNE
They say it's the best ice cream in
the whole world.

YOUNG TOOT
Who says?

YOUNG LAYNE
(shrugs)
Who cares, Toot? It's Cheery-Tyme.

YOUNG TOOT
Cherry-Time?

YOUNG LAYNE
That's what it's called: Cheery-
Tyme Ice Cream.

Young Toot puzzles this with 8-year-old seriousness.

YOUNG TOOT
Why, Layne?

YOUNG LAYNE
That's what he says: "Ch-ch-ch-
Cheery-Tyme."

Young Layne wiggles his eyebrows.

YOUNG LAYNE (CONT'D)
You'll see. Just wait.

They look down the street. In the distance, some OTHER KIDS are out doing curb duty.

ENTER YOUNG JOE, still formidably hefty and a bit older than Young Layne and Young Toot. He PEERS down-road.

YOUNG LAYNE (CONT'D)
Hey, Big Joe.

YOUNG TOOT gives a preadolescent nod of welcome.

YOUNG JOE
Where's the rest of the Bunch?

(CONTINUED)

Young Layne and Young Toot SHRUG exaggeratedly.

YOUNG LAYNE
Jerkin' off.

YOUNG TOOT
Look!

LONG SHOT - The CHEERY-TYME TRUCK stops at the apex of hill. It has already attracted about five kids. If you've ever seen one of the old Mr. Softee trucks, you know the look: white panel truck, bad suspension, bald tires, festooned with stickers of frozen confections, a jolly painted "Cheery-Tyme" logo all over, maybe some exterior strings of holiday lights, psychedelic rainbow paint scheme, circus hubcaps, and rooftop-mounted airhorn-style speakers for the tinny music. Topping off the roof is a big, goofy Cheery-Tyme ice cream bar in a very characteristic pink-and-gold wrapper we see on all the Cheery-Tyme confections.

(The INSIDE of the truck - which we'll get to - is the domain of BUSTER DOCKINS, who has collected hundreds of hanging trinkets, bumper stickers, grade-school drawings by kids, plastic dinosaurs, anything and everything that would appeal to a slightly "challenged," slow-uptake adult.)

We can HEAR Buster's Peewee-style VOICE over the LOUDSPEAKER:

BUSTER (V.O.)
Who's ready for today's ... special ...
FLAVOR?!

The kids on the hilltop flock to the truck's serving window.

YOUNG LAYNE
Let's go up.

YOUNG JOE
I gotta see this.

AT THE TRUCK

BUSTER DOCKINS bounds from the open rear of the truck to dispense ice cream and collect quarters. He is always moving, almost a manic kid himself. Animated.

The smaller kids like his antics best. He is tricked out like a big top stunt clown: overalls, big fake squirt-flower, striped shirt, striped socks, white cloth gloves. A bald cap with a fringe of scarlet hair. White face makeup. A bulbous red NOSE that LIGHTS UP when he wants it to.

(CONTINUED)

He reaches back into the truck and with a magician's flourish hands a wrapped ice cream bar to JESSICA (7, pigtails) and jerks his hand back as though burned.

BUSTER
Yoww! Hot potato, hot potato!
Gotta put out that fire!

Buster holds out his fingers. Squeezing a hidden bulb in his pocket with his other hand. Water spritzes from the SQUIRT FLOWER onto his hand and splashes Jessica, who giggles and hands him a quarter.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Psssst! Ahh, that's better! Who's next, who's next?

A LITTLE BOY (ERKY,6) steps up.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Geez, you know I know somebody who looks exactly like you, exceptin' his name is Erky.

ERKY
I'm Erky, Buster - you know that!

Buster whips out a giant magnifying glass and scrutinizes Erky. Buster's NOSE blinks on and off. Buster's occasional STUTTER sneaks out:

BUSTER
You sure you ain't gotta twin b-b-brother? Oh my, oh my --!

Another blast on the loudspeaker, with feedback:

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Ladies and gentlemen, it's Erky!
Let's g-give him a big hand!

Buster WAVES - what else? - a huge foam hand, making a Harpo horn noise. The kids APPLAUD. Erky hands over his quarter. Beneath Buster's manic patter we detect a slight hesitancy and a sense of rote, almost as if he is barely within operational limits making 6-year-olds giggle.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Nope, nope, nope, nosirree, you were the first to call me by name, so yours is FREE! But first --

21 CONTINUED: (4)

21

Buster begins to JUGGLE. Ice cream, squeak toys, whatever he has at hand. OVER THIS:

LAYNE (V.O.)

Buster was born "disadvantaged," as we'd say today. When he got older he was just savvy enough to drive that truck and sell ice cream.

(PAUSE THE FLASHBACK.)

22 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT - RESUMING**

22

Angela thinks she already knows the end of this story.

ANGELA

Until he played the Sneaky Eel Game with the parson's daughter, right?

LAYNE

Au contraire. Buster put on that makeup and fake nose, it was like he'd found a persona, where nobody could tease him. The kids were his friends. He was theirs.

ANGELA

Any exceptions?

LAYNE

Yeah. Our unofficial gang bully.

23 **EXT. BRIARWOOD STREET - DAY - (FLASHBACK RESUMES)**

23

LAYNE (V.O. / CONT'D)

Virgil Constance.

WITH THE BOYS TROOPING UP THE HILL

They are joined - surprise attack - from behind by YOUNG VIRG, *sallow, mean, illiterate.*

YOUNG VIRG

Hey, queers.
(needling Joe)
Doncha know ice cream'll make ya fat?

YOUNG LAYNE

Shut up, Virg.

(CONTINUED)

Young Virg HEADLOCKS Young Layne for an Indian burn.

YOUNG JOE
Cripes, Virg knock it off!

YOUNG TOOT
Quit it, you guys!

YOUNG VIRG
Fight me back, ya pussy.

Joe YANKS Virg back. Joe is just big enough for Virg not to commence a fight.

YOUNG JOE
Virg is fighting the crazy squirrel
inside his head.

Virg's eyes glint evilly. He displays the QUARTER he snatched from Layne's hand.

YOUNG VIRG
Layne's treat? Gee, thanks.

Virg, Layne and Joe STOP, facing off. TOOT races ahead to the truck.

YOUNG LAYNE
Give it back.

YOUNG JOE
Yeah, Virg, give it back.

Virg relishes a terrorist sense of control, eyes glinting. He flips the quarter onto the pavement.

YOUNG VIRG
Eat it.

AT THE TRUCK — YOUNG TOOT HAS ARRIVED

Buster peers DOWN at Toot. Something not quite right. But he FLASHES a comic grin.

YOUNG TOOT
I'd like a drumstick, please.

Buster whips out a foiled ice-cream drumstick.

(CONTINUED)

BUSTER

You can't play the drums with this!
(Harpo honk-honk)
Baboom! Here ya go!

Layne, Virg and Joe have caught up. Joe rolls his eyes at Buster's routine. Virg sullenly lights a cigarette.

YOUNG JOE

Oh, brother.

Layne steps up while Virg and Joe hang back.

BUSTER

You're a new face! What would you
be c-c-called?

YOUNG LAYNE

Layne Bannixter, sir.

BUSTER

"Sir?!" "Sir?!"

A whoopee whistle sounds piercingly, blown by Buster in celebration.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

You don't hafta call me sir, sir.
Sir, I get to call you sir, yessir.
What'll ya have there, kind sir,
good sir Layne?

As Buster babbles we FAVOR VIRG AND JOE.

YOUNG VIRG

(derisory)
What's wrong with this picture?

YOUNG JOE

They say he was born retarded or
... something.

The cruel LIGHT sparks again in Virg's eyes.

YOUNG VIRG

A retard?
(to Layne)
Don't eat that shit, Layne.
Retardo the Clown probably beat his
meat on it.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG LAYNE

Blow it out your ass, Virg.

Joe CRACKS UP at this display of bravado. Virg's expression clouds and he SHOVES his way to the front. To Buster:

YOUNG VIRG

Hey, c'mere, I wanna ask you something.

Buster leans closer. Virg blows smoke in his face.

BUSTER

You gotta question, I gotta answer, I'm the answer man! What c-c-can I do ya for?

YOUNG VIRG

What's up with this nose?

Virg PULLS OFF Buster's blinking nose. Buster RECOILS in horror with a feminine SHRIEK. Because there is a gaping BLANKNESS where his real nose should be. Smooth flesh like burn scars, uneven twin slits, but no nose.

Gape-mouthed, flat-out-scared, Virg takes a backward stumble onto his butt, still holding the red nose. Some of the younger kids SHRIEK along with Buster, thinking it's a game.

YOUNG VIRG (CONT'D)

Holy fucking shit, he ain't got no nose!

The kids SCATTER. Buster is CRYING.

YOUNG JOE

Hey, he didn't mean it! He's sorry, okay? Virg, tell him you're sorry, for christ's sake.

Joe TURNS to see Layne looking down at Virg's crotch, which has slowly darkened.

YOUNG LAYNE

You wet your pants, man.

Here comes Virg, full of fresh vinegar. His ONCOMING FIST (at Layne) BLACKS OUT FRAME at the SOUND of his PUNCH.

(PAUSE THE FLASHBACK.)

24 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT - RESUMING** 24

This recollect is not without its comedy. Bells are ringing for Angela, too.

ANGELA
What happened to Buster?

LAYNE
(vague)
He died. Later.

ANGELA
What happened to the delinquent,
whatsisname --?

LAYNE
Virg. Virg had a special hate on
for me, god knows why.

ANGELA
Kid crap.

LAYNE
Basically. Except now I'm starting
to think that since we've moved
back here, Virg has decided to mess
with us. The Bunch. Same shit,
different decade. I swear I saw him
at Kent's funeral. Just for an
instant.

ANGELA
A showdown, after all this time?

LAYNE
That's sure what it stinks like.

ANGELA
You'll just have to work it out in
your head. You'll see an answer.
You always do.

She arches up to kiss him and they begin to make love.

Sex at last! ... until, inevitably, the PHONE RINGS. We hear Layne's frustrated GROAN from the tangled sheets.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
No! Don't you! Dare! Answer that!
Phone! I'll -

(CONTINUED)

BEEP as the answering machine picks up and PAPA JOE's frantic VOICE is heard:

PAPA JOE (V.O./PHONE)
Layne? Pick up. Layne! I know it's
late, but you've gotta pick up!
Layne!

With a bestial roar of scuttlement, Layne EMERGES.

LAYNE
Ahhhhh, goddammit!
(picks up phone)
I'm here, Joe.

Angela knows: only one reason for calls like this: bad news.

PAPA JOE (V.O./PHONE)
Christ, Layne, I'm sorry to wake
you up so late, but --

LAYNE
I wasn't asleep.

PAPA JOE on the scene with Layne and Buck. Buck holds his flashlight beam where Toot WAS, where now only his clothes remain in a jumble in the dirt, suffused with running clots of glistening, slimy brown GOOP.

LAYNE
Oh, crap.

PAPA JOE
Not crap. No smell. See?

BUCK
I hollered for him but he didn't
make a sound. Don't make no sense,
for him to just run off buff-ass
naked, even if he was drunk.
(to Joe)
Right?

PAPA JOE
Probably fell down, hit his stupid
head on a rock, now we gotta play
Find the Inebriate.

BUCK
I saw somebody else.

Layne and Papa Joe look at each other, both thinking, now, wait just a friggin' minute.

LAYNE
Not Toot?

BUCK
Nossir. Some old hairbag. Big guy. Straggly beard, like a hillbilly? Crazy eyes. I could see his eyes in the dark.

PAPA JOE
Virg Constance, betcha ten. Next to him, shit house rats have etiquette.

Layne surveys the scene.

LAYNE
Remember what Toot said about just the clothes being left behind?

PAPA JOE
Toot could just be fucking with us, but then this is a little complex for him.

LAYNE
Joe, call the cops.

PAPA JOE
For what? This ain't no crime. We ain't got no body. The best we can do is "vanishment."

Off Layne's reaction.

MARYLYN, a heartbreaker at 11, sits as though suffering Gestapo interrogation the following morning.

MARYLYN
We didn't go anywhere. We didn't do anything wrong.

ANGELA doesn't know how to frame the questions and doesn't want to appear too harsh.

ANGELA

Toby was out in the middle of the road in the middle of the night, and he said --

MARYLYN

I'm not his baby sitter!

ANGELA

I know, honey, you were at Agnes's, but ... while you were at Agnes's ... are you sure you didn't just go out and ... forget?

There is trust here, so MaryLyn decides to divulge:

MARYLYN

Mom. Agnes and I didn't go anywhere. We really didn't.

(a beat, then)

But I had a kind of dream, or a nightmare, where we did go out, because we wanted, like dessert. Ice cream. But that was stupid, because -

ANGELA

Nobody's open.

This seems like a great relief to MaryLyn. Yeah, that's it.

MARYLYN

Totally.

LAYNE ENTERS, having risen very late.

LAYNE

Hey, beautiful.

(beat)

Either one of you.

He gratefully accepts coffee from Angela.

LAYNE (CONT'D)

Calls?

ANGELA

Nothing about Toot.

LAYNE

Dammit.

(CONTINUED)

ANGELA
Just some from other -
(catches herself)
I'll tell you later.

MaryLyn rolls her eyes. Grown-up crap. And EXITS.

LAYNE
Sounds bad.

ANGELA
From what Nora Pickton says, a lot
of parents "just dozed off" last
night. And a lot of kids ...
wandered.

LAYNE
The Little Rascals plotting the
overthrow of the parental
oppressors in the dead of night?

Angela gnaws a knuckle. Thinks about it.

ANGELA
Daytime, they're okay. Nighttime ...

LAYNE
We'll see.

27 **EXT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

27

CLOSE on the porch THERMOMETER. It is a summery 72 degrees. A
whisper of COLD FOG WAFTS PAST and the temperature PLUNGES to
32 degrees.

28 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

28

Layne is dozing in a chair. Fitful. OVER we hear:

TOBY (O.S.)
"Ch-ch-Cheery-Tyme ..."

Layne jolts awake. All is well. THEN, B.G. (we see it before
Layne does) TOBY beelines for the front door in his jammies
with feet. It takes Layne an absurd second to REACT and jump
up to intercept him.

LAYNE
Hey! Whoa, boss, where're you
headed?

(CONTINUED)

Toby, HOLDING A QUARTER, BLINKS a couple of times and focuses on his father.

TOBY
The best ice cream in the whole world.

Layne's expression curdles. He scoops Toby into his arms and heads back for the stairs. Toby has gone alarmingly LIMP in his grasp.

WITH LAYNE UP THE STAIRS

STICK WITH LAYNE as he RUSHES to MaryLyn's room, kicks open the door. Nobody home. OPEN WINDOW.

LAYNE
Goddammit.

He dashes into his bedroom, where Angela sleeps.

LAYNE (CONT'D)
Honey!

Angela STIRS as if from a coma.

LAYNE (CONT'D)
Angela - wake up!

Angela STIRS, groggy, long enough for Layne to DUMP Toby on top of her, loop one of her arms around the child.

ANGELA
(sleepy)
What ...?

LAYNE
Watch him!

Now he PILES DOWN THE STAIRS, pell-mell, and OUT the front door.

A chilly FOG has descended but Layne can see MARYLYN, also in nightclothes, halfway across the bridge to the road.

LAYNE
MaryLyn!

He CHASES, catches up, CALLS her name to no effect and has to physically IMPEDE her progress. Unlike Toby, MaryLyn seems to GO BERSERK, kicking and flailing.

MARYLYN
No! No! Let go of me!

LAYNE
MaryLyn! What the hell --!

MARYLYN
Let go it's the best ice cream in
the whole world let go of me I HATE
YOU!

It's like trying to hug a bobcat. SUDDENLY MaryLyn goes completely SLACK in Layne's grasp, expression strangely BLANK, her eyes VACANT. Layne stares toward the road.

HEADLIGHTS, there in the fog.

LAYNE
Come on ... show yourself,
goddammit.

But the headlights BACK AWAY and vanish like they were never there, leaving an O.S. WHISPER OF:

BUSTER / KIDS (V.O.)
We all scream ... for ice cream.

30 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - LATER** 30

ANGELA rubs her face in disbelief. LAYNE ENTERS.

ANGELA
Jesus christ ...

LAYNE
It was freezing out there.

ANGELA
Not possible. God, do you think she
might be sleepwalking or something?
MaryLyn said she had this dream,
and now -
(beat)
You've got something stuck to your
shoe.

Layne checks. A pink-and-gold Cheery-Tyme wrapper. He pales.

(CONTINUED)

LAYNE
Goddammit all to hell.

ANGELA
What is going on?

Suddenly, Angela GETS IT. Her gaze goes flat-hot and almost angry.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
What part of that little guilt-trip story did you not tell me?

PUSH SLOWLY IN ON LAYNE, his eyes darting, unsure, slightly panicked. DISSOLVE THROUGH TO:

LAYNE
It was Virg Constance's idea.

31 **EXT. BRIARWOOD STREET - DAY - (FLASHBACK RESUMES)** 31

The entire West End Bunch - YOUNG LAYNE, TOOT, JOE, SKIP, KENT and VIRG in a huddle as the Cheery-Tyme ice cream truck APPROACHES in B.G. on a HARD SLOPE in the roadway.

YOUNG VIRG
Every time he parks in front of Jo Denny Battle's house, he never turns the wheels in like he's supposed to.

YOUNG KENT
So?

Young Virg fires up another cigarette's worth of rebellion.

YOUNG VIRG
So we need a distraction, like in them bank robbery movies.

YOUNG SKIP
Buster can't make change for shit. Give him a five dollar bill and he's all confused.

YOUNG VIRG
Yeah. Get him to step down, make change. Then you bump him.

YOUNG LAYNE
Why, to steal his ice cream?

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG VIRG

No, numbnuts. So we can let go the
brake and watch the truck roll down
the hill.

YOUNG SKIP

Watch the freak freak out.

YOUNG KENT

It'll be awesome.

YOUNG TOOT

I can bump him.

YOUNG JOE

This is stupid. I'm outta here.

YOUNG JOE EXITS and Young Layne almost follows.

YOUNG LAYNE

I'm outta here, too.

Young Virg catches him by the scruff.

YOUNG VIRG

No you ain't. You just got brake
duty, asswipe.

YOUNG TOOT

Come on, Layne! I'm doing my part!

YOUNG LAYNE

He's just a ... a ... retarded guy!

YOUNG VIRG

He's a birth-defected retardo ain't
got no fucking nose.

YOUNG KENT

Come on, Layne, it ain't gonna hurt
nobody.

YOUNG SKIP

It'll be bitchin'.

YOUNG KENT

I'm going first.

Peer pressure erodes Young Layne's resolve.

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE — BUSTER OUTSIDE THE TRUCK

Going through his routine, as before. Young Kent bustles to the head of the line.

YOUNG KENT (CONT'D)
Hey, Buster!

BUSTER
You were the first to call my name,
so yours is FREE!

He hands a KID a pink-and-gold foil-wrapped Cheery-Tyme.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
And your name is Keh ... Kuh ...
(struggles it out)
Kent! You're Kent!

YOUNG VIRG (O.S.)
Stutterin' asshole.

Our three kids have joined the periphery of the group.

YOUNG VIRG (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hey, buh-buh-Buster.

Toot steps up emboldened by Virg's example.

YOUNG TOOT
Can you muh-muh-make change?

Buster is flustered but can't take offense. He peers at the bill. Another of his routines.

BUSTER
Holy c-c-cow, look at that
President! He sure doesn't look
happy! He needs some ice cream!
Look, it's magic!

Buster directs the attention of the kids to the change-maker around his waist. He "vanishes" the fiver via elementary magic.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
It goes in here — whoop!
(clicks out change)
And it comes out here!

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE - CHEERY-TYME TRUCK

Where lurks Layne, still hesitant. The back of the truck OPEN and tempting. Virg behind him, snake-eyed. Punches one fist into the other.

YOUNG VIRG
You just do it.

ON TOOT AND BUSTER

Toot, Kent, and Skip gang up to inelegantly SHOVE Buster. The change SCATTERS, much of it rolling down the hill. Buster flips out.

BUSTER
Oh my! Oh my!

And he CHASES after the coins, DOWNHILL.

YOUNG KENT
(mocking)
"Oh my!"

AT THE TRUCK CAB

Virg SHOVES Layne toward his mission.

YOUNG VIRG
Now!

Layne darts IN, then OUT, just long enough to complete the dare and release the truck's handbrake.

OUTSIDE, THE TRUCK BEGINS TO MOVE

And as it MOVES, BACKWARD, picking up speed, rolling downhill, the Cheery-Tyme MUSIC plays, slow, wobbly, distorted, and BACKWARD as well. Toot JUMPS clear.

YOUNG TOOT
Holy shit.

YOUNG VIRG
Awesome.

The rest of the Bunch and some ND KIDS SCATTER out of the lumbering pinball path of the truck.

(CONTINUED)

YOUNG LAYNE's mouth opens to WARN Buster but stalls, silent.

BUSTER scrambles after coins, looking UP TOO LATE to see the truck.

BUSTER

Oh, my.

The rear end of the truck HITS Buster. Knocks him down and ROLL OVER Buster's CHEST, crushing it. His red NOSE LIGHT is now ON STEADILY. Buster CHOKES and a gout of BLOOD flies into the air, speckling his clown-white face.

COINS roll free into the street and SETTLE. ALL QUARTERS.

LAYNE and the BUNCH all running like hell AWAY. CAMERA MOVES to JESSICA (the little girl from earlier in flashback), who begins to CRY like an erupting dam.

As scattered QUARTERS settle in the street, MOVE IN TIGHT on a single one as it SPINS DOWN.

ANGELA (V.O.)

Then Virgil put you up to it. It wasn't your fault. You were just a kid ...

(FLASHBACK ENDS.)

Layne's secret is out and he looks drained. But he can't varnish the truth.

LAYNE

It was my fault. I did it.

ANGELA

So, what? Virgil is tricked out in a clown suit playing Pied Piper?

LAYNE

(dully)
Maybe it's not Virg.

ANGELA

Oh, now wait just a hot second.

LAYNE

Either way, I have to find him.

(CONTINUED)

ANGELA

Honey, you're starting to sound mildly insane.

LAYNE

Listen: I don't know how it works. I do know that unless you watch the kids every second, they'll wander. So I want you to pack off to your mom's. Just for a day.

ANGELA

No.

Layne whirls on her. He's not kidding.

LAYNE

Do it now. Right now. Please.

ANGELA

(defiant)

Kiss my ass and no, no, no. Go away while you do ... what?

HOLD HOLD HOLD on Layne's beleaguered expression.

An edge-of-town wrecking yard and chop shop. Dead cars in piles. Dead appliances. Razor wire and corrugated tin.

LAYNE'S TRUCK pulls up by the gate. Closed for business. Layne BANGS on the gate. Nothing. He skinnies in.

WITH Layne as he ENTERS the maze of junked cars and discards.

Deeper, past old appliances. Spooky shadows. A fortress-like wall of abandoned vehicles. Among them:

THE Cheery-Tyme ICE CREAM TRUCK

Rusted, wheelless, glass long gone, grille like a dead mouth. You can feel the spit in Layne's mouth dry up as he gets NEARER and shines a penlight over the corroded logos.

He rounds the truck to SEE:

ANOTHER AREA OF THE JUNKYARD

Hidden as though the truck is a secret passage. Layne STEPS OUT, relieved to be free of the truck.

(CONTINUED)

At the back of the yard is what resembles a squatter's camp: Tar paper shack. Cook fire in an oil drum. Junk all around. A parked '58 Harley with flames painted on the tank.

LAYNE

Virg? Virg Constance? It's Layne Bannixter.

Layne NEARS the shack. Lantern-light from within.

Packed with scavengings from the junk yard. Taxidermied animals. Seedy furniture. Hog heaven. In one corner, a sawed-down whiskey barrel filled with scummy, steaming hot water.

MOVING POV STALKING TOWARD LAYNE

VIRG (O.S.)

Boo.

LAYNE STARTLES, TURNS TO SEE:

VIRG standing behind him. A wad of scar tissue where his left ear used to be. Still fearsome after all these years. Virg is NAKED. He CACKLES derisively.

VIRG (CONT'D)

Pussy Boy. Yeah, I figured you'd show up sooner or later.

Virg LOWERS himself into the hillbilly hot tub. Ahhhh.

LAYNE

Virg, I ...

VIRG

(overriding)

Well now. You put on some beef since the last time I seen your scrawny ass. You been to the big bad world outside, now you come back, all smarter than everybody and shit?

LAYNE

I wanted a comfortable life. A dull life. So far, it ain't working out.

Virg mops his pits and sluices his unit with a grunt. Sly.
Evasive. Cunning.

VIRG

Am I supposed to know what you mean
by that?

LAYNE

I'm hoping you might. The West End
Bunch, Virg. We're dying off like
crane flies. Too close together to
be a coincidence.

VIRG

There's still you and me.

LAYNE

And Papa Joe.

VIRG

That fat sumbitch.

LAYNE

And Toot Embry.

No reaction. Virg hawks a brown phlegmwad and spits it over
the side.

VIRG

I cornholed that little geek. He
squealed like a girl and never
dared speak a word about that, did
he?

Layne's mouth curls in revulsion.

VIRG (CONT'D)

So, you come up here just to sweet-
talk me too?

LAYNE

You were in the park yesterday.
You saw Toot. You saw what
happened.

VIRG

Says who?

LAYNE

Buck Treadway.

(CONTINUED)

VIRG

Well, now.

Virg's hand rises from the water with a HUNTING KNIFE. Picks his teeth with it. Then embeds it in the rim of the cask. The threat is on the table now.

VIRG (CONT'D)

What you aim to do about that?

LAYNE

Nothing. Just tell me what you saw.

Virg sighs, a bronchial rattle. Even he is taken aback by memory.

VIRG

It happened ... fast. Quick.

LAYNE

What were you doing in the park?

VIRG

There's this little ole gal I meet there sometimes. She didn't show. But on my way there I seen a kid. Toot's kid. Eatin' ice cream.

35 **EXT. BRIARWOOD STREET - NIGHT (FLASHBACK - TO LAST NIGHT)** 35 *

PETEY holds a Cheery-Tyme bar, watching the subzero TRUCK wobble off down the street. Buster's admonition an echo effect:

BUSTER (V.O.)

Go ahead ... get even.

Petey UNWRAPS the bar. It is a HUMAN EFFIGY. Like a voodoo candle, with male genitals.

Petey bites off the head and begins to lick the stick, practically devouring the treat. He TURNS and his eyes TILT guiltily up toward the horrifying apparition of:

VIRG, glaring down at him wordlessly. To Petey he looks like a gargoyle, a night-walker.

PETEY runs away pellmell, still eating the ice cream.

LAYNE (V.O.)

What about Toot?

(CONTINUED)

36 **INT. VIRG'S SHACK - NIGHT - RESUMING**

36

VIRG

I got to the park. Seen him in the bushes. Then he was gone. Like I said, quick.

LAYNE

He ran away.

VIRG

No. Buster got him.

Layne's jaw unhinges. He sucks air.

LAYNE

Buster ... ?

VIRG

Yeah, Buh-buh-buster, ya dumb fuck. Who'dja think?

It's clear that Layne hoped it was Virg all along.

LAYNE

Buck Treadway didn't see Buster Dockins in Flat Shores Park. He saw you.

VIRG

Aw, don't you get it, numbnuts? Buck Treadway weren't even borned yet. He ain't part of it.

He GUFFAWS, splashing dirty water.

VIRG (CONT'D)

Wassamatter, don't you believe in re-vengeance?

Even as Layne susses this out he can't believe it:

LAYNE

It can't be Buster ...

(CONTINUED)

VIRG
(interposes)
Yeah and he ain't coming 'round to
collect Papa Joe's big fat ass, nor
yours, neither.

LAYNE
What about your big fat ass?

Virg SNICKERS. Big shit eating grin.

VIRG
I'm safe. Ain't got no kids.
Unlike you and Papa Joe

PUSH IN ON LAYNE, forced to recall one of the worst items of
the past that eventually forced him to leave town.

LAYNE
How? How does it happen?

37 **EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

37

In dreamy SLO-MO the Cheery-Tyme truck PASSES, its theme
ECHOING. It could be Layne's imagination at work. Or real.

But the trucks light is COLD, the noise is CHILLY, and the
demeanor of the truck has changed. It appears in a self-
generated BILLOW of subzero FOG like a UFO. The holiday
lights are all WHITE, all color strangled beneath a coat of
FROST. Touch it and your hand would stick.

BUSTER
(through speakers)
I scream!

UNSEEN KIDS (V.O.)
I scream!

VIRG (V.O.)
Shoulda kept it in your pants,
Daddy.

38 **INT. VIRG'S SHACK - NIGHT - RESUMING**

38

Virg now taunting Layne.

VIRG
Kids'll be the death of you.

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED: 38

BUSTER (V.O.)
You scream!

UNSEEN KIDS (V.O.)
You scream!

ON LAYNE, almost as if he can HEAR the chant.

LAYNE
You hear that?

Virg indicates his scarred ear.

VIRG
Can't hear for shit.

39 **EXT. STREET - NIGHT - RESUMING** 39

TIGHT ON THE TRUCK SPEAKERS

BUSTER (O.S.)
We alllllllll scream!

This last is nearly a SNARL, blurting from the speakers in cool puffs of condensation

UNSEEN KIDS
We all scream!

BUSTER
For ice cream.

As we get a good look at BUSTER:

His COSTUME is rimed with ice, all colors dead white, even his blinky NOSE, which PULSES like an ebbing moon. The squirt flower petrified like a frozen pipe. Ice crystals in his eyebrows. Under the clown drag Buster's EYES have gone an arctic blue-white. Frozen rictus leer. Like a corpse fresh from a morgue icebox. His breath frigid vapor.

He LEANS INTO FRAME with an icy crackle, proffering a large pink-and-gold-wrapped ice cream bar to CHYLA (13), who peels it. It is a HUMAN FIGURE. Like a voodoo candle, with male genitals. Chocolate body, but a WHITE HEAD. Chyla is thrilled, almost orgasmic.

Buster entreats her, his voice coming in clouds of frigid vapor:

(CONTINUED)

BUSTER (CONT'D)
(sinister)
Go ahead. Get even.

Chyla BITES OFF THE HEAD. Mmmm, scrumptious.

40 **INT. VIRG'S SHACK - NIGHT - RESUMING**

40

Layne has had it. Virg has no more to offer, not even a fight.

LAYNE
You're still the biggest bastard I
ever met in my life.

VIRG
Oooh, fightin' words. 'Cept I don't
give two shits for your body nor
your soul, neither.

He tries to RISE from the tub and slips back down.

VIRG (CONT'D)
Whoops. Hey, gimme a hand.

Gaseous BUBBLES roil up from the tub. Maybe a fart. Layne's face puckers.

LAYNE
Jesus.

But the bubbles KEEP COMING. Virg is rooted to the tub.

VIRG
Oh, my ...

VIRG MELTS right in front of Layne's horrified gaze, flesh sliding off his skull like candle wax, fingers BLENDING into the murky, churning tub water, skeleton digits DISSOLVING like sugar candy, his body deliquescing to milky mush.

Virg's tub runneth over, his body liquefied to thick paste that STAINS the tub bright Neapolitan COLORS. Not even clothing left this time.

Layne backs away. Stumbles. And begins to RUN.

41 **EXT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - DAY (DAWN)**

41

Sunup. Layne's truck parked behind Angela's SUV.

LAYNE

I checked. Cheery-Tyme Ice Cream
hasn't fielded a truck for more
than 20 years.

Papa Joe grimly turns up TWO MORE CHAIRS at the "reunion
table." Four up, two down.

PAPA JOE

I'm open to suggestions as to what
we oughta do.

LAYNE

Joe... does any of your brood hate
you enough to want to kill you?

Papa Joe thinks about it.

PAPA JOE

Joe Lee's my youngest. He
wandered, too. So I grounded him.
He seemed okay; took it like a man.

LAYNE

That won't matter if he hears the
call tonight.

He scrutinizes Layne seriously. Concerned close pal.

PAPA JOE

Nobody's ever gonna believe your
story, by the way.

LAYNE

I don't care what "nobody" thinks.
"Nobody" didn't stand there and
watch Virg dissolve.

PAPA JOE

Like melting ice cream?

LAYNE

Virg said he didn't have any kids.

Papa Joe harrumphs. Yeah, right.

PAPA JOE

He bragged about rape. Ain't a
stretch to think one of them wild
sperm of his must've gotten away.

(CONTINUED)

PAPA JOE (CONT'D)

Okay, so it's like a voodoo doll.
Kenny Bafler eats the ice cream and
his dad dies. Toot's kid ...

LAYNE

Petey.

PAPA JOE

Same deal.

Layne PALES.

LAYNE

Christ, Joe, he tried to get my
kids last night. He missed, and so
Virg got tagged. You say Joe Lee
was out last night, too.

*

Papa Joe's bluster is diminished as it sinks in. Head in
hands, he morosely considers their prospects.

PAPA JOE

I'm not scared of dying. But I
don't know any exorcists, either.

Papa Joe downs another beer in a single swallow.

LAYNE

He only shows up at night ... he's
cold. Frozen.

PAPA JOE

Listen to yourself. You don't
fight this kind of thing. It just
... collects you.

LAYNE

All we have to do is secure the
kids. Tie 'em down if we have to.

PAPA JOE

It won't do any good. We're all
guilty, aren't we?

LAYNE

We gotta fight back. For our
family, if not ourselves.

Papa Joe does not react. Layne GRABS Papa Joe's shirtfront.

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED: (3)

43

LAYNE (CONT'D)

Don't make me kick your ass.

Papa Joe snaps out of his guilty reverie.

PAPA JOE

Like you ever could.

44 **EXT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - DAY**

44

Papa Joe's Caddy pulls in behind Layne's truck. Angela's SUV is STILL THERE. Hatch open, packed bags, but no one around.

45 **INT. PAPA JOE'S CADDY - DAY - CONTINUOUS**

45

Papa Joe gives Layne the hairy eyeball of doubt.

PAPA JOE

Looks like maybe you shoulda told her why, old buddy.

LAYNE

Go. Lock your kids down. Use duct tape if you have to. Go on -- we're losing the light.

Layne PANICS, jumps from the car --

46 **EXT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - DAY - (DUSK)**

46

-- and almost runs over ANGELA, who is standing there with her arms folded. Not amused. The kids behind her near the front door.

Behind him, Papa Joe reverses the Caddy and ROARS AWAY down the street.

Angela's expression is not forgiving.

ANGELA

I thought I might wait and see if you made more sense after I had coffee. But now I think: I am not leaving ignorant, especially if you are in trouble.

Layne loves them. He wants them out. He is incredibly frustrated.

(CONTINUED)

LAYNE
Goddammit to hell!

He GRABS Angela's wrist, pulls her close, out of earshot of the kids. She almost smacks him until she sees the haunted expression in his pleading gaze.

ON TOBY AND MARYLYN - BY THE FRONT DOOR

MARYLYN
They're fighting.

Toby NODS morosely.

BACK TO LAYNE AND ANGELA

LAYNE
All right, you want the truth?
Here it is: Buster Dockins has
come back to kill us. All of the
West Side Bunch. Only me and Papa
Joe are left.

Angela's eyes brighten with tears. She sees how crazy her husband thinks he sounds; how it's ripping him up.

LAYNE (CONT'D)
He uses ... our kids. To get us.
The grown-ups. The fathers.

Disbelief wars with compassion as Layne's voice become a terse whisper. Final appeal:

LAYNE (CONT'D)
If I'm right, this will be over by
morning. If I'm wrong, I'm crazy.
Either way, I want you and the kids
safe. Please go. Go now.
(beat)
I love you.

Angela closes her eyes. Loses a single tear. Nods. Turns with resolve. Calls to the kids:

ANGELA
Both of you, in the car, right now.

She can't let Layne go. But does. As TOBY passes:

TOBY
Are you getting a divorce?

(CONTINUED)

46 CONTINUED: (2) 46

Angela hustles Toby into the car and SPEEDS AWAY as though the house were on fire.

47 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (DUSK)** 47

Layne rummages until he finds a REMOTE CONTROL. Points it at the yard through the window. Click. Nothing.

He pops the remote and replaces old batteries.

48 **EXT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT** 48

Layne MOVES to a yard-mounted switch box. House lights and sprinklers on a TIMER. He CLICKS the remote. Nothing. He TILTS it several ways, clicking. Finally:

IN THE YARD floodlights click ON near a chopping stump with an AXE imbedded therein.

Sprinklers start and stop.

Layne BACKS AWAY from the switch box, testing for distance, clicking the lights on, then off, then on ... as darkness falls.

49 **EXT. STREET - NIGHT** 49

ANGELA'S SUV stops for a traffic light.

50 **INT. ANGELA'S SUV - NIGHT** 50

MaryLyn shotgun, Toby in the back seat.

MARYLYN

Can we at least stop and eat?

ANGELA

When we get to Grandma's.

TOBY

I want some ice cream.

Toby is staring at the REARVIEW MIRROR. Angela's gaze tilts up as the mirror FILLS with the sight of:

BUSTER'S FROZEN TRUCK PULLING UP BEHIND THEM.

(CONTINUED)

50 CONTINUED: 50

The kids slip out before Angela can stop them. She tries to follow but finds her doors are frozen shut.

51 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT** 51

Layne fetches a beer. Checks his freezer. Cold vapor. A container of STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM fixes his gaze.

He looks DOWN to the kitchen trash. There: The Cheery-Tyme wrapper found stuck to his shoe earlier.

He fishes it out. Real. Contemplates it. Then methodically RINSES it off. Saving it for later.

52 **EXT. OAK HILL DRIVE - NIGHT** 52

A LONG SHOT of the street as the sun sets.

53 **EXT. FLAT SHORES PARK - NIGHT** 53

Looking deserted.

54 **EXT. ROAD - NIGHT** 54

PAPA JOE'S CADDY barrels along the road.

55 **INT. CHEERY-TYME TRUCK - NIGHT** 55

SLOW TRACK along the frozen INTERIOR: iceboxes crusted with frost, icicles on the trinkets, a glittering deep-freeze. END TRACK on EXCU of Buster's gloved HAND as it clicks a frosty switch and the Cheery-Tyme MUSIC warps up to speed, warbling, damaged, mis-tracking.

TILT to Buster's iced-up FACE, smiling as he CHUCKLES.

56 **EXT. BRIARWOOD STREET - NIGHT** 56

JOE LEE PEEKS INTO FRAME, today's contestant in the night watch for Buster. *

57 **EXT. OAK HILL DRIVE - NIGHT** 57

TIGHT on the WHEELS of Buster's truck, cruising, leaving smoky-frozen tread marks on the pavement.

58 **EXT. BRIARWOOD STREET - NIGHT** 58

As Buster's FRIGID HAND extends INTO FRAME to hand a foil-wrapped Cheery-Tyme to Joe Lee, who grins in anticipation. *

BUSTER
Go ahead ... get even.

Joe Lee unwraps it. Bites it. *

59 **EXT. ROAD - NIGHT** 59

Papa Joe's Caddy SLOWS. Wanders lane-to-lane. Veers to the shoulder like a drunk walking the line. And STOPS, THUMP, against a tree.

TIGHT ON THE DRIVER'S DOOR OF THE CADDY

As it whacks OPEN and what's left of Papa Joe GUSHES out onto the road in a cascade of dissolving bones and thick, pasty, sugary glop.

60 **INT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT** 60

Layne chain smoking and standing guard at a window through which the yard and street are visible. On the phone.

LAYNE
Goddammit, Joe, where are you?

When Layne racks the phone, he HEARS the O.S. MUSIC. Growing closer. Ch-ch-Cheery-Tyme ...

LAYNE (CONT'D)
Bring it on, you sonofabitch.

He peers out the window. COLD FOG is rolling in. As though Buster's malign cryogenic environment PRECEDES him.

Layne shucks into a down jacket. Pockets a REMOTE CONTROL for the yard lights. Prepared. Layne EXITS.

61 **EXT. LAYNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT** 61

A FOG BANK has settled around Layne's house. Mist SWIRLS as Layne tramps to the CHOPPING BLOCK and sets down a DRINK COOLER.

(CONTINUED)

When he looks to his driveway, Buster's TRUCK has parked there, BLOCKING Layne's driveway. It seems to GLOW icy-white, exuding cold, apparently manufacturing the fog.

Layne calls evenly toward the truck. Into the fog-cloud.

LAYNE

Come on, Buster. It's down to you
and me.

Layne is UNAWARE of BUSTER stepping INTO FRAME, BEHIND him, until Buster WHISTLES like Harpo Marx, SPINNING Layne around. In manic mimic of his own (former) kiddie-speak, Buster SCREAMS:

BUSTER

Looks like you're today's ...
special ... FLAVOR!

Layne GLANCES at the AXE in the yard. Too far away.

LAYNE

Where's Papa Joe?

BUSTER

Y'wanna see him? Ya reaallllly
wanna see him?

From behind his back (more ledgerdemain) Buster produces a festive (yet FROZEN) carnival BUCKET.

Layne whips out the REMOTE and presses a button. NOTHING HAPPENS.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

Your wish is my command! Here he
is!

Buster UPENDS the bucket and ice-creamy glop sluices out. (Maybe with John's glasses in it or some other visual cue.)

Layne chokes and almost stalls. He STABS the remote again. STILL NOTHING. He LUNGES for Buster in anger. Buster JUMPS BACK.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

But wait! Don't answer, because
you also get --!

Buster whips out from behind his back a SINGLE Cheery-Tyme bar in pink-and-gold foil. Man on a stick. Guess who.

(CONTINUED)

LAYNE

You're fucked, Buster. I got them out. They're far away from here.

BUSTER

Oh, reeeeeeallly?!

Buster WHISTLES again, piercingly.

TOBY (O.S.)

I scream!

Layne WHIRLS. TOBY and MARYLYN are piling OUT OF THE TRUCK, running toward Buster, ecstatic. Layne between Buster and the kids.

MARYLYN

You scream!

BUSTER, TOBY, MARYLYN

We all scream for ice cream!

Layne tries to run interference on his kids, blocking them. He frantically KEYS the remote, tilting it like an uppity cellphone.

LAYNE

Goddammit!

FINALLY: The YARD LIGHTS pop ON in the dense FOG as Buster MOVES IN on Layne. Buster looks around, STARTLED. But AMUSED. Then he KEEPS COMING.

There is a sudden HISSING, gurgling sound as the SPRINKLERS GUSH ON. Buster HESITATES again. Then keeps COMING.

The kids STOP behind Layne, delayed.

A drop of water HITS the porch THERMOSTAT, holding steady somewhere BELOW ZERO. The glass tube CRACKS.

ON BUSTER in the sudden DOWNPOUR. He is SO COLD the water instantly FREEZES into coat upon coat of ICE. Each of Buster's movements quickly HAMPERED, then RESTRICTED, then strait-jacketed. Buster growls, limbs immobilized.

Layne GRABS THE AXE and marches on Buster.

LAYNE (CONT'D)

Buster, I'm sorry. There isn't a day in my life I won't be.

(CONTINUED)

Buster's teeth CHATTER. Flash-frozen hate in his gaze.

BUSTER

I'm sorry, you're sorry, oh, We're
all soooo SORRY!

LAYNE

We did you wrong. And the one
thing nobody ever did was ...
apologize to you.

Under the armor of ice, Buster's EYES FADE from blue-white to human brown. His STUTTER comes back.

BUSTER

You're really s-s-sorry?

LAYNE

More than you'll ever know. But
you have to leave now.

Layne RAISES the axe to shatter Buster like a chandelier.

Buster SMILES and it's pretty horrible. His frozen cocoon CRACKS and SPLITS, beginning at his too-wide MOUTH, and DROPS AWAY in shards.

Buster CATCHES the axe ONE-HANDED as Layne SWINGS it down. Layne is astonished at the sudden STOP of the blade.

BUSTER

You said my name. So you get a
freebie.

A flick of Buster's wrist and Layne LOSES the axe. Layne CHARGES, grabbing Buster, trying to grab the Cheery-Tyme bar. Layne is virtually propelled backward when he gets SEVERE FREEZER BURN on both hands.

Water still spraying. The yard is gradually ICING UP, the air full of chilly condensation.

Buster TOSSES the Cheery-Tyme bar into the air, toward the kids. Hollering:

BUSTER (CONT'D)

What kind of ice cream!?

TOBY

The best in the whole world.

Toby reaches to catch it. MaryLyn INTERCEPTS it.

(CONTINUED)

TOBY (CONT'D)

No, it's mine! Gimme it!

MARYLYN

No, it's mine!

They TUSSELE over the prize. Two kids playing.

Buster savagely BACKHANDS Layne with inhuman strength. Layne teakettles over the chopping stump, SPILLING the beverage cooler there.

BUSTER

Looks like it's time for dessert.
Just desserts.

Buster has the axe in a two-handed grip now. Serious business. Here he comes. Layne still holding his frozen hands against his chest. Buster screams like a manic Japanese game-show host:

BUSTER (CONT'D)

So come on kids, let's all ... GET
EVEN!

Toby SPIES, in the upended cooler, ANOTHER Cheery-Tyme BAR (in Layne's recycled wrapper) and beelines for it.

MaryLyn strips the wrapper from her bar. Human figure. Her mouth waters. Opens to bite it.

LAYNE

MaryLyn! No!

MaryLyn HESITATES for just a split second.

MARYLYN

Daddy ...?

Buster RAISES THE AXE for the kill shot.

Toby strips the wrapper from his bar to reveal a human ice-cream figure sculpted from the STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM in Layne's freezer. With a RED CANDY CLOWN NOSE. Toby ravenously BITES OFF THE HEAD.

Causing Buster to STALL on the downswing.

Buster's FEATURES begin to gush and runnel like STRAWBERRY gelatin in a microwave.

(CONTINUED)

The acetylene light in Buster's eyes RESURGES and he SWINGS DOWN the axe with a howl of pure rage.

The AXE THUNKS into the ground next to Layne's head.

Buster POUNCES on Layne, strangling him with his glacial death grip, their faces inches apart.

TOBY has the Buster Bar in his mouth. It slips completely off the stick. Toby goggles the empty stick.

BUSTER SEES THIS. Not good.

BUSTER

Oh my.

LAYNE

Hey, Buster.

The strawberry mush emanating from Buster turns BLOOD RED as his face begins to FALL APART, his clown makeup and features mix-and-matching into a Bozo death's-head.

LAYNE (CONT'D)

Nothing beats home-made. *

Angela pulls up in her car, and runs out to Layne and her kids.

TIGHT ON one of the sprinklers as it STOPS gushing water. *

Layne hesitantly OPENS his eyes. No truck, no Buster, everything coated with ICY FROST. And he SEES:

ANGELA stumbling toward him, dishevelled, distressed, wrung out ... alive. *

Layne gropes toward his kids in the fog. Angela joins them and they all embrace.

MARYLYN holds up something she found on the ground:

BUSTER'S FAKE NOSE

(CONTINUED)

61 CONTINUED: (6)

61

Still frozen white. When Layne tilts it, several droplets of BLOOD despoil the whiteness in his palm. Drip ... drip ... drip. Like melting ice cream.

MARYLYN

Where'd he go?

LAYNE

Back where he belongs.

62 **INT. PAPA JOE'S COZY GRILL - DAY**

62

Layne, alone in the bar, his arm bandaged for frostbite, tips up the fifth chair at the reunion table. Leaving one. His own. He tips THAT one up, too. Blows out the candle.

LAYNE

(to no one)

I'll see you around, old buddy.

63 **EXT. STREET - DAY**

63

Layne EXITS Papa Joe's. His truck is parked curb side, loaded with boxes and furniture from the house. Angela's SUV behind it, ditto. MaryLyn with Angela, Toby with Layne.

MARYLYN

Do we really get to stay out of school a whole extra week?

LAYNE

Absolutely. Maybe two.

He kisses Angela.

LAYNE (CONT'D)

Let's hit the road.

Distantly -- VERY distantly -- the O.S. echoes of the Cheery-Tyme theme prick Layne's ears to attention, accompanied by the sound of children's laughter.

But Layne hears it. He'll probably hear it for the rest of his life. Along with a faraway sound, like ghosts in the wind:

BUSTER / UNSEEN KIDS (O.S.)

I scream! You scream! We alllll scream!

(CONTINUED)

PUSH IN TIGHTER AND TIGHTER on Layne's haunted expression.

The MUSIC only Layne can hear just seems to get louder and LOUDER, until we:

FADE OUT.

-the end-