

MUD

by
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1 INT. ELLIS' ROOM - PREDAWN 1

ELLIS(14) sits fully-clothed on top of his made bed. He is a wiry young man with a few blonde hairs on his upper lip struggling desperately to be a mustache.

His room, cluttered with junk, is dark, quiet and tiny. A backpack and an oversized Walkie-Talkie sit next to him.

The silence is cut by a SQUAWK from the Walkie. Ellis quickly grabs it.

ELLIS
I'm comin' out now.

He crams the Walkie into his backpack and slings it over his shoulder. On his feet, he slides open a window at the foot of his bed. He's out in one motion.

2 EXT. HOUSEBOAT - PREDAWN 2

Ellis skirts alongside the exterior wall of his room on a two-foot-wide section of decking.

He lives on a HOUSEBOAT anchored just off the bank of the Arkansas River. The "boat" is really the combination of a double wide trailer and a vinyl-sided shack fused together atop large flotilla.

Ellis scurries to the mobile home section of the boat. He slips past a barbecue grill and settles underneath a lighted window. VOICES come from inside.

Slowly, Ellis gets on his toes to peer through the window.

3 INT. ELLIS' KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 3

MARY LEE(41) takes a jug of milk out of the refrigerator. SENIOR(52) sits at a small table reading a newspaper. The mobile home kitchenette is no larger than Ellis' room.

MARY LEE
I just want to have a conversation.
I just want to talk about it.

Mary Lee sits down across from Senior, who doesn't look up from his paper. Her eyes narrow and she extends a finger toward him.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)
If you don't look up from that
goddamn paper...

She stops before completing the thought.

After a moment, Senior lowers his paper. He stares across the table at his wife. He looks at her with true disdain.

His eyes trace down her face and robe before finally settling on his cup of coffee. He picks up the cup, takes a sip, and sets it back on the table. He raises the paper up.

Mary Lee's eyes soften. She bites the inside of her cheek to keep from crying. Her eyes move to the kitchen window.

4 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 4

Ellis quickly ducks and mouths the word "shit."

He slips under the window toward a metal carport that covers a boat, fish cleaning station, and industrial ice machine.

The entire houseboat is anchored to the shore by two thick ropes tied to opposite ends of the flotilla. The ropes extend upward into the tops of enormous pine trees.

Ellis sprints across a simple, wood-planked bridge to shore. His houseboat is one of several in a row along the riverbank.

5 EXT. ELLIS' RIVERBANK - CONTINUOUS 5

Ellis scurries into the treeline and arrives at a dirt path.

Waiting for him there is NECKBONE(14), a scrawny kid with slicked back blonde hair wearing a FUGAZI T-shirt. He sits atop a smallish dirt bike. Ellis hops on the back.

NECKBONE
What the shit man?

ELLIS
Suck it. Drive.

The bike spits up mud as they peel out down the trail.

6 EXT. RIVERBANK - PREDAWN 6

From a distance, the single headlight of the dirt bike snakes up and down, in and out of trees along the riverbank.

ON THE BIKE,

The sound of the engine rips through fog and trees illuminated by the straining headlight.

7 EXT. RIVERBANK - DAWN 7

The boys emerge from behind a sand covered hill. Now on foot, they are silhouetted against a light blue, morning sky.

NECKBONE
How old is she?

ELLIS
A Junior.

At a collection of trees growing out of the water, the boys move branches away from a tarp covered boat.

NECKBONE
She's got nice titties. You talk to her?

ELLIS
Nah.

NECKBONE
You're gonna have to talk to her.

ELLIS
I know.

NECKBONE
Remind me when we get back to my house, Galen's got a book on that.

Neckbone takes a spot up front in the small, flat-bottom boat. Ellis, a foot on the bank and one in the boat, launches them out into the water.

8 EXT. RIVER - MORNING

8

A chunk of Neckbone's greased back hair bobs in the wind as they cruise down river. Ellis steers a small 15 horsepower motor. An orange sun is coming up now.

Neckbone's eyes lock on what's in front of them. Ellis kills the motor. Neckbone stands up, a serious look on his face.

NECKBONE
Shit.

Ellis raises up behind him. He takes a deep breath, nods.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
Your dad'd kill us he knew we went out there.

ELLIS
I'm not worried about my dad killin' us.

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER sprawls out in front of them. It's enormous.

Their boat drifts at the mouth of the Arkansas, a small river by comparison. The Mississippi is a swirling mess of brown water and yellow foam six football fields wide.

NECKBONE
What if it sinks?

ELLIS

It ain't gonna sink. We gotta move
if we're gonna make it back. Set
your watch. We'll need a good
fifteen minutes.

Neckbone sets an alarm on his fat plastic wristwatch. They
take their seats. Ellis cranks the motor.

The small boat slowly chugs out onto the massive river.

9 EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - MORNING

9

The boat lurches through the murky, rushing water.

Neckbone has both hands firmly planted on the boat's edges.
Ellis tries to handle the motor which has little impact
against this current.

The tail end of the boat swings to the right. Ellis flinches
and grabs an edge to steady himself. The front of the boat
bobs toward an ISLAND in the middle of the river.

Neck turns to Ellis and points.

NECKBONE

THERE IT IS!

10 EXT. ISLAND SHORE - DAY

10

The boys splash down in ankle deep water. They take hold of
the front of the boat and drag it onto the muddy shore.

Neckbone jogs to a tree line in the center of the island.
Ellis snatches up his backpack and follows.

11 EXT. ISLAND WOODS - CONTINUOUS

11

The island, only 60 some yards in diameter, is separated by a
clump of tall trees that form a wooded area in its center.
The trees make it so you can't see from one side of the
island to the other.

NECKBONE

Galen thinks it's been here awhile.
Thinks the last flood did it.

Ellis follows as Neckbone winds through the trees. They stop
at a deep creek that cuts across the island. Neckbone looks
to his right, then his left. Sees what he's looking for.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

It's down there.

A fallen tree trunk that straddles the creek. Ellis starts
across.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

Hold it.

Neckbone picks a large stone up off the ground.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

Look.

Eight feet below the tree trunk, a nest of water moccasins curl around in the creek. Neckbone drops the stone on top of them. The snakes fan out.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

Little shits.

Their mud-caked high-tops stomp across the trunk.

12 EXT. ISLAND WOODS - DAY

12

The boys stop near the base of a large tree and stare up. Ellis cranes his neck back. Awestruck.

NECKBONE

So there it is.

ELLIS

Yeah, there it is.

A 26 Foot Long BOAT sits nestled in the tree limbs above.

13 EXT. BOAT IN TREE - MOMENTS LATER

13

The boys scale up the tree from low lying branches.

Ellis, hands on the edge of the boat, gets a leg over the side and pulls himself onto the deck. He reaches down and helps to drag Neckbone on board.

They get to their feet, steadying themselves on the wooden deck. It's solid. They take in their new vantage point.

ELLIS

It came down from up there.

Ellis points to higher limbs that have long been broken off. Neckbone walks to the back of the boat and hangs his head over. He finds a gaping hole of gutted wood.

NECKBONE

Motor broke off.

Ellis isn't concerned with the motor. His eyes are locked on a covered cabin at the front of the boat.

ELLIS

Who else knows about this?

NECKBONE
Just me and Galen.

ELLIS
What's he think?

NECKBONE
He don't care about it.

ELLIS
Good.

Ellis walks to the cabin. He pushes a vinyl door open.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
'Cause this boat's ours.

Ellis has to duck down to go inside. Neckbone follows.

14

INT. BOAT CABIN - CONTINUOUS

14

Ellis, stooping over, makes his way into the tiny cabin room.

Yellow floral curtains, stained with age, cover a row of windows that wrap around the top of the cabin. These provide an odd glow in an otherwise dark, wood paneled space.

There is a bench with rotted out cushions to the left. To the right, a mold-covered sink and mirror.

Neckbone peers over Ellis' shoulder at the front of the cabin room. A small booth sits to the right across from a miniature toilet partially shielded by an open door.

NECKBONE
It's got its own shitbox

Neckbone slides back a portion of floral curtain and light streams in. He starts opening small closets and drawers. Ellis plops down on the rotted bench cushions.

ELLIS
This is perfect.

NECKBONE
Ho-Lee-Shit.

Neckbone stares in an open drawer. He removes a stack of Playboys from the 1980's.

Ellis smiles at him. He leans back and props his foot against the sink cabinet across from him. This is home.

Neckbone opens the first Playboy. It disintegrates.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
Aw shit.

As he scrambles to gather the fallen pages, Ellis notices a dried BOOT PRINT next to his foot. He lowers his shoe from the cabinet leaving a smaller, muddy print of his own.

He leans in to examine the larger print. The impression of a CROSS has been left in the heel.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
Her tits are so small.

Ellis reaches out and traces his finger in the groove of the cross marking. His eyes narrow as he re-surveys the cabin.

On the table across from the toilet, he notices several empty cans of Beanie Weenie. In the booth, he sees a grocery bag. Ellis slowly raises up and goes over to it.

ELLIS
Neck.

NECKBONE
Look at that beave. You gotta see this.

Ellis reaches out for the plastic bag. His fingers pull back the edges to reveal its contents: one can of unopened Beanie Weenie and half a loaf of BREAD.

ELLIS
Neck.

Ellis reaches for the bread and gives it a squeeze. It's FRESH. Ellis freezes.

NECKBONE
What?

ELLIS
Someone's here.

NECKBONE
What?

Ellis holds the loaf of bread up to Neckbone.

ELLIS
Someone's livin' here.

Neckbone sees the grocery bag. His eyes widen. The boys are stone frozen. They listen for other sounds. Silence.

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Both boys flinch at the sharp sounds. Neckbone's hand flies to cover the alarm on his wristwatch.

NECKBONE

Shit.

ELLIS

We gotta go. I can't be late.

15 EXT. BASE OF BOAT TREE - MOMENTS LATER 15

They drop out of the tree and hit the ground running.

16 EXT. ISLAND WOODS/CREEK - MOMENTS LATER 16

The boys' feet rush across the tree trunk bridging the creek.

17 EXT. ISLAND SHORE - MOMENTS LATER 17

They launch out of the treeline and sprint to their boat.

Neckbone grabs the side and starts pushing the boat to the water. Ellis slings his backpack in and joins him.

Suddenly, Ellis straightens up, leaving Neckbone to struggle.

NECKBONE

What are you doing?

Ellis stares at a muddy boot print, cross in the heel, stamped in the center of their boat. He looks back to the treeline, then down the shore. He looks to his feet.

The boys' shoe prints make chaotic patterns in the mud. Larger boot prints lead off down the shoreline.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

What is it?

ELLIS

(pointing)

I saw that same boot print up in the tree. It has a cross in the heel. Somebody's been in our boat.

NECKBONE

Shit. Let's go.

Ellis begins following the boot prints around the shoreline.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

We gotta go if you wanna make it back.

(no response)

Your dad's gonna kick our ass. It'll take twice as long goin' up river.

ELLIS

Hold it.

Ellis stops and points ahead of them.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Up there. They stop.

Neckbone takes the lead, walking up to the last boot print. They appear to vanish.

NECKBONE
Where the hell'd he go?

ELLIS
I don't know.

Neckbone turns and freezes. A MAN has appeared in the distance behind Ellis. He stands between the boys and their boat.

Ellis notices the look on Neckbone's face and turns. He flinches at the sight of the Man.

MUD(38) stands near the boys' boat holding a pink, child's fishing pole with cartoon characters on it. He stares back at them and casts his fishing line into the water.

NECKBONE
Shit. You know that guy?

ELLIS
I've never seen him before.

NECKBONE
Shit.

Mud, not taking his eyes off the boys, slowly reels in his line. His hair is a wild mop that leads to two weeks of growth on his face.

With a cigarette clinched, he cracks a smile revealing a MISSING CANINE. He holds a hand in the air as if to wave.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
Shit.

Neckbone slowly raises his hand up to wave back. Mud wears jeans and cowboy boots. His filthy button-up shirt looks like it hasn't left his body in years.

He breaks his stare with the boys. Continuing to reel in his line, he walks over to them.

MUD
What you say?

The boys don't respond. Mud walks past them and casts again.

MUD (CONT'D)
 Helluva thing.

ELLIS
 What's that?

Mud takes the cigarette from his mouth. A tattoo of a snake's head covers the top of his right hand. Two large cotton blossoms spill out of its jaws.

MUD
 Boat in the trees. It's a helluva thing.

Mud continues walking down the shoreline, reeling in his bait. The boys follow, tentatively.

ELLIS
 You talkin' 'bout our boat?

MUD
 I'm talkin' about my boat.

NECKBONE
 We found it.

MUD
 You found it with me livin' in it.
 Possession is nine tenths of the law.

NECKBONE
 So?

MUD
 Don't tell me you boys are from Mississippi?

ELLIS
 No.

They watch as he grabs the bait at the end of his line and spits on it. Then, tucking the pole under his arm, he ties a lock of his hair into a knot. He finishes this process with another cast.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
 You got crosses in your heels.

MUD
 Nails. Shaped liked crosses.

ELLIS
 What for?

MUD

Ward off evil spirits. A man I called an Indian but was Meskin said they were Seven-league boots worn by the seventh son of a seventh son. Told me it'd turn me into a werewolf but that's a lie. I don't know nothin' about that.

Ellis, confused, won't take his eyes off the man.

MUD (CONT'D)

They just good luck, but so far they ain't been workin' too well.
(missing tooth smile)
What's your name?

Mud seems easy to smile, which softens his otherwise coarse look. His words spill from the mouth rapidly, without much thought for punctuation. Neckbone, emboldened by these facts, steps forward to answer.

NECKBONE

I'm Neckbone, he's Ellis, and mister you may be stone ass crazy but I know you're not the owner of that boat, not for nine tenths of nothin'.

MUD

Neckbone? That's a real handle son. Where ya'll from?

NECKBONE

What do you care where we're from?

ELLIS

DeWitt.

Neckbone looks at Ellis, frustrated by his friend.

MUD

Arkansas boys. Ya'll had me worried for a second.

Mud, pleased by this news, tucks the fishing pole under his arm and holds out a hand to shake. Ellis stares at the hand, unsure. He takes it reluctantly.

ELLIS

We s'posed to know you?

MUD

I doubt it. I grew up 'round here, but I've been gone awhile.

ELLIS
Where around here?

MUD
Different places. Spent a lot of
time back up near the White.

ELLIS
You know Shelly's Oxbow?

Neckbone can't believe his friend is offering this up.

NECKBONE
Ellis. We gotta go.

MUD
I know it. Guy named Tom
Blankenship used to live back in
there.

ELLIS
He still does. His boat's cross
from mine.

Mud smiles.

MUD
Ain't that somethin'.

In one motion, Mud flicks his cigarette away and grabs a pack
out of his shirt pocket.

MUD (CONT'D)
I like you two. You remind me of
me. And seeing how you boys are
from Arkansas and we know some
people and sounds like we all from
the same place I'd say we can make
a deal here about somethin'.

ELLIS
A deal for what?

MUD
Food. Food for a boat.

NECKBONE
This guy's a bum Ellis. Come on.

Mud's smile vanishes. Neckbone begins to walk off but
begrudgingly stops when Ellis starts back in.

ELLIS
Why don't you go get your own food?

MUD

I would if I could, but I told somebody I'd meet 'em here. So I'm stuck for now and what I got's runnin' low.

Neckbone walks back and pulls Ellis by the arm.

NECKBONE

He's a bum Ellis, let's go.

Mud lays a serious look down on Neckbone.

MUD

I'm no bum. I got money. You can call me a hobo 'cause a hobo'll work for his living and you can call me homeless 'cause that's true for now, but if you call me a bum again I'll have to teach you somethin' about respect that your daddy never did.

Neckbone's confidence recedes. Ellis stands his ground.

ELLIS

When they show up, you'll leave?

Mud begins fishing again.

MUD

Yeah.

ELLIS

And when you leave, that boat's ours?

MUD

Yeah.

Ellis studies Mud's face, clothes, tattoos. He's thinking about it. Mud pauses from fishing to make eye contact.

MUD (CONT'D)

I'm in a tight spot. I just need a little help.

ELLIS

We gotta go.

With that, Ellis turns to leave. The boys walk briskly back to their boat. Ellis looks over his shoulder to see Mud making another cast with his fishing pole.

Ellis motors them away from the island.

ELLIS
You get his name?!

NECKBONE
No!

Ellis looks back. Mud has disappeared.

19

EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - DAY

19

Senior heaves an enormous, white cooler into the bed of his weathered pick-up truck.

The truck is parked at an angle on a concrete boat ramp next to their houseboat. The bed of the truck is jam-packed with six of the big, white coolers.

The SOUND of a dirt bike rattles through the trees. Senior looks up, wiping his brow with a handkerchief.

Ellis leaps out of the treeline and runs to the pick-up. His hands hit his knees, out of breath.

ELLIS
I'm sorry.

SENIOR
Where you been?

ELLIS
Neck and I got caught up helpin'
Galen.

SENIOR
You're s'posed to be helpin' me. I
had to load this myself.

ELLIS
I know, I'm sorry.

SENIOR
Just get in the back. Can't be
later than we are.

ELLIS
Yessir.

Senior flips up the tailgate. Ellis hops up the wheel well and into the bed of the truck. He steadies himself on one of the coolers as his father pulls away.

EXT. DEWITT/MONTAGE - DAY

SERIES OF IMAGES:

20 -Ellis looks around as he rides in the bed of the pick-up truck. He's propped up on a cooler against the back window. The truck works its way down a two-lane highway. 20

A20 -Driving, they pass a marina junkyard filled with old boats and sailing paraphernalia. A20

B20 -Downtown Dewitt. A gas station. A Clinic. Rows of red brick buildings, some abandoned, a small furniture store. B20

C20 -Parked, Ellis fills a grocery sack up with Ziplock bags full of white fish and ice out of the coolers. C20

-He hops out of the truck and runs the sack of fish to the front door of a house. An elderly black man waits there.

21 EXT. SONIC DRIVE-IN - DAY 21

Ellis sits in the bed of the truck eating a chili dog. Senior is up front wolfing down a cheeseburger.

A GROUP of TEENAGERS are gathered around a CLUSTER of parked cars in the corner of the lot. They meander between the vehicles, smoking, gossiping, passing around a bottle of Boone's Farm. Ellis watches them.

MAY PEARL(16) appears in the middle of the Group laughing with her GIRLFRIENDS. She's pretty and physically more mature looking than Ellis.

He watches as a SKINNY KID takes his ballcap off and puts it on May Pearl's head. She sniffs the cap, gags and tosses it back at him. Her friends laugh.

SENIOR

Let's go son.

Ellis crumples the wrapper to his finished hotdog and jumps down from the bed of the truck.

22 I/E. SENIOR'S TRUCK/TWO-LANE ROAD - MOVING - DAY 22

Ellis rides up front with his father.

Senior is a reserved man, older than Ellis' mother by several years. He's got thinning hair under the cap that only leaves his head when he sleeps.

He reaches into his shirt pocket and fishes out a fold of cash. He slips out a five dollar bill and hands it to Ellis.

ELLIS

It's s'posed to be ten.

SENIOR
It's ten you do your share. I
loaded this mornin'. That makes it
five.

Ellis begrudgingly stuffs the five in his jeans.

ELLIS
You drop me at Neck's?

Senior checks his pants pockets, feels around under his seat.

SENIOR
Hadn't you seen enougha him today?

ELLIS
Said he had something for me.

SENIOR
You see anymore Ding Dongs over
there?

Ellis checks under his seat and pulls out a half-empty box of
Ding Dongs. Hands one over to his father who rips the
package with his teeth.

ELLIS
What'd Momma wanna talk to you
about?

SENIOR
What?

ELLIS
This mornin', what'd she wanna talk
with you about?

SENIOR
You spy on me in my own house?

ELLIS
I wasn't spyin', just heard ya'll.

SENIOR
That's your mother's business.

Senior makes this his answer, eats the Ding Dong.

23

EXT. NECKBONE'S TRAILER - DAY

23

Neckbone sits on the front steps of his trailer reading a
comic book. The muffled sound of the Beach Boys' "Help Me
Rhonda" plays off a record inside.

Senior's truck pulls away as Ellis walks up the entrance to
the trailer park.

ELLIS
I came by for that book.

NECKBONE
What book?

ELLIS
You said Galen had a book might help me out.

NECKBONE
Aw, yeah. We gotta give it a minute. You hear that music?

ELLIS
Yeah.

NECKBONE
That means he's doin' it. That's his doin' it song.

Ellis takes a seat next to Neckbone. They listen to the song, slightly craning their necks to pick up on any other sounds. There are none.

ELLIS
You know who it is?

NECKBONE
Whoever's drivin' that white Dodge.

Neckbone motions to a beat up Dodge Shadow in the yard.

ELLIS
You tell Galen 'bout this morning?

NECKBONE
Nah. You tell anybody?

ELLIS
No.

NECKBONE
That guy was crazy.

ELLIS
Maybe. I don't know. I think he just needed some help.

NECKBONE
Well he can swim his ass off that island and get some.

ELLIS
I think I'm gonna go back, take him some food.

NECKBONE

Why?

Suddenly, the music from inside stops. Footsteps approaching and the trailer door flies open, almost hitting the boys.

A GIRL(28) bursts out down the steps, straight to her car. She wears tight jean-shorts and is buttoning a white shirt. She stops and turns back to the boys.

GIRL

You're Neckbone right?

NECKBONE

Yeah.

GIRL

You look like a good enough kid. A word of advice, don't grow up to be like your shit heel uncle.

The boys can't take their eyes off her cleavage revealed under her half-buttoned shirt. A necklace with three misshapen pearls hangs from her neck.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Hey!

She snaps the boys' attention up to her eyes.

GIRL (CONT'D)

You hear me? You treat a woman like a princess. Got it?!

NECKBONE

Yeah.

The trailer door opens and GALEN(36) emerges. He's a big, lumbering guy wearing a full-body wet suit pulled halfway down. A faded mermaid tattooed in the middle of his chest.

GALEN

Come on baby.

GIRL

I'M A GODDAMN PRINCESS!!!

The Girl yanks off the necklace and hurls it at Galen. He brushes fingers through his thick mustache.

GALEN

That's uncalled for.

He walks out to her. She heads for the Dodge Shadow.

GALEN (CONT'D)
 (trailing off)
 A lot of people are comfortable
 with that kind of thing in the
 bedroom. Some people aren't. We
 know that about you now...

Ellis sees one of the misshapen pearls at his feet. He picks it up and holds it to the sun.

NECKBONE
 Pearls. Galen finds 'em in some of
 the mussel shells. Most of 'em
 ain't worth dick, but he likes to
 make necklaces for the girls. Come
 on, let's get that book.

Neckbone walks into the trailer. Ellis stands up and retrieves the other two pearls out of the dirt. He crams them in his pocket and follows Neckbone inside.

24 INT. NECKBONE'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

24

The trailer is decorated in the filth of a true bachelor pad. Neckbone makes his way to a bedroom. He tosses clothes and trash around to get to what he's looking for. A cardboard box. He pulls the box onto the bed and sifts through.

NECKBONE
 I don't want you goin' back out
 there by yourself. That river's
 scary enough with two people, and I
 don't trust that guy.
 (finds something)
 Here it is.

He takes out a hardback book. The slip reads, "The Confident Confidant, communicating with the opposite sex."

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
 Galen said this really turned
 things around for him.

ELLIS
 Thanks.

Ellis flips delicately through the manual.

25 EXT. NECKBONE'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

25

Galen watches as the Girl's Dodge Shadow pulls away. The boys step out of the trailer.

NECKBONE
 You really going back out there?

ELLIS

I think it's the right thing to do.

NECKBONE

Well...I'll be over in the mornin'
then.

Galen, his thumbs tucked under his armpits, walks back to the trailer. He passes the boys and notices the self-help book in Ellis' hands.

GALEN

(without stopping)

That's a good book. Be sure you do
the worksheets in the back. Let's
get some dinner Neck.

Galen's gone inside.

NECKBONE

I'll call 'fore I come.

ELLIS

All right.

Neckbone follows his uncle into the trailer. Ellis flips through his new book as he heads out of the trailer park.

26 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT

26

By the time Ellis makes it to his houseboat, the sun has disappeared behind the horizon.

He crosses the make-shift plank and enters through a screen door by the carport.

27 INT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - DEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

27

Mary Lee flinches when she sees Ellis come through the door. Her face is flushed. Senior stands toe to toe with her.

They stare at Ellis, who has paused in the doorway. He doesn't say anything, just looks curiously at his parents.

Senior storms past Ellis and is out the door.

Ellis steps further into the den. Mary Lee tries to straighten herself, patting down her hair and dabbing at her eyes with the back of her hand.

ELLIS

You okay momma?

MARY LEE

Yes.

She walks into the kitchen keeping Ellis at her back. She turns on the sink and begins scrubbing at a dish.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)
Do you need me to fix you
somethin'? Have you eaten?

ELLIS
I'm all right.

Mary Lee shuts off the water and lets the dish rest in the sink. She turns to Ellis.

MARY LEE
I'm gonna turn in.

ELLIS
Okay momma.

Mary Lee slips past him and enters her bedroom. The door closes and Ellis is left alone in the den. It's quiet. He waits, looking at the door his mother just closed.

Ellis walks into the kitchen and eases open a cabinet door.

Checking over his shoulder, he zips his backpack open and fills it with CANNED FOOD.

28 EXT. TOM BLANKENSHIP'S HOUSEBOAT - DAY

28

Hands pump the stock of a high-powered pellet gun.

TOM BLANKENSHIP(67), white hair cut high and tight wearing a short-sleeve button up, takes careful aim with the pellet gun.

Tom sits in a lawn chair atop the roof of his houseboat. He squeezes his left eye shut.

A snake's head pokes out of the water about 15 yards off his boat. The head makes for a target no bigger than a thumb.

Tom's left eye snaps open and he fires. The pellet rips through the snake's head. Its body floats to the surface.

Tom takes account of his shot as he pumps the air rifle. He scans the water for more targets.

29 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS

29

Ellis watches Tom Blankenship from across the bayou. Tom's boat sits directly opposite Ellis', separated by 30 yards of muddy brown water.

Ellis leans against a post under the carport. His backpack resting at his feet, he holds the Walkie-Talkie in his hand. Senior works behind him washing utensils in the outdoor sink.

ELLIS
 What do you know about Tom
 Blankenship?

SENIOR
 What?

Senior doesn't turn around from his work at the sink.

ELLIS
 Mr. Blankenship, what do you know
 about him?

SENIOR
 Why?

ELLIS
 I don't know. He looks lonely over
 there.

SENIOR
 Some people move to this river to
 work on it, and some move here to
 be left alone.

Senior makes his way to the ice machine and begins scooping
 ice into a large white cooler.

Mary Lee emerges from the houseboat dressed for work, a
 secretarial job. Senior stops what he's doing to watch her.
 She walks over to Ellis.

MARY LEE
 Let's sit down for dinner tonight
 okay? Will you make it home by
 seven?

ELLIS
 Yes ma'am.

She walks off the boat without a glance in Senior's
 direction. He trails her with his eyes before going back to
 digging in the ice.

A29 Ellis looks back at Tom. The Walkie SQUAWKS out several A29
 loud BEEPS. Ellis crams it in his backpack and runs off the
 boat.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
 Bye Dad.

Senior holds a hand up but never looks up from his work.

30 EXT. ISLAND SHORE - DAY

30

Water laps at the shore of the island. Ellis and Neckbone drag their boat onto the muddy bank.

NECKBONE

Where you think he's at?

ELLIS

I guess we should try the boat.

They head for the treeline.

31 EXT. BASE OF BOAT TREE - DAY

31

The boys emerge from the woods, their attention focused up to the boat hovering in the tree some twenty feet above them.

Ellis notices the remnants of a fire on the ground. A log pushed up next to it for a seat. Ellis kicks at the ash.

ELLIS

Looks like he made camp.

NECKBONE

(looking up to the boat)

You think he's up there?

MUD (O.S.)

I didn't know if ya'll'd come back.

The boys spin around. They survey the woods but no one's there. Their eyes drift up to find Mud sitting in a tree, his legs dangle off a branch.

ELLIS

What're you doin'?

Mud bounds down, stepping from limb to trunk to the ground. It's an agile move.

MUD

I try to never sleep in the same place twice. What you got there?

Mud motions with his head to the backpack in Ellis' hand. Ellis holds it out to him.

ELLIS

I brought you some food.

Mud looks at the backpack, but doesn't move.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

Go on.

Mud takes the backpack and walks over to the ashes of his campfire. He squats with his back to the boys and unzips the bag. Hunkered down, Mud's shirttail rides up over the lip of his jeans revealing a PISTOL at his backside.

Ellis sees this and motions to Neckbone. The boys stand their ground, cautious.

MUD
I owe you boys.

Keeping the bag in hand, Mud takes a seat on the stump behind him. He pulls out a selection of canned food; pumpkin pie filling, evaporated milk, green beans. He grabs the beans.

MUD (CONT'D)
I was gonna try runnin' a trot line today. See how far that'd get me.

Mud removes a good-sized folding knife from his pocket and makes short order of the can lid. He tips the can up letting the beans fall into his mouth. Juice flows down his cheeks.

MUD (CONT'D)
(a mouthful)
I'd been rationin' what I had...green bean never tasted so good.

The can is quickly emptied, juice running down Mud's chin. He straightens his back, choking down the final swallow. He sees the boys staring at him and catches himself.

MUD (CONT'D)
I appreciate it.

ELLIS
Yeah.

NECKBONE
What you got that pistol for?

Mud wipes off his chin, realizing the boys have been studying him. He closes the knife and tucks it in his pocket.

MUD
For protection.

Mud gets up, heads for a duffel bag tucked under a nearby tree. The boys pivot, keeping Mud in front of them. Mud notices.

MUD (CONT'D)
Ya'll don't have to be afraid of me. I have two ways to protect myself out here. This shirt, and this pistol.

(MORE)

MUD (CONT'D)
 There are fierce powers at work in
 the world boys. Good, evil, poor
 luck, best luck. Men have to take
 advantage where they can.

Mud removes a spool of fishing line and a small plastic
 tackle box. He scoops up the duffel bag and heads into the
 woods.

MUD (CONT'D)
 Ya'll comin'?

32

Neckbone looks to Ellis, who walks after Mud into the
 trees.

32

ELLIS
 Who's this guy you're waitin' on?

MUD
 I'm not waitin' for a guy. I'm
 waitin' on my girlfriend. Juniper.

NECKBONE
 Is she hot?

MUD
 She's beautiful.

NECKBONE
 (coughing)
 Bullshit.

MUD
 Best lookin' girl I've ever seen.
 Hands down. Blonde hair. Long
 legs. She's like a dream you don't
 want to wake up from. She's got
 birds tattooed on her hands, here.

Mud stops, points to the area on the top of his right hand,
 between his thumb and pointer finger.

MUD (CONT'D)
 Nightingales. Good luck birds.

NECKBONE
 That a good luck snake?

MUD
 No it is not.

NECKBONE
 I hate snakes.

MUD
 That's because God made them for us
 to fear.

(MORE)

MUD (CONT'D)

It's a thing we knew to be afraid
of before we even got into this
world.

33

They emerge from the woods onto the downstream coast of
the island. It looks different than the other shoreline.
A large swath of red clay angles sharply into the water.

33

MUD (CONT'D)

Cherokee would wrap snake skin
around their pregnant women's
bellies. Induce labor, scare the
child out. Here.

He fetches a length of rope out of the duffel bag and tosses
it to Neckbone.

MUD (CONT'D)

Set that 'round your bed at night.
Snake won't cross braided rope.

NECKBONE

Thanks.

(nods to Mud's tattoo)

So what's that for then?

Mud walks to a tree branch that has grown out over the bank,
nearly resting in the water. He sets a trot line from it.

MUD

A reminder. Don't get bit. I was
10, swimmin' 'bout a mile up from
here. Me and Juniper. Sonofabitch
swam right up under me, bit me just
below the armpit. June got me out,
got me to a clinic. Doctor said I
shoulda been dead in twenty
minutes. Took us an hour just to
get back to town.

NECKBONE

What'd they do?

MUD

Gave me antivenom. For a cotton
mouth. See here.

Mud shows the tattoo on top of his right hand. He points out
the two cotton blossoms bulging from the snake's mouth.

MUD (CONT'D)

Problem with antivenom is they can
only give it to you once. It's
made from horse blood. Your body
would reject it a second time. The
cure ends up being more dangerous
than the poison.

ELLIS

What happens if you get bit again?

MUD

I die, or just sweat it out.

Neckbone, not buying it, looks at Ellis and taps his watch.

ELLIS

We gotta go help Neck's uncle.

MUD

All right.

ELLIS

You never said your name.

MUD

Mud. You can call me Mud.

ELLIS

Mud?

MUD

M-U-D.

Neckbone tosses the braided rope back. It lands at his feet.

NECKBONE

Here you go, Mud. I think you need that worse than I do.

MUD

(smiling)

I'll be all right.

The boys disappear back into the trees.

34 INT. GARY'S ELECTRIC SHOP - DAY

34

A switch clicks "ON". BLINDING LIGHT emits from two FLOOD LAMPS encased in plastic shells. The switch clicks "OFF" and the lights dim to the dull orange glow of their filaments.

GALEN

They look bright enough.

The owner of the shop, an ELECTRICIAN(62), holds up a metal bar with the lamps affixed by bolts at either end.

ELECTRICIAN

Should be. I rigged DC power up through marine batteries. Makes it portable. Gave you a rigging bar to set on your shoulder.

GALEN

So you really think these'll work
under water?

ELECTRICIAN

In theory.

35 EXT. GARY'S ELECTRIC/PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS 35

Ellis and Neckbone sit on the tailgate of Galen's truck. The Gary's Electric sign hangs behind them.

Neckbone focuses on a carburetor in his hand. Ellis stares across the street at the Piggly Wiggly parking lot where the roving GROUP of TEENAGERS have collected for the afternoon.

The Teenagers are up to their typical gossip and minor offenses. Ellis has zeroed in on May Pearl again.

NECKBONE

You start datin' I bet her dad'll
give you a free pick-up truck.

ELLIS

I don't care about that.

Ellis watches as the same Skinny Kid from before tries to flirt with her. She's not having it. He pops her bra strap before landing the final straw, a smack on her ass. She turns and swats at him.

Seeing this, Ellis is on his feet and crossing the street.

NECKBONE

What's goin' on?

Ellis doesn't turn back. Neckbone reluctantly sets the carburetor down and follows.

36 EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS 36

MAY PEARL

Stop it!

She shoves the Skinny Kid, but he continues laughing.

ELLIS (O.S.)

Hey.

Ellis taps the Kid on the shoulder. As he turns, Ellis PUNCHES him in the face.

The Kid, completely taken off guard, stumbles and trips to the ground. Some older, tougher looking GUYS see this and begin laughing at him.

OLDER KID
Holy shit Pryor, get off your ass.

Pryor collects himself and gets off the ground. Ego bruised, he walks off mumbling. The Older Kids keep riding him.

May Pearl sizes up Ellis.

MAY PEARL
You didn't have to do that.

ELLIS
He was messin' with you.

MAY PEARL
Do I know you?

ELLIS
I'm Ellis. That's Neck.

Neckbone waves by wagging a finger in the air.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
We went to Junior High with you,
before you went to High School.

MAY PEARL
How old are you?

ELLIS
Fourteen.

MAY PEARL
Fourteen? You know you just
punched a Senior?

ELLIS
So?

MAY PEARL
You think you're pretty tough.

Ellis shrugs, not wanting to deny it.

MAY PEARL (CONT'D)
I'm May Pearl.

ELLIS
I know.

MAY PEARL
What else do you know?

ELLIS
Nothin'.

She smiles.

Something catches Neckbone's attention. He cranes his neck forward to get a better look.

NECKBONE
Son of a bitch...Ellis?

Ellis breaks away from his conversation with May Pearl.

ELLIS
What?

NECKBONE
Look.

Neckbone nods to a cheap motel called the EXECUTIVE INN located on the opposite side of the Piggly Wiggly parking lot.

JUNIPER(35), a truly beautiful woman squeezed into tight jeans and a low cut top, makes her way from the motel parking lot to the Piggly Wiggly.

She passes in front of the cluster of Teenagers. All of the boys have taken note. Some cat calls from the crowd. Juniper, without facing the Teenagers, gives them the finger.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
You ever seen that girl before?

ELLIS
No. Did you see her hands?

MAY PEARL
Hello?

Ellis catches himself and turns back to May Pearl.

ELLIS
Sorry. We know a guy we think might know that girl.

MAY PEARL
Oh.

A GIRLFRIEND(17) of May Pearl's calls out to her.

GIRLFRIEND
May Pearl! Let's go!

MAY PEARL
Okay!

ELLIS
I guess I'll see you.

MAY PEARL

If you can find my phone number,
you should call it.

ELLIS
I can find it.

May Pearl walks over to her friend. Ellis watches her go, but then remembers Juniper. He turns to Neckbone.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Where'd she go?

NECKBONE
Into the Piggly Wiggly. She came from the motel.

ELLIS
I'm gonna go see if it's her.

NECKBONE
I gotta go check on Galen. We'll pick you up out front.

Ellis heads for the Piggly Wiggly. Neckbone calls after him.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
What'd she say?

ELLIS
Wants me to call her.

NECKBONE
Shit.

37 INT. PIGGLY WIGGLY - DAY

37

Ellis walks past the grocery aisles looking for the girl. He spots her by the potato chips. He tucks behind a display of stacked cans and watches.

Juniper reaches for a bag of chips, birds tattooed on her hand. Ellis smiles. It's her, and she really is beautiful.

She turns down the aisle, coming right for him. He pretends to peruse the canned food and notices that it's a big display of Beanie Weenie. He grabs two handfuls as she passes.

Ellis takes the cans to an open register. As a CASHIER scans and bags his items, he cranes his neck looking for her. She's disappeared into another section of the store.

Ellis pays in crumpled cash. A horn HONKS. He sees Galen's truck idling out front. He grabs the bag and runs out.

38 EXT. GALEN'S TRUCK/PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

38

Neckbone waits at the open passenger door.

NECKBONE
Was it her?

ELLIS
It's her. I saw the tattoos. He
wasn't lyin'.

NECKBONE
(looking back)
No he wasn't.

39 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT

39

By the time Ellis makes it back home, the sun has gone from the sky. He crosses the makeshift plank to board his house.

SENIOR (O.S.)
Home for dinner?

Ellis is startled by his father's voice. Senior sits in a lawn chair under the eaves of the carport. He's hidden in shadow, save for a red glow from the tip of his cigarette.

ELLIS
What you hidin' for?

SENIOR
I ain't hidin'.

He notices Senior tip back a pint of liquor and set it at his feet. Ellis opens the screen door leading inside.

SENIOR (CONT'D)
Come over here.

Ellis lets the door fall shut and skulks over to a beam that supports the carport. He leans into it.

SENIOR (CONT'D)
You know I love you?

ELLIS
Yessir. I know.

SENIOR
I work you hard 'cause life is
work. You know that?

ELLIS
Yessir.

SENIOR
Your Mamma's been talkin' 'bout
movin' in town.

ELLIS
What's that mean?

SENIOR

She seems set on it. Wants to separate. She may ask me for a divorce.

This hits Ellis like a ton of bricks. He rights himself.

ELLIS

What's that mean for me?

SENIOR

It means enjoy the river son. Enjoy it while you live on it, 'cause this way a life isn't long for this world. Game and fish's 'bout made certain of that.

ELLIS

But you and me can still live out here. Game and fish can't take your boat. Not while you're still in it.

SENIOR

The houseboat's in your mother's name. Her daddy give it to her not me. If she wants to leave it, Game and Fish has ever' right to take this boat apart board by board.

ELLIS

But that ain't right. You work outta here. We got the ice machine, the traps. What are we supposed to do?

SENIOR

Like I said, this is your mother's business.

ELLIS

I ain't no townie. I ain't livin' like that.

Senior takes a slow pull off the bottle. Ellis' mind races.

SENIOR

I've let you down. A man should be in charge of his own affairs, but I haven't worked it like that.

ELLIS

But ya'll are married. Ya'll are s'posed to love each other.

SENIOR

I don't know about that anymore.

Ellis is speechless. After a moment, he turns to go inside.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Ellis?

He stops and turns back to his father. Senior tries to express a sentiment he doesn't have the words for. Ellis continues inside.

40 INT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - DEN - CONTINUOUS 40

Mary Lee sits hunched at the made dinner table. She runs her finger around the rim of a half empty glass of iced tea.

It's a full spread with fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and a salad. The table is set for two. She's been waiting.

Ellis lets the front door slam shut behind him. She sits up.

MARY LEE

You're late.

Ellis doesn't speak, he doesn't look at her. He enters his room and shuts the door.

He's heard the news and she knows it. Mary Lee's face drops.

41 INT. ELLIS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS 41

Ellis slings his backpack down, pacing the small room. He stops and leans his forehead against the door. The sound of his Mother clearing the table seeps through.

He kicks the door, cracking its shitty composite wood. His face flushed and his breathing heavy, he slides to a seat.

On the verge of hyperventilating, he stares out the dark bedroom window trying to get control of his breathing.

Ellis looks at his backpack. It has spilled open revealing a can of Beanie Weenie. Ellis studies the can.

He looks back to the window. His breathing settles.

Quickly, he scoops up the backpack and heads out the window.

42 EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - NIGHT 42

It's pitch black. The only light comes from the moon's reflection off the surface of the water.

Ellis, eyes wide, navigates the small boat through choppy black water.

43 EXT. ISLAND SHORE - NIGHT 43

Ellis struggles to pull the boat onto shore. Leaving it half in the water, Ellis looks around. No sign of Mud. He sizes up the dark woods.

He removes a flashlight from his backpack and shines it down the shorelines. Still nothing. Ellis follows the beam of light into the woods.

44 EXT. ISLAND WOODS - NIGHT 44

Ellis stands at the creek that cuts through the island.

He can make out a campfire glowing through trees in the distance. A RUSTLING behind him. He swings the light around. Nothing but trees.

Ellis takes a deep breath. Finding the log to cross, he shines his light down into the creek. The nest of snakes show their backs.

45 EXT. BASE OF BOAT TREE - NIGHT 45

A campfire burns at the base of the tree. The firelight illuminates the belly of the boat that rests 20 feet above.

Ellis, his flashlight off, crouches behind a tree and watches the campsite. There is no one there. He looks into the black forest behind him, thinks of going back.

A twig snaps in the distance and he's back on guard. Ellis nervously scans the woods before finally stepping into the light of the campfire.

The SOUND of a gun's hammer drawing back CLICKS behind him. Ellis freezes.

Mud emerges from the trees, a .45 extended toward Ellis' back.

MUD

Ellis?

Ellis, still frozen, slowly turns to him. Mud huffs out a laugh and drops the pistol to his side.

MUD (CONT'D)

What're you doin' out here?

Ellis slowly raises the backpack in his hand.

ELLIS

I got you some Beanie Weenie.

Mud tucks the pistol into his jeans and accepts the backpack.

MUD

I appreciate that, but I didn't expect you out here at night.

Mud takes a seat on the log and transfers the cans into his own duffel bag. He holds up a can of the Beanie Weenie.

MUD (CONT'D)

Look at that. You really know how to do somebody right. I didn't wanna say anything before, but it's hard to make a meal out of pumpkin pie filling.

ELLIS

That's all my mom had.

MUD

I'm not complainin'.

ELLIS

Can I get one of those?

MUD

They're yours to begin with.

Ellis sits as Mud hands him a can. They eat.

ELLIS

I missed my dinner.

MUD

That's good right?

ELLIS

(mouth full)

You been out here too long.

Mud laughs. Finishing the can, he takes a half-smoked cigarette from his shirt pocket. He pulls a twig from the fire for a light.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

The girl you're waitin' on, she's your girlfriend?

MUD

Juniper. Yeah.

ELLIS

How'd you meet her?

MUD

We grew up together.

ELLIS

Do you love her?

MUD

I do. The first time I saw her was on this river. Just up from here. She saved my life.

ELLIS

From the snake bite.

MUD

That's right. I was younger than you are now, but when I came to in the hospital and she was there, it was like the world split open, came back together new. Everything changed. I knew from then on I'd do anything for her.

ELLIS

Why aren't ya'll married?

MUD

I've asked. Several times. Marriage just doesn't work for some people.

Ellis thinks on this.

ELLIS

My dad says my parents may be gettin' a divorce.

MUD

I'm sorry to hear that.

ELLIS

If it happens, and my mom moves us off the river, they say the government can come take our boat away.

MUD

Who says that?

ELLIS

Everybody. They passed a law so you can't sell your boat. Can't rent it. If the owner leaves, they got you. Game and Fish want 'em off the river.

MUD

I've never been one to trust the government on matters of personal property, but if your parents love each other, there's always a chance.

(MORE)

MUD (CONT'D)

People just sometimes forget why
they fell in love in the first
place.

Ellis watches Mud take the cigarette nub. He's really
getting all he can from it.

ELLIS

I saw Juniper today.

MUD

What?

ELLIS

I didn't talk to her, but she had
the birds tattooed on her hand like
you said. You were right. She's
pretty.

Mud stands, surprised by the news. He walks to the other
side of the fire so his back is to the boy.

MUD

Where'd you see her?

ELLIS

At the Piggly Wiggly. I think
she's stayin' at a motel by there.
The Executive Inn.

Mud looks at Ellis through the fire. He takes a drag and
smiles at the boy. The hole from his missing tooth shows.

MUD

That's good news. Real good news.

Mud paces, slowly. He's thinking.

ELLIS

Does she know you're out here?

MUD

No. We picked another place to
meet. Couple days from now.

Mud walks back to the log and sits.

ELLIS

You wanna go tonight? I can give
you a ride up river.

Mud looks at Ellis, nodding.

MUD

Tomorrow. I'll go tomorrow.

ELLIS
You need me to come get you?

MUD
Naw. I can manage. Hell I got out
here didn't I?

Ellis smiles.

They sit in silence. Ellis stares up at the boat hanging
over them, its peeling hull lit by the firelight.

Mud pinches the ash from the end of his cigarette, places the
stub back in his shirt pocket. Noticing Ellis, Mud tilts his
head back to take in the boat.

MUD (CONT'D)
It's a helluva thing.

Mud pauses, his mind working on something.

MUD (CONT'D)
Helluva thing.

The two sit by the campfire staring up at the suspended boat.

46 INT. ELLIS' ROOM - MORNING

46

Mary Lee knocks on her way into the bedroom.

MARY LEE
Time to get up.

She begins picking clothes off the floor. Ellis, in bed,
raises up on his elbows. He's tired from a late night.

ELLIS
It's Saturday.

MARY LEE
I'm going to Wal-Mart. I need you
to come with me.

ELLIS
(moaning)
Mom.

MARY LEE
Come on.

She pulls the covers off of him.

47 I/E. MARY LEE'S CAR/INTERSTATE - DAY

47

The two ride in an awkward silence.

Ellis stares at the farmland passing by outside as Mary Lee steers the compact Toyota down a four-lane interstate.

MARY LEE

Ellis I know what your father told you last night. That's not what I wanted. I wanted to sit you down and talk about it.

ELLIS

What do you wanna talk about? You want to leave and that means they can tear up our house.

MARY LEE

I've spent my whole life on that boat. I don't think it's too much to ask for your...

Mary Lee is interrupted by a line of traffic backed up in front of her. She slows to a stop.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)

Oh no. I hope no one's hurt.

There are flashing police lights up ahead. Ellis tries to see what's going on but can't make anything out past the line of cars. They inch forward.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)

I'm just saying there are two sides to this. I haven't made up my mind about anything because I want you to be involved in my decision, but I need a change Ellis. I deserve one.

As they approach the flashing lights, they see three State Trooper vehicles parked to funnel traffic down to one lane. The STATE TROOPERS stop each car, checking the trunks.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)

I think they're searching people.

A Trooper signals Mary Lee to pull up to a stop. Two other Troopers approach her vehicle. The first begins looking in her back windows as the second leans down to speak to her. She lowers her window.

TROOPER

Can you open the trunk please ma'am?

MARY LEE

Of course.

Mary Lee pulls the lever by her knee, and the second Trooper walks around the back of the car.

TROOPER
Have you picked up or seen any
hitchhikers today ma'am?

MARY LEE
No sir.

The Trooper produces a flier with a color photo on it.

TROOPER
Have you seen this man?

MARY LEE
No sir.

The Trooper leans over and holds the paper out to Ellis.

TROOPER
Son, have you seen this man?

Ellis looks at the photo. It's of Mud. He looks exactly the same as he did last night, down to the shirt. In the photo, Mud's smiling, revealing his missing tooth.

ELLIS
No.

TROOPER
We've had reports that he's in this
area. If you see him, call 9-1-1
immediately.

MARY LEE
We will officer.

The Trooper pulls his head from the window.

ELLIS
What'd he do?!

The Trooper bends back down and looks at Ellis.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
(more calm)
What'd he do?

TROOPER
Move along please.

Mary Lee pulls forward and speeds back up on the interstate.

MARY LEE
My lord.
(rolls up her window)
(MORE)

MARY LEE (CONT'D)
How would you feel about moving
into town with me?

(no answer)

Please don't tell your father this,
but I've been looking at a couple
of places. I know it would be a
big adjustment for you, but it
might end up being something you
like. You know living on the river
isn't exactly everyone's idea of
the good life. Ellis?

He looks at her.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)
Are you even listening to me?

48 INT. ELLIS' ROOM - DAY 48

Ellis busts through the door, grabs his backpack and is gone.

49 EXT. HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 49

Ellis is off the houseboat and running up the bank.

He heads down the dirt path, grabbing the Walkie Talkie out
of his backpack.

ELLIS
(into the Walkie)
Neck! Neck, pick up!

50 EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY 50

Ellis removes branches and readies the flat bottom boat to
launch. The sound of Neckbone's bike arrives before he does.

Neckbone crests the sand covered slope. He dismounts and
starts to chain the bike up to a tree trunk.

NECKBONE
So what's the big deal?

ELLIS
My mom and I were headed to Wal-
Mart on 165. There was a roadblock
with state troopers. They searched
our car and showed us a picture of
Mud. They're lookin' for him.

NECKBONE
I knew it! I told you that crazy
sonofabitch was trouble. Did they
say what he did?

ELLIS
No.

NECKBONE

So'd you tell 'em where he is?

ELLIS

No. That's why I called you. We gotta warn him.

NECKBONE

What?

ELLIS

He's goin' to get Juniper today. I went out there last night and told him where we saw her. He needs to know people are lookin' for him.

NECKBONE

You think he doesn't know that already? Jesus Ellis, why do you think he's on that island? You don't even know what he's wanted for.

Ellis climbs in the boat and Neckbone yanks his shoulder.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

Ellis! I'm serious. We don't know who this guy is.

ELLIS

He loves her Neck. He told me.

NECKBONE

I don't give a shit who he loves.

Ellis starts the motor and waits for his friend.

ELLIS

He's not dangerous.

Reluctantly, Neckbone throws his leg into the boat.

NECKBONE

It sounds like a shitload of state troopers think different.

51 EXT. BASE OF BOAT TREE - DAY

51

Ellis and Neckbone emerge from the woods at Mud's campsite. They scan nearby tree limbs.

NECKBONE

No tellin' where the hell he's been sleepin'.

ELLIS

He may already be gone.

MUD (O.S.)

Hey!

The boys look straight up. Mud leans over the edge of the boat above them.

MUD (CONT'D)

Up here!

Mud drops them a rope with knots tied in it. Ellis starts inching his way up. Neckbone begrudgingly follows.

52

EXT. BOAT IN TREE - CONTINUOUS

52

Ellis pulls himself over the edge of the boat. He finds Mud sitting in the swivel chair behind the steering wheel. He writes in an open spiral notebook with a black Sharpie.

ELLIS

What are you doin'?

MUD

I'm gonna have to go back on our deal for the boat. I don't feel good about it, but I don't see any other way outta what I'm into.

Neckbone makes his way on board. Mud has pulled a panel off the steering column. Exposed wires dangle.

ELLIS

So you know about the state troopers?

He looks up from his notebook.

MUD

What state troopers?

NECKBONE

The ones spreadin' your picture all over the place. Stoppin' cars on 165 searchin' for your ass.

Mud factors this in and then goes back to writing.

MUD

I didn't know about that, but it doesn't surprise me. There plenty of folks lookin' for me right now.

ELLIS

Why?

MUD

I shot a man. Killed him.

Mud stands and walks to the back of the boat. The boys' eyes follow him cautiously.

Mud lifts a hatch at the back that would typically house the batteries and engine wiring. There's nothing left but a hole into the trees. He makes a note.

MUD (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I didn't tell ya'll sooner, but I was hopin' to be gone before anything came of it. Didn't want you involved.

Mud turns to really face them for the first time.

MUD (CONT'D)
Ya'll have been real good to me. You're the only friends I got out here. If the state troopers have 165 blocked, they'll have others blocked too. I won't get anywhere in a car. I want to try takin' this boat down, see if we can get it in the water.

Ellis and Neckbone stand their ground. They don't say anything. Mud walks back to the steering column. He drops to his knees and fiddles with the wires.

MUD (CONT'D)
With a boat like this I can make it to the gulf in two days. I could get anywhere from there. But I'd need a boat at least this big to make it on open water. It's got no title, no owner, nobody lookin' for it. It's my best shot.

NECKBONE
Who'd you kill?

MUD
It was a bad piece of business. Ya'll don't need to hear about it.

ELLIS
I need to hear about it.

Mud sits up. He looks at Ellis, deciding how much to tell.

MUD
Juniper made a mistake. She hooked up with a guy. He was no good. His name was Hutchins. Family owns a chain of restaurants down in Texas.

ELLIS

Where were you?

MUD

I was around, but me and Juniper were on the outs. She met this Hutchins, he sold her on some lies. Got her pregnant. That's when he started showin' who he really was. He dropped June down a flight of stairs after whoopin' her half to death. She lost the baby. He made it so the doctors think she can't have children anymore. There're things you can get away with in this world and things you can't. I tracked him down at a motel just outside of San Antonio. He was there with another woman. That's where it happened.

Mud's done with his story. He goes back to the wiring.

MUD (CONT'D)

I understand if you can't help me anymore, but I need this boat. And I need to get it in the water fast.

After a moment, he sits up and wipes sweat from his forehead.

MUD (CONT'D)

I've made a list. Things we'll need. What do ya'll think?

Ellis takes time to consider everything. He looks at Neckbone, who has a disgruntled look on his face.

ELLIS

You did it for her? To protect her?

MUD

Yeah.

Ellis nods. Mud looks over at Neckbone, who still has the disgruntled look on his face.

MUD (CONT'D)

What do you think?

NECKBONE

I think you want us to run around, stickin' our necks out, gettin' everything you need, just so you can take our boat.

MUD
That's about it.

Mud removes a cigarette butt and sparks it with a lighter.

NECKBONE
What do we get out of it?

MUD
What do you want?

Neckbone looks to Ellis, judging his bargaining position.

NECKBONE
What about that pistol?

Mud eyes the boy, pulling on the nub of cigarette.

MUD
I only got two things out here
worth anything. This shirt...

Mud pulls the pistol from the back of his jeans. Neckbone tenses, but relaxes when Mud splays it out on an open palm.

MUD (CONT'D)
And this pistol. I can't give you
the shirt 'cause I need it for
protection, but if you help me get
this boat in the water, the
pistol's yours.

Neckbone squinches his face in thought, sizing up this trade.

NECKBONE
What kind is it?

MUD
A forty five.

NECKBONE
I guess we could work a deal like
that.

Neckbone steps forward to grab the pistol, but Mud puts it back in his jeans.

MUD
We get this thing floatin' first.

Neckbone looks over at Ellis, who shrugs.

NECKBONE
All right then.

Mud smiles, flashing his missing tooth. He spits in his palm and holds it out to Neckbone. Neckbone, not sure about taking the spit hand, reluctantly shakes.

Mud rips a page from the notebook and hands it to Ellis.

MUD

Ya'll scrounge what you can off this list, but if we're gonna get this done right we'll need more help. Can you fetch Tom for me?

ELLIS

Tom Blankenship?

Mud has smoked down to the filter. He crushes the butt into his palm and puts it back in his shirt pocket.

MUD

I was hopin' to let that old assassin stay put, but we'll need him to get things ya'll can't. Can you find him?

ELLIS

I know where he lives, but I've never spoke to him.

MUD

Just tell him my name. He'll know you're serious.

Ellis folds the list up. He and Neckbone start down the rope as Mud goes back to the wiring.

MUD (CONT'D)

Boys?
(they pause)
Thanks.

Ellis nods.

NECKBONE

Don't lose my pistol.

They continue down the rope. Mud continues his work.

53

EXT. SHELLY'S OXBOW - DAY

53

Ellis steers to the southern mouth of Shelly's Oxbow, the bend in the river that holds he and Tom Blankenship's houseboats, among others.

He grounds the boat just shy of entering the Oxbow and steps over Neckbone to hop onto the bank.

ELLIS
You comin'?

NECKBONE
I'll watch the boat.

Ellis scans the woods that populate the patch of land wedged between the river and this short tributary.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
Ellis?

ELLIS
What?

NECKBONE
Be careful. Galen always said that old man's crazy.

Neckbone keeps his seat as Ellis darts into the woods

54 EXT. TOM'S WOODS - DAY

54

Ellis prowls around the small pine trees and bushes. He pauses, seeing the entrance to Tom Blankenship's boat.

Something moves on the houseboat. Ellis hunkers down behind a bush. He sees Tom wrapping cable onto a metal spool.

Ellis is nervous. He checks over his shoulder, nothing but woods. When he looks back to the boat, Tom is gone. In a crouch, Ellis moves closer.

Taking a deep breath, Ellis steps out from the cover of the pine trees and heads up a walkway that leads onboard.

TOM (O.S.)
Why you huntin' me?

Ellis flinches. He turns to find Tom Blankenship standing at the edge of the boat.

TOM (CONT'D)
You deaf boy? I said why're you huntin' me?

ELLIS
I ain't huntin you.

TOM
What's your business here?

ELLIS
I came to find you. I got a message for you.

TOM
You're Senior's boy.

ELLIS
Yessir.

TOM
What you got to say he can't tell
me himself?

Tom, rusty on pleasantries, brushes past Ellis as he heads
inside the boat.

ELLIS
It ain't from him.

Ellis, not wanting to follow further, shouts from the planks.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
MUD SENT ME!

There is a silence. Then footsteps. Tom reappears.

TOM
Mud sent you.

ELLIS
Yessir.

TOM
What do you know about it?

ELLIS
He asked me to come get you.

Tom straightens his back. He looks into the woods, searching
for something he may have missed.

TOM
Your daddy know this?

ELLIS
No sir. Mud needs your help.

Tom's mind churns on a series of facts unknown to the boy.

TOM
Where is he?

55 EXT. RIVER - DAY

55

Neckbone bounces in the boat as it shifts in the choppy
Mississippi water. His eyes are locked on the back of Tom's
head. Tom rides stone faced in the front.

Neckbone turns back to Ellis and raises his eyebrows as if to
ask, "What's going on?". Ellis shrugs.

56 EXT. ISLAND SHORE - DAY

56

Ellis runs the boat on shore. Tom splashes into the ankle deep water and helps the boys drag it onto the bank.

Ellis takes the lead, walking ahead and scanning the treeline. Mud steps out, just past the shadow of the woods.

Ellis turns to Tom and points.

ELLIS
There he is.

Tom spits onto the muddy bank and makes his way toward Mud. Ellis and Neckbone stay by the boat and watch.

BY THE TREELINE,

Mud watches Tom approaching. He corrects his posture and feebly attempts to smooth some wrinkles from his shirt.

Tom stops in front of him, his eyes pinched in the sun.

TOM
Mud.

MUD
Sir.

They stare at each other for a long moment. Neither one flinching.

BY THE BOAT,

At this distance, the boys can't hear what is being said, but they try and size up the situation through body language.

NECKBONE
You think that's his dad?

ELLIS
I don't know.

BY THE TREELINE,

TOM
Where is she?

MUD
In town. Got here yesterday.

Tom lowers his head. Frustrated.

TOM
Why you out here like this?

BY THE BOAT,

The boys see Mud take a seat on a nearby stump. He's explaining something. Tom listens, standing over him.

NECKBONE

They don't look like family.

Ellis watches Mud as he gestures and speaks. He seems different. Younger.

Mud stops talking. Tom scratches a hand through his white crew cut. He begins pointing a finger at Mud. His face is flushed and the sound of his voice carries to the boys, though still unintelligible.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

He's really givin' it to him.

AT THE TREELINE,

Mud's head hangs as Tom shouts at him.

TOM

You've spent your whole life followin' that girl! She's run you halfway cross the country and back, and for what? For this, left out on an island beggin' for help. A murderer. A thief.

MUD

I ain't no thief.

TOM

What would you call it then? Don't even mention draggin' those boys into this. Do you have any idea what you're doin'?

Waits for a response, but Mud gives none.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm ashamed of you.

Mud looks up at him.

TOM (CONT'D)

Don't expect help from me. There's none to be given.

AT THE BOAT,

They see Tom turn his back on Mud and head toward the boat. Mud doesn't protest; he doesn't move.

Tom brushes past Ellis.

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm ready.

Tom shoves the boat back into the water. Neckbone helps him. Ellis looks back at Mud, who still hasn't moved from his stump. He goes to him. Tom sees this and stops pushing.

TOM (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Dammit.

AT THE TREELINE,

Ellis stops a good six feet back from where Mud sits.

ELLIS

You all right?

Mud raises his head.

MUD

Looks like we're on our own.

He stands and takes a folded piece of paper from his shirt.

MUD (CONT'D)

I didn't want you bein' the one to do this, but I can't see a way around it. I need to get this letter to Juniper. Could you take it to her for me?

ELLIS

Yeah.

MUD

You have to be careful. You can't just walk up and knock on her door, you hear me? You have to watch yourself.

ELLIS

I can handle it.

Ellis steps forward and Mud hands over the note. Ellis takes it and walks back to the others.

AT THE BOAT,

Tom stares at Ellis as he climbs on board.

Tom looks back at Mud, who is watching him. He gives the boat a final shove before pulling himself in. They motor away. Tom doesn't look back.

57 EXT. RIVER/SHELLY'S OXBOW - MOVING - DAY

57

NECKBONE
You Mud's daddy?

TOM
Mud didn't have no daddy. No
mother I ever knew of. He was
livin' in the woods when I met him.
Younger than you are now.

Tom doesn't offer anymore. Neckbone thinks on his answer.

Ellis kills the engine near the mouth of Shelly's Oxbow. Tom jumps down into the knee deep river and wades onto shore. He turns back to the boys.

TOM (CONT'D)
Ya'll need to watch yourselves.
Don't go gettin' into something you
don't have any business in. Mud's
into something you don't want any
part of. I suggest you forget
about him.

Ellis and Neckbone don't respond. Tom, with a final admonishing look, disappears into the woods.

Ellis cranks the motor and points the boat up river.

58 EXT. RIVER - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

58

Edges of the notebook paper flap in the wind. Neckbone reads Mud's letter to Juniper.

Ellis reaches the bank where they stash their boat. He shuts off the motor and let's them drift. Neckbone folds the letter back up and turns to face Ellis.

ELLIS
What do you think?

NECKBONE
He loves her. You can tell that
much. You gonna take it to her?

ELLIS
I told him I would.

Neckbone thinks about this seriously, shakes his head.

NECKBONE
I don't know. Could be a lot of
trouble.

ELLIS
 You still got that trailer you made
 for your bike?

59 EXT. DEWITT STREET - LATE AFTERNOON 59

Neckbone rides with Ellis on the back of his dirt bike.

Cars and Trucks HONK and zip by them. Their speed is topped out at about 15 miles per hour. Mostly a result of the small 3X4 metal trailer they are towing behind the bike.

One of Senior's white fish coolers sits in the trailer.

60 EXT. EXECUTIVE INN/PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON 60

Parked in the far corner of the lot, Ellis sits on top of the white cooler eyeing the Executive Inn. Neckbone straddles the dirt bike. A handful of cars are parked at the motel; an old Honda, a pick-up, and a BLACK LINCOLN.

ELLIS
 I say we start at the top, work our
 way down.

NECKBONE
 All right.

They each grab an end of the cooler and carry it across the lot toward a flight of stairs.

61 ON THE SECOND FLOOR, 61

The boys set the cooler down in front of the first room on the corner. Ellis checks over his shoulder, nothing strange.

Ellis knocks. They wait. No answer.

They pick the cooler up and walk to the next door. Knock. After a moment, a BLACK MAN in his late sixties opens the door wearing boxers and an undershirt.

BLACK MAN
 What you want?

ELLIS
 We're sellin' fish. You wanna buy
 some?

BLACK MAN
 Fish?

He looks at the two boys like they are insane.

BLACK MAN (CONT'D)
 I don't want no damn fish.

He slams the door.

They drag the cooler to the next door. As Ellis holds up his fist to knock, they hear a woman shouting a few doors down.

JUNIPER (O.S.)
STOP IT! STOP!

Ellis heads for the room. Neckbone drags the cooler after him. Ellis reaches the motel room door, which has been left ajar. He places his hand on it and lets it fall open.

62

INT. EXECUTIVE INN/JUNIPER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

62

CARVER (O.S.)
KEEP LYIN'! KEEP LYIN' AND I'LL
CRACK YOUR NOSE OPEN!

The door opens to CARVER(47), a tall, slender man in a dark Western cut suit, standing over Juniper. She's crumpled up in a ball at the end of the bed. Carver swats open-handed at her head. Grabs the top of her hair.

CARVER (CONT'D)
You hear me bitch? Tell me another
lie.

Ellis rushes Carver with his shoulder as if he were breaking down a door. Carver is knocked off balance. He trips over the edge of the bed and crashes into the motel room wall.

Carver, slightly stunned, gets to his feet and in two broad steps lands a man-sized punch across Ellis' face. It's hard. Ellis melts. He grabs the boy up by the scruff of his shirt.

CARVER (CONT'D)
Who are you!? Who the hell are
you!? Did he send you!?

Carver removes a piece of paper from his pocket. It's a photo copied picture of Mud, different than the State Trooper's. Carver crams the photo in the boy's face.

CARVER (CONT'D)
You know this man!? Look at him!
Do you know him!?

Blood trickles from a cut under Ellis' eye. He stutters under the shaking force of Carver's hands.

ELLIS
I don't...I...

NECKBONE (O.S.)
FISH!!! IT'S FISH!!!

Neckbone is yelling at the top of his lungs, almost in a girl's pitch. Carver turns to him. The cooler is open behind them and Neckbone holds up two Ziplock bags of fish.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
We're just selling fish!

Carver sizes things up. It takes a moment, but he settles. He snorts out a laugh and drops Ellis on the ground.

Carver turns his attention back to Juniper, who is huddled up in the corner of the motel. Carver walks over to her.

Opening a good-sized knife, he gets down in her face and holds the blade uncomfortably close to her cheek.

CARVER
I know you know where he is. And I swear to God I'll cut through every one a you to find him.

She flinches. Standing, Carver folds up his knife.

CARVER (CONT'D)
We know you came here for him, and we know he's too stupid to leave you behind. So when he pops his head out of whatever shithole he's staying in, I'll be there. You tell him that.

Carver turns, stepping over Ellis on his way out.

CARVER (CONT'D)
And you need to mind your business boy.

Neckbone moves from the doorway to let him pass. Carver is gone. Neckbone shuts the door and fastens the security latch. He kneels down to check on his friend.

NECKBONE
You all right?

ELLIS
Yeah.

NECKBONE
He popped your eye.

Ellis holds the back of his hand up to his eye which has begun to swell. The cut trickles blood over his cheekbone.

Juniper moves to the sink. Ellis sits up, staring at her back.

She opens an ice bucket and wraps a handful of cubes in a towel. She turns and walks over to them, her eyes cast down.

She kneels in front of Ellis, making eye contact for the first time. She touches his chin, gently pivoting it to see the wound. Her eyes are glassy.

JUNIPER

Thank you.

He stares back at her. He can't take his eyes off her. She holds the iced towel to his cheek. He doesn't even flinch.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry.

Tears form and run down her cheeks.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

Here.

She takes his hand and places it against the towel. She gets to her feet and pulls a pocket book from a bag in the corner.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

How much is your fish? I'll buy the cooler full.

Ellis motions Neckbone to the cooler. Neckbone goes over and crams his hand into the ice. He removes a Ziplock bag containing the note that Mud sent.

Neckbone hands it to Ellis. Taking the note, he sets his ice down and walks over to Juniper.

ELLIS

Mud sent us to give this to you.

Juniper is stunned. She looks at the bag, then at the boys.

JUNIPER

You've met Mud?

Ellis nods. Neckbone speaks up from the back.

NECKBONE

Yeah we met him.

Juniper takes the bag. She removes the letter and takes a seat on the edge of the bed to read it.

Ellis watches her eyes move along the paper. She smiles, which makes Ellis smile. After a moment, she folds it up.

JUNIPER

He tells me to hold tight.

NECKBONE

Yeah, we read it.

Juniper raises her eyebrows at Neckbone.

JUNIPER

Well do you know how long 'hold tight' is?

ELLIS

I think it's a couple days. He wants to get a boat for ya'll.

JUNIPER

God.

Juniper shakes her head and goes to the sink. She pulls a lighter from her jeans pocket and torches Mud's note.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

Tell him I'll wait.

Running water over the ashes, she turns back to them.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

But I don't want ya'll involved. Tell him what I said and make that it. I don't want you gettin' in any trouble.

ELLIS

We won't.

JUNIPER

What do you call that?

She motions to his swelling eye. Ellis shrugs.

ELLIS

We'll be all right. Keep your door locked. We'll be in touch.

Ellis heads to the door as Neckbone gathers up the cooler.

JUNIPER

Wait.

Ellis turns back.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

What's your name?

ELLIS

I'm Ellis. That's Neckbone.

Juniper walks up to Ellis and puts her hands on his shoulders. She has to bend slightly to do it, but she kisses him just above his swollen eye.

JUNIPER
Thank you Ellis.

Ellis stares at her, infatuated.

NECKBONE
We gotta go.

Ellis turns and grabs one end of the cooler. Neckbone slaps back the security latch and opens the door with his free hand. They walk out.

63 EXT. EXECUTIVE INN/JUNIPER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DUSK 63

Ellis, his foot on the door, looks back at Juniper.

ELLIS
Lock the door.

She smiles. The door slams shut. The room number, 212, stares Ellis in the face. He takes a deep breath.

NECKBONE
Let's go hard on.

He and Ellis wrangle the cooler down the steps. The sun set while they were inside. A blue hue hangs over everything.

64 I/E. CARVER'S LINCOLN/PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS 64

Carver takes a drag off a cigarette from behind the steering wheel of his black Lincoln town car, conscious to blow any smoke out the open driver's window.

His car, wedged between two others in the Piggly Wiggly parking lot, is pointed toward the Executive Inn. He watches as Ellis and Neckbone load the cooler onto Neckbone's bike.

65 INT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT 65

Ellis enters his houseboat. It's quiet.

He sees a note on the counter next to a can of soup. It reads, "I've gone to a movie. Warm up some soup for dinner. Love, Mom". Ellis picks up the can, not thrilled.

He goes to the fridge and grabs a sack of peas from the freezer. Holding the peas against his eye he takes a seat at the counter and flips through a phone book.

He finds what he needs and dials a corded phone. He waits.

NECKBONE

We've got more, but no motor.

MUD
This'll work for now. You get her
my note?

ELLIS
Yeah.

Ellis turns and Mud sees his black eye for the first time.

MUD
Where'd you get that from?

ELLIS
We came up on Juniper's room. A
guy was in there beatin' up on her.

Mud's face turns dark.

NECKBONE
Ellis rushed him. Got smacked for
it.

MUD
What'd he look like?

ELLIS
I don't know. Tall. Looked like a
cowboy.

MUD
Dark hair?

ELLIS
Yeah.

MUD
DAMMIT!

Mud slings the rope to the ground and kicks it. His face is
flushed. It's the first time the boys have seen him angry.

MUD (CONT'D)
GOD DAMMIT!

The boys back up. Mud takes a deep breath, tries to cool
down. It takes a moment, then something occurs to him. He
eyes Ellis with a look of genuine gratitude.

MUD (CONT'D)
Thanks for lookin' after her.

Ellis nods. Mud picks up the rope.

MUD (CONT'D)
His name's Carver. Brother of the
man I shot. If he's here, then
more are comin'.

NECKBONE

More what?

Mud gathers the supplies and heads to the treeline. The boys, with their hands full, follow him.

MUD

Bounty hunters. Carver's rotten, but his daddy's the one to be scared of. He'll spend all the money he has to see me dead. If it was up to me I'd put the whole family down same as the other. Not a decent man between 'em.

Mud stops and turns to lay a serious look on them.

MUD (CONT'D)

Ya'll listen to me now. If you see that old man, don't get near him. He's the triple six real deal scratch you hear me?

Mud waits for nods from them both.

MUD (CONT'D)

All right.

68 EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER/ISLAND - CONTINUOUS 68

Galen drifts in his own boat out on the Mississippi River. He stares at something in the distance.

A68 FROM ACROSS THE RIVER, A68

He sees Neckbone and Ellis on the island walking with Mud.

Galen, a concerned look on his face, keeps one hand on his motor and the other on a bulging net of mussel shells.

His HELPER, a salty looking man in his fifties, sits at the front of the boat sipping Budweiser from the can.

HELPER

What you waitin' for?

GALEN

Shut up.

After a moment, Galen cranks the motor and speeds away.

69 EXT. BOAT IN TREE - DAY - LATER 69

Mud stands with Ellis and Neckbone on the deck of the boat. He holds a pulley in one hand and a length of rope in the other. He stares up into the trees.

MUD

Ellis, can you climb up that trunk and get these hung?

ELLIS

Yeah.

MUD

Take a foot of line and tie 'em off with a bowline knot. You know it?

ELLIS

I'm not stupid.

Ellis takes the pulley and scales the trunk without hesitation. Mud tosses his pocket knife to Neckbone.

MUD

Neck, start cuttin' line. Three fifteen foot sections. Count a foot long as your arm.

Mud begins threading the pulleys with rope. As Neckbone cuts rope, he sees the pistol stuck in the back of Mud's pants.

NECKBONE

What's so special 'bout that shirt you'd lose your pistol for it?

MUD

It's got a wolf's eye sewn in the sleeve. More protection than a bullet ever gave. Tom swears by it.

NECKBONE

He said he wasn't your daddy.

MUD

Tom's the closest thing I ever knew to a father.

NECKBONE

I never met my parents.

MUD

It's hard not knowin' the ones you came from.

NECKBONE

My uncle Galen tells me things about 'em. He's the one that takes care of me.

MUD

Tom did that for me.

Ellis drops down to the deck and grabs another pulley.

ELLIS

What'd you mean when you called Tom
an assassin?

MUD

Tom's had lives you'd never know
about. Grew up up North. Went to
Yale. For a long time he was a
paid killer for the C.I.A. Lived
in Cuba in '63. He's probably
killed more people than you've met.

(to Neckbone)

Hand me that line.

Neckbone tosses him an end of rope, looks to Ellis. Ellis
gives a shrug before heading back up the trunk.

70

EXT. BASE OF BOAT TREE - DAY - LATER

70

Mud hangs off the tree fifteen feet up by a piece of rope
tied around his waist. A series of ropes and pulleys
crisscross from the boat to the trees.

Neckbone and Ellis stand on the ground staring up at him.
Mud holds a chainsaw and seems to be hesitating.

NECKBONE

Well if you're gonna do it do it!

Mud takes a deep breath and yanks the cord. Angled on one of
the main branches holding up the boat, Mud begins cutting.

Ellis and Neckbone step further and further back as they
watch the chainsaw work through the thick limb.

Suddenly, the chainsaw stops. A deep CRACKING sound. The
huge branch SNAPS, tumbling off lower limbs before crashing
to the ground. Mud holds onto the trunk for dear life.

The branch now rests on the ground, SILENCE. The ropes and
pulleys hang taught, squeaking from the weight of the boat.

Mud slowly lifts his head up. He smiles at what he sees.
The rigging has held.

MUD

One down!

Neckbone and Ellis watch as Mud scampers around the trunk to
the next branch. The chainsaw cranks back on.

NECKBONE

This shit is crazy.

71 I/E. MARY LEE'S CAR/PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

71

Ellis looks out the car window at HIGH SCHOOL KIDS that have gathered in the Piggly Wiggly parking lot. His hair is slicked to one side, and he's wearing a collared shirt.

MARY LEE
You look nice.

ELLIS
Thanks.

MARY LEE
What time are you gonna be home?

Ellis shrugs. She looks at him as the car radio rambles.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)
No later than eleven?

Ellis nods.

ELLIS
You make up your mind?

MARY LEE
About moving in town?

ELLIS
About leavin' dad.

Mary Lee thinks about how to answer, shuts off the radio.

MARY LEE
You can't make other people change
Ellis. If I'm unhappy then I'll
have to be the one to change
something.

Ellis chews on the inside of his cheek and watches her avoid eye contact. He shoulders his way out of the car.

Mary Lee takes a moment before driving off.
As Mary Lee pulls away, Ellis takes in the scene.

72 EXT. EXECUTIVE INN - LATE AFTERNOON - ELLIS POV

72

He looks up at Juniper's motel room and sees her leaning on the railing smoking a cigarette. She doesn't see him.

73 EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

73

He pauses, noticing a MAN to his left who ALSO stares up at Juniper. The man, early thirties with a thick mustache, is JAMES. He leans against the grill of a black Lincoln.

Carver appears from inside the Piggly Wiggly. He holds a cup of coffee and is closely trailed by a fat little man, NELSON(56). They're all dressed in a similar fashion, a cross between rural farmers and rodeo stars.

As Carver approaches the Lincoln, he scolds James for leaning on the grill. Carver rubs the hood with his coat sleeve and gives orders to the men.

MAY PEARL (O.S.)

Ellis!

Ellis turns to see May Pearl hopping down from a Ford Bronco. She leans on the door and waves Ellis into the back.

MAY PEARL (CONT'D)

Come on!

Ellis takes another look at Carver and his men before running over to the Bronco.

74

EXT. FIELD/BONFIRE - NIGHT

74

A bonfire rages in the middle of an open field. A FEW DOZEN KIDS mingle between vehicles and the fire. Drinking, yelling, music blasting from car speakers.

Ellis stands by himself next to the blaze with his hands in his pockets. May Pearl has vanished.

Pryor, the skinny kid Ellis punched to get this date, wanders past. He makes eye contact. Ellis stares him down. Pryor glares back but then just skulks over to another group.

MAY PEARL (O.S.)

Try this.

A Styrofoam Sonic Cup is thrust into Ellis' hand. He turns to find May Pearl standing next to him.

MAY PEARL (CONT'D)

Come on.

She leads Ellis behind one of the trucks parked nearby. May Pearl climbs onto the tailgate, a red glow across her face. No one else is around. Ellis hesitates.

MAY PEARL (CONT'D)

You wanna sit down?

Ellis takes a seat next to her. She looks at him, smiling, and gestures to his black eye.

MAY PEARL (CONT'D)

You must really like to fight?

ELLIS
Not really.

Ellis takes a sip from the Sonic cup. His face puckers.

MAY PEARL
But you're not scared if you have
to.

ELLIS
I guess. You got a lot of friends.

MAY PEARL
They're all right. I don't know
all of 'em.

ELLIS
I bet you're pretty popular.

MAY PEARL
Why do you say that?

ELLIS
I don't know. 'Cause you're nice
to people.

MAY PEARL
How do you know that?

ELLIS
You're nice to me.

MAY PEARL
But I like you.

Ellis digs into his jeans pocket.

ELLIS
I got this for you.

He removes a bracelet made from the pearls he collected off Galen's porch. May Pearl takes it, begins putting it on.

MAY PEARL
A bracelet?

ELLIS
Neckbone's uncle caught the pearls.
I thought with your name and
everything...

MAY PEARL
Thank you.

She leans over, hugging him with a kiss on the cheek. She stays close.

ELLIS
You wanna be my girlfriend?

She smiles, then kisses him.

75 EXT. ELLIS' AND TOM'S HOUSEBOATS - MORNING 75

Morning fog sits on top of the water around Ellis' houseboat.

Ellis steps outside and makes his way to the ice machine. A loud WHISTLE comes from across the oxbow. Ellis walks to the edge of the garage.

A75 He sees Tom Blankenship seated on the roof of his houseboat. A75
He motions Ellis over.

Ellis watches him, unsure of what to do. Another WHISTLE.

Tom motions to him again. Ellis looks back at the house. No sign of his parents. He shoots a glance back at Tom.

76 EXT. TOM BLANKENSHIP'S HOUSEBOAT - MOMENTS LATER 76

Ellis bumps his father's boat against the side of Tom's houseboat. He steps up onto the deck and ties off.

Tom, down from the roof, stands by his front door.

TOM
You want some coffee?

Tom disappears inside.

ELLIS
I don't drink coffee.

Ellis waits for a moment, but realizes this is Tom's way of inviting him inside. He enters.

77 INT. TOM BLANKENSHIP'S HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 77

This houseboat, although similar in size, is different than Ellis'. It's an actual wood shack that has been constructed atop a barge.

Ellis looks at photos, books and memorabilia that cram the walls and shelves. It feels homey.

Tom, his back to the boy, stands in the kitchen area pouring a cup of coffee.

TOM
You been seein' Mud?

ELLIS
No.

A collection of framed photos on a desk catches Ellis' attention. A young Tom with a pretty dark skinned girl. They seem happy. Another photo, late 60's, of Tom standing alone in a suit. He holds a LONG SUITCASE.

Tom enters holding two cups of coffee.

TOM
You don't have to lie to me boy.

He hands Ellis a cup of coffee with a cartoon image of a dog on it. It reads, "I'm a real bitch in the morning!" Tom sits in a LazyBoy that he gently rocks in.

TOM (CONT'D)
I've seen you runnin' around.
Takin' things. He all right?

ELLIS
He's okay.

TOM
He get that boat down?

Ellis nods. There is an awkward moment.

ELLIS
He called you an assassin.

Tom snorts out a laugh, sips his coffee.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Is it true?

TOM
How long have you known Mud?

ELLIS
Few days.

TOM
Well that's long enough to know
he's full of shit.

ELLIS
So it's not true.

TOM
I was a sharpshooter in the army.
In Mud's world, that makes me an
assassin. Not exactly true, right?

ELLIS
Yeah I guess.

Tom notices the boy's disappointment.

TOM
You think he's a bad ass don't you?

ELLIS
I don't know.

TOM
You know why he's stuck out on that island?

ELLIS
Yeah.
(hesitates)
He shot somebody.

TOM
He tell you why he shot that man?

ELLIS
Because he hurt Juniper.

TOM
Right. The real reason Mud's in the trouble he's got is because of her. He's been in love with that girl since he was your age. They used to run all around here and it was the same back then. He'd follow that girl wherever she led him. Problem is she don't care about nobody but herself. I've told him as much. She'd bed down with the meanest snake she could find, then when things went bad she'd go runnin' to Mud. Mud would take her back, then go find whatever unlucky sonofabitch last put a hand on her and beat 'em 'til they knew to never touch her again. And this time I guess he thought a beating wasn't good enough. Had to shoot that fella. I don't know for sure, but I'd put money on Juniper knowin' he'd do it. And I have a suspicion she might of even told him to. Either way, those two are set for failure. Only chance Mud has is to cut her loose. Cause I'll tell you what, Mud's no bad ass. He's runnin' scared.

Ellis can't look Tom in the eye, he's offended by the old man's remarks. Ellis sets the coffee cup on the desk.

ELLIS
I gotta go.

Ellis heads for the door, but stops short.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

You're wrong about Juniper. They love each other and they're gonna make it. If you weren't a wore out old man you'd know it was true.

Tom eyes the boy, taking a sip from his cup. He nods a goodbye to Ellis who is already out the door.

78

EXT. ISLAND/BASE OF BOAT TREE - DAY

78

Ellis stomps out of the trees and is struck by the new position of the boat. It hangs three feet off the ground; SUSPENDED in dry dock. A clear-cut path of trees leads off toward the island's southern shore.

Beside the boat, remnants of a giant fire smolder. Ellis surveys the MOUND OF ASH.

MUD (O.S.)

What you say Ellis?

Ellis turns to find Mud standing on the deck of the boat holding a fistful of wires. He jumps down.

ELLIS

I got more stuff.

MUD

You find a motor?

ELLIS

Not yet.

(points to the ash)

What's that?

MUD

I made a bonfire.

Mud enters the woods. Ellis follows.

ELLIS

Why?

MUD

Bonfire's an all purpose cure all for bad luck. I don't know where this boat's been or what kind of person had it before me. For all I know it could have some serious bad business left on it. We got too much ridin' on this thing to leave to chance. Where's Neckbone?

ELLIS

Helpin' his uncle with a dive.

79

EXT. ISLAND SHORE - MOMENTS LATER

79

Mud and Ellis exit the treeline heading to Ellis' boat.

ELLIS
Tom called me over to his place
this mornin'.

MUD
What he say?

ELLIS
He was runnin' down Juniper.

Ellis looks for a response, but Mud just jumps up into the boat and starts throwing pieces of wood on shore.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
I told him he was a wore out old
man. Told him he couldn't know how
much you loved Juniper.

MUD
You don't know his story.

ELLIS
I don't care.

MUD
You should. Tom loved a woman more
than most men could in two
lifetimes. They had a good life
started together.

Mud hops down and scoops a load of wood into his arms.

MUD (CONT'D)
She was pregnant with a little boy,
but the birth got the better of
'em. They didn't make it. Tom's
been alone ever since. Lone wolf.

Mud has begun walking back to the treeline. Ellis stays.

ELLIS
I gotta go help my dad.

Mud turns back but doesn't stop moving.

MUD
Thanks for the wood Ellis.

Ellis watches him go, thinking on what he said.

80 EXT. UNDERWATER - RIVER - DAY

80

Fully suited in diving gear, Galen toils in the murky brown water at the bottom of the river.

His gear consists of a typical wet-suit, wet-socks but no gloves. His metal helmet is not typical. It's welded from half a hot water heater that's been fitted with barbell weights. A hose connected to the top runs to the surface.

Galen ties off a netted sack and yanks on its line.

81 EXT. RIVER - CONTINUOUS

81

A small air compressor chugs as Neckbone stands in the middle of Galen's boat pulling in the heavy rope. At the end, the net bulging with mussel shells appears.

He manages to roll the heavy load into the boat before moving over to a crank handle that feeds another line.

After several cranks, Galen's steel helmet breaches the surface. He places his hands on the edge of the boat as Neckbone removes the barbell weights.

The weight removed, Neckbone takes off the helmet. Galen pulls himself into the boat, out of breath.

GALEN

This shit never gets easy.

NECKBONE

That's a good haul.

GALEN

I've had worse.

Galen reclines as Neckbone kills the air compressor and begins organizing the gear. He watches his little nephew.

GALEN (CONT'D)

You doin' all right?

NECKBONE

Yeah.

GALEN

You don't need to tell me anything?

NECKBONE

Tell you what?

GALEN

I know I'm just your uncle, not much of a parent. But you can tell me things if you need to.

NECKBONE

I can tell you this helmet smells
like my duck butter.

82 EXT. ELDERLY WOMAN'S HOUSE - DAY 82

Ellis holds a wrought iron door open with his backside as an
ELDERLY WOMAN takes the paper bag of fish from his hands.

Ellis walks back to the truck. Senior watches him, looking
at the black eye.

83 I/E. SENIOR'S TRUCK/CATFISH PARLOUR - MOVING - DAY 83

Ellis rides up front with Senior. Windows down, no radio.

SENIOR

Where'd you get that black eye?

ELLIS

A kid in town. He got his too.

SENIOR

What you fightin' for?

ELLIS

'Bout a girl.

SENIOR

What girl?

ELLIS

My girlfriend.

SENIOR

You got a girlfriend?

ELLIS

Yes sir.

SENIOR

When'd that happen?

ELLIS

Other day.

Senior pats his shirt pocket and finds a smoke. Lights it.

SENIOR

You seen your mother today?

ELLIS

No.

SENIOR

You not talkin' to me?

ELLIS

I'm talkin'. I'm talkin' to both of you. That's all ya'll want to do is talk.

SENIOR

Well, that's your mother. Would rather tongue lash a problem than step up and handle it. You'll see one day. Women are tough. They'll set you up for things. You can't trust love, Ellis. If you're not careful, it'll run out on you. You just gotta pick a woman and roll the dice. Hope you don't wake up in fifteen years hatin' each other.

Ellis keeps staring out the window as they pull into the parking lot of the Catfish Parlour Restaurant.

84

EXT. THE CATFISH PARLOUR/THE PINES MOTEL - LATE AFTERNOON-
CONTINUOUS

84

Senior climbs out of the truck and enters the restaurant. Ellis pops open the tailgate and reaches for a cooler.

The Catfish Parlour is one business in a strip center row. There is nothing else around save for farmland and a motel across the road.

Ellis notices Carver's black LINCOLN parked in the motel lot. He walks away from the truck to get a better look.

Ellis scans the FOUR OTHER VEHICLES in the lot. All Texas plates. A maroon Cadillac sails past and turns into the motel. Ellis recedes to the rear of his truck.

He watches as KING(76), a fireplug of a man, emerges from the Cadillac. Cramped from a long drive, he stretches and eyes the sign for the Pines Motel.

A motel room door opens and Carver walks out. He's smiling and calls out to King. They hug as a green PICK-UP pulls up. MILLER, a slick dressed man in black boots, climbs out.

SENIOR (O.S.)

Ellis! Let's go!

Ellis snaps around to find Senior leaning out the restaurant door. Ellis yanks the cooler down and drags it inside. He looks back over his shoulder for a final glance at the men.

AT THE MOTEL,

CARVER

Daddy this is Miller. He's one of ours.

KING
 (shaking)
 How do you do? Appreciate your
 help.

MILLER
 Yes sir.

CARVER
 We'll be in in a minute.

Miller nods and enters the motel room. King turns to Carver.

KING
 Catch me up.

CARVER
 They work in shifts. Two outside
 her motel, the others either out
 searching or sleepin' here. I met
 with the county sheriff but he
 wasn't much help. Said they'd
 handle their own business, but I
 got two of their people on payroll
 and a person on the inside at the
 state police.

KING
 Good. Doin' good. Who all's here?

CARVER
 All but two now. Nelson and James
 are watchin' her place. I called
 the rest in.

KING
 Okay. Let's meet the men.

Carver leads his father to the motel room.

85

INT. PINES MOTEL ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

85

Carver holds the door open as King steps inside. A door to
 his left connects another room which is empty.

An episode of the Smurfs plays on the television. There's a
 MAN on each of the queen beds. Another THREE playing cards
 at a small table by the window. MILLER stands in the corner
 smoking. Empty Budweiser cans litter the room.

King, unimpressed by the scene, looks at his son. Carver
 quickly moves in front of the television and turns it off.
 He stares down the men on the beds.

CARVER

Get up.
 (to the others)
 Ya'll pay attention.

The men get up from the beds and the others put down their cards. Everyone slowly gathers into an audience.

CARVER (CONT'D)

This is my father, King. He runs the show.

Carver recedes as King steps forward. He speaks like a high school football coach.

KING

Men. I wanna thank you for the work you're doin'. It's important work, and I want you to know what it means to me personally. I'm grateful for it. No man should have to bury his son. It's not natural, and it's a pain I hope none of you ever have to endure.

King removes a photocopied picture of Mud from his pocket. He unfolds it, stares at it, then raises it to the men.

KING (CONT'D)

This man did that to me. He took my youngest boy. And now, you're gonna help me get him.

King stares at the men, keeping the photo held high.

KING (CONT'D)

Now gather 'round. Come on now, in a circle. I want ya'll to join hands.

They do it reluctantly.

KING (CONT'D)

Everybody take a knee.

They do. King joins them on his knee and grabs Carver and another Man's hands.

KING (CONT'D)

Bow your heads. I need you to help me pray for the death of the man that killed my son.

They all bow their heads.

A85 EXT. NECKBONE'S TRAILER - MORNING

A85

A tarp is thrown back from a rusting boat trailer.

Ellis and Neckbone stand by the trailer looking less than thrilled. It's covered in junk and debris.

NECKBONE
You touch her breast?

ELLIS
A little.

NECKBONE
That's great man.

ELLIS
Thanks.

Ellis walks up and knocks a stack of bricks off the trailer.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
We could take it apart. Bring it out piece by piece.

NECKBONE
It's welded. We'd just tear it up. What if we float it out?

ELLIS
With what?

NECKBONE
Come on.

Neckbone walks to the trailer. Ellis follows.

B85 INT. NECKBONE'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

B85

The boys open the front door and are met by a BLINDING LIGHT.

NECKBONE
Jesus!

They squint and shield their eyes.

The light shuts off as quickly as it came on. Galen stands in front of them wearing his wet suit. The bar with the flood lights attached sits across his shoulders.

The boys rub their eyeballs, seeing spots. Galen shuffles over to the couch holding a marine battery connected to the lights. He labors to take a seat.

GALEN
What do you think?

NECKBONE

That's real good Galen.
 (to Ellis)
 Gimme a minute.

Neckbone, still blinking, goes back to his room. Ellis notices Galen staring at him. Galen pats the couch.

GALEN

Come 'ere Ellis.

Ellis takes a seat on the other end of the couch. Galen pats the spot next to him. Ellis scoots over, uncomfortable.

GALEN (CONT'D)

(pointing up)
 You see that ceiling fan?

ELLIS

Yeah.

GALEN

I found it in the river. Works great. Best ceiling fan I've ever owned. This river brings a lotta trash down it. Some a that trash is worth a lotta money, some of it's not. You gotta know what's worth keepin' and what's worth lettin' go. You know the difference?

ELLIS

I think so.

GALEN

Neck looks up to you. Don't get my nephew into anything you can't get him out of.

Galen forces a stare with Ellis, who nods. Neckbone enters as Galen begins to remove his light rig.

GALEN (CONT'D)

Help Me Rhonda's just about a guy needing to get a piece to get over a girl that put one over on him. So you get your heart broke, don't walk around with a shit look on your face. Get back in there. Get your tip wet. You hear me?

ELLIS

What?

GALEN

You know what I'm sayin'.

Ellis doesn't. Galen moves to an electric guitar leaning by a small amp in the corner.

GALEN (CONT'D)
Ya'll wanna hang out? Alan's comin' over. We're gonna pump it up.

NECKBONE
We got stuff to do.

GALEN
Whatever.

The boys exit as Galen turns on the amp.

C85 EXT. NECKBONE'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

C85

Galen pumps it up inside as Neckbone and Ellis walk to the boat trailer. Neckbone pulls a handful of long zip ties from his back pocket.

NECKBONE
What were ya'll talkin' about?

ELLIS
I don't know.

86 EXT. ISLAND NORTHERN SHORE - DAY

86

Mud's knife slices through a plastic zip tie.

MUD
King. That's what they call him.

A BOAT TRAILER rests atop FOUR, 55-GALLON BRIGHT YELLOW BARRELS affixed with plastic zip ties. The make-shift raft is half on shore with the back still floating in the water.

The boys watch as Mud walks around the trailer cutting off the zip ties. The barrels kick out from underneath the trailer as this happens.

MUD (CONT'D)
He's their father. You didn't go near him did you?

ELLIS
No.

MUD
Good. That left-handed sonofabitch is the devil himself. If he's here, then it's time. We need to get Juniper out here.

ELLIS

We still need a motor.

NECKBONE

There's a motor in the scrap yard
might work.

MUD

I need one that runs.

Mud moves to the front of the boat trailer and begins
dragging it fully onto the bank. It's heavy.

NECKBONE

I can get it runnin'. Tell him
Ellis.

ELLIS

It's true. He built his own dirt
bike.

MUD

All right then. Give it a shot.

ELLIS

I don't know. That motor's worth
somethin'. It's not like this
other junk.

NECKBONE

It's been there for months.
Nobody's even gonna know it's gone.

Ellis hesitates. He looks to Mud.

MUD

We do need a motor.

Ellis thinks on it as Mud takes a deep breath and grabs the trailer again.

87 EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - DAY

87

The supermarket is busy. Ellis stands at a pay phone out front as Neckbone kicks a vending machine nearby.

Ellis looks at Juniper's motel. He scans the Piggly Wiggly parking lot and spots Carver's black Lincoln. Ellis picks up the phone and deposits some change. He dials.

ELLIS

I wanna talk to room 212.

88 I/E. JUNIPER'S MOTEL ROOM/PIGGLY WIGGLY - CONTINUOUS

88

Juniper watches TV (o.s) at the foot of the bed. The phone rings. She snaps up, hits mute and grabs it.

JUNIPER

Hello?

INTERCUT WITH ELLIS,

ELLIS

Juniper?

JUNIPER

Ellis?

ELLIS

It's me.

JUNIPER

Thank god. I've been goin' crazy in this room. Is Mud okay?

ELLIS

Yeah. It's time to take you out to him.

JUNIPER

Now?

ELLIS

Tomorrow. We'll come get you.

JUNIPER
What's goin' on?

ELLIS
He's got a plan for ya'll to get away. Be ready tomorrow at five. Neckbone'll be waitin' at the back of the motel with a dirt bike.

JUNIPER
They're watching my room.

ELLIS
I'll take care of that. Just be ready at five.

JUNIPER
Wait. Just wait. I don't know about alla this. I don't even know what he thinks we're gonna do. Where are we even gonna go? This is Mud. This is what Mud does.

Ellis hears her crying through the phone.

ELLIS
It's okay. He's got the boat. We helped him fix it up. It's a good plan. Just be ready.

JUNIPER
Why are you even doing this?

ELLIS
What do you mean?

JUNIPER
Why are you helping us?

ELLIS
Cause ya'll love each other.

Juniper searches for a comment.

Ellis, looking out over the parking lot, sees May Pearl getting out of a car with her MOTHER and SISTER.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
I'll see you tomorrow.

JUNIPER
Wait.

Dial Tone. Juniper holds the phone, worried.

89 EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

89

Ellis turns and watches May Pearl push a cart in the parking lot with her family. Neckbone bangs at the Coke machine.

NECKBONE

How'd it go?

ELLIS

We're good.

90 I/E. CARVER'S LINCOLN/PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - DAY

90

Carver sits behind the wheel of his Lincoln. The man with the mustache, James, sits in the passenger seat next to him.

Carver notices Ellis and Neckbone standing in front of the Piggly Wiggly. He climbs out.

AT THE VENDING MACHINES,

NECKBONE

Gimme a quarter. This shit took mine.

Ellis watches May Pearl entering the grocery store. He calls out with a wave.

ELLIS

MAY PEARL!

Without stopping, May Pearl, along with her Sister and Mother, all turn. May Pearl sees him, but doesn't wave back. She continues inside.

Ellis looks confused, then embarrassed. Neckbone notices.

NECKBONE

It's all right man. She's with her family. Come on. I wanna get that motor before dark.

They head to the dirt bike.

CARVER (O.S.)

Hey there!

Ellis turns to see Carver approaching.

CARVER (CONT'D)

You remember me don't you?

Ellis nods. Carver notes the healing bruise on Ellis' face.

CARVER (CONT'D)

I'm sure sorry about that. Ya'll caught me at a real bad time.

Ellis climbs on the bike. Carver walks over to them.

CARVER (CONT'D)

Hold on now. One second. I don't want ya'll thinkin' I'm a bad guy. Ya'll were just trying to do a job, and I got in your way.

Carver removes a roll of twenties and peels off two.

CARVER (CONT'D)

Let's just say I bought that whole batch of fish ya'll were sellin'. Would forty cover it?

NECKBONE

That'd bout do it.

ELLIS

We don't want your money.

Carver steps in close to the boys.

CARVER

I bet ya'll really get around this town. Probably know every hole and ditch. Have ya'll come across the man whose picture I showed you?

ELLIS

No.

Carver removes a flier with Mud's picture and holds it out.

CARVER

You sure about that? Take a look with your good eye.

ELLIS

I'm sure.

CARVER

What about that girl in the motel? The pretty one. Ya'll talk to her some more?

ELLIS

No.

Carver smiles. He tucks the flier and the forty dollars into Ellis' hand.

CARVER

There's a number on there. Ya'll let me know if you do.

Neckbone cranks the engine and backs the bike up with his feet. They pull away.

Moving, Ellis looks back to see Carver watching them.

91 EXT. CRAWFORD'S JUNKYARD - DUSK

91

Neckbone pulls back a loose section of chain-link fence surrounding the marine junkyard. Ellis crouches through.

INSIDE THE JUNKYARD,

Ellis and Neckbone creep through piles of starboard and boat parts. They stop at a party barge with only one pontoon. At its rear hangs a big rusted motor, 200 horsepower.

Neckbone quickly disassembles its attachment. The motor pops loose leaving the boys to strain against its heavy weight. They ease it to the ground.

NECKBONE

Jesus that's heavy.

The boys get on either side of the motor and begin half-dragging it back to the fence line.

ACROSS THE YARD,

A LITTLE GIRL(10) dangles her feet off a loading platform and bites at an ice cream sandwich. She watches Neckbone and Ellis from a distance.

92 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT

92

Ellis walks onto the houseboat as the sound of Neckbone's bike fades in the trees. He stops, noticing a PAPER BAG sitting on the water's edge of the boat. He goes over to it.

He opens the sack and takes a quick inventory. A loaf of bread, potted meats, a bottle of Jack Daniels, a roll of cash, and an Arkansas boat tag.

Ellis looks around, no one. He looks over to Tom's boat. It's dark. Ellis scoops up the sack and heads inside.

93 EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

93

The digital wristwatch changes from "4:59" to "5:00".

Neckbone sits on his bike parked near the vending machines at the Piggly Wiggly. Ellis, on the payphone, scans the parking lot. No sign of Carver's Lincoln. No other Bounty Hunters.

NECKBONE

Where are those bastards?

ELLIS
 I don't know.
 (hangs up)
 She's not answerin'.

NECKBONE
 What do you wanna do?

ELLIS
 Take your bike around the side.
 I'll check her room. We'll just
 have to hope no one sees us.

Neckbone cranks the bike and speeds toward the motel. Ellis looks to the motel, then the parking lot.

94 EXT. EXECUTIVE INN - MOMENTS LATER 94

ON THE SECOND FLOOR,

Ellis cautiously heads up the stairs. He eyes the parking lot at the Piggly Wiggly but still sees no sign of Carver's men.

He moves quickly toward Juniper's door. Checking over his shoulder, he knocks. No answer. He knocks again. Nothing.

He peeks through the window. No lights. No movement.

95 BY THE DIRT BIKE, 95

Neckbone gets off his bike and slips to the corner of the building. As he peeks his head out, Ellis nearly knocks him over on his way downstairs. They both flinch.

NECKBONE
 Shit. Was she there?

ELLIS
 Nothin'.

Ellis notices the front office

ELLIS (CONT'D)
 Come on.

96 INT. EXECUTIVE INN/FRONT OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 96

The MOTEL CLERK(29) doesn't look up from his issue of Lowrider as Ellis and Neckbone enter.

ELLIS
 Scuse me, sir?

MOTEL CLERK
 Yeah.

ELLIS
We're lookin' for the girl in room
212. You seen her?

MOTEL CLERK
I've seen her.

ELLIS
You see her today.

MOTEL CLERK
Yeah, she came down askin' for
directions to the nearest bar. I
told her to head out to a place on
61.

Ellis digests this. They turn to leave.

MOTEL CLERK (CONT'D)
Wait a second, are ya'll the little
bastards tryin' to sell fish to the
guests?

They're already out the door.

97 EXT. ROADSIDE BAR - DUSK

97

Ellis and Neckbone pull into the gravel lot in front of a
roadside bar. The cinder block building sits by itself just
off the highway. Cars and motorcycles fill the lot.

NECKBONE
You think this is it?

ELLIS
It's gotta be.

98 INT. ROADSIDE BAR - CONTINUOUS

98

The small bar is loud and crowded. Shoulder to shoulder
PATRONS bump against one another as MUSIC blares.

Neckbone and Ellis press through the crowd searching for
Juniper. They are a good foot shorter than anyone else.

Ellis notices a man at the bar. It's Miller, the bounty
hunter from King's motel. He's staring at something across
the room. Ellis follows his line of sight.

The crowd weaves in front of him, but then he sees her.
Juniper leans against a pool table at the far end of the bar.

A GUY(32) whispers in her ear and kisses her neck. She
throws her head back, laughing. Ellis watches in disbelief.

Nearby, the BARTENDER(46) fills a customer's shot glass. The
two underage kids catch his attention.

Ellis' face is frozen, locked on Juniper. Neckbone places a hand on his shoulder.

Juniper's eyes drift toward the boys. She makes eye contact with Ellis, and her smile vanishes. The Guy keeps whispering in her ear. Juniper straightens her back slightly.

Ellis can't take his eyes off her. Juniper stares back at him, but doesn't make a move.

After a moment, Juniper's eyes fall to the floor. She turns her head back to the Guy. The crowd fills back in and the image is out of Ellis' reach.

BARTENDER (O.S.)
What the hell are ya'll doin'?!

The Bartender swoops in, grabbing them both by the backs of their necks and shoving them toward the door. Ellis strains against the thick hand. He tries to get another look at Juniper, but it's too crowded.

99

EXT. ROADSIDE BAR - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

99

The Bartender flings Ellis and Neckbone into the parking lot. Neckbone slides on the loose gravel.

BARTENDER
Ya'll stay outta here!

Ellis just stands staring at the front door. The Bartender makes a swatting motion toward them.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
I SAID GET OUTTA HERE!!!

Neckbone gathers his friend and leads him away.

NECKBONE
Thanks a lot asshole!
(to Ellis)
Come on man.

They head over to Neckbone's dirt bike. He pulls out the key and climbs on. Ellis hesitates.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
I'll take you home.

ELLIS
We're gonna have to tell Mud.

Neckbone drops his head, nods reluctantly.

100 EXT. ISLAND SHORE - NIGHT

100

The boys struggle to pull the heavy motor out of their boat. It hits the shoreline with a thud. They lean over it, sucking air.

ELLIS
Just leave it. Mud'll have to help
get it.

NECKBONE
What're you gonna tell him?

ELLIS
I'll just tell him the truth.

101 EXT. ISLAND/SOUTHERN SHORE - NIGHT

101

Mud stands at the back of the boat, which now rests on the boat trailer near the water. His face is clean shaven and his hair is wetted back. His shirt, still filthy, is tucked into his pants.

He whistles and works by the light of a small fire nearby.

Ellis steps out from behind a tree. He's holding the grocery sack that was left on his houseboat.

ELLIS
MUD!

Mud, hearing the voice, quickly puts down his tools and turns to the woods. He smooths his clothes down.

MUD
What you say there?!

Ellis appears out of the dark, followed by Neckbone. Mud's eyes search the treeline for Juniper.

MUD (CONT'D)
What you say Ellis?

Ellis can't look him in the eye.

ELLIS
We got that motor.

MUD
Is Juniper okay?

ELLIS
Yeah.

MUD
Where is she?

ELLIS
She didn't meet up with us.

MUD
What happened? Was it Carver?

ELLIS
It wasn't Carver.

Mud straightens up, prepares for the news.

MUD
What's goin' on Ellis?

ELLIS
She was supposed to meet us on the side of the motel. She never showed up. We went asking for her. The motel clerk told us she went to a bar out on 61.

MUD
What?

ELLIS
We tracked her down. She was there with another guy.
(hesitates)
They were together.

Mud's face drops. He walks to the fire and shakes a cooking pot resting in the coals. The pot bubbles with roof tar.

MUD
She probably thought Carver was on to her.

ELLIS
She knew the plan Mud. She just didn't show up.

MUD
What was she doin' with the other guy?

Ellis hesitates, not wanting to say. Mud pushes.

MUD (CONT'D)
What were they doin' Ellis?

ELLIS
They were playin' pool. Drinkin'. He was close up on her. They were laughin'. He kissed her on the neck.

Mud nods.

MUD
And that's how it is.

He takes the pot of roofing tar over to the boat and begins pasting some of the newly replaced boards with a flat stick.

ELLIS
What do you want us to do?

MUD
Just go home Ellis.

Ellis looks at Neckbone, then sets the grocery sack on the ground.

ELLIS
Tom left this for you.

They slowly retreat into the woods and disappear.

Mud turns back to the campfire and shoves the pot into the ashes. His eyes, soft and red, reflect the flame.

102 EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - NIGHT 102

Ellis and Neckbone motor away from the island in the flat bottom boat. They look back at the shore.

ELLIS
You think it's all right to leave him alone?!

NECKBONE
I doubt it!

Neckbone sees Ellis' concern.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
I'll sleep over at your house tonight! We can check on him first thing tomorrow!

Ellis nods. As they head further up river, the island grows smaller, silhouetted by the moonlight.

103 INT. ELLIS' ROOM - MORNING 103

Neckbone snores, sprawled out on top of a sleeping bag on the floor. Ellis sits up in bed with something on his mind.

He gets up and steps gingerly over Neckbone to exit the room.

104 INT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - DEN - CONTINUOUS 104

The house is silent. Ellis slips into the kitchen and picks up the phone receiver mounted on the cabinet.

He pulls the cord out to stand with his face in the corner. He dials, waits, and speaks softly into the receiver.

ELLIS

Hello? Is May Pearl there...This is Ellis...I called yesterday, you give her my message?...My name is Ellis. I'm her boyfriend...Oh, she's asleep...I said she's asleep?

The front door flies open. Senior storms headlong toward Ellis. He shouts.

SENIOR

MARY LEE!

Ellis turns as Senior yanks the phone by the cord. It snaps out of Ellis' hand and smashes apart on the floor. Ellis flinches at the sight of his father flying at him.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

What the hell have you been doing?
WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOIN'?!!

Senior grabs Ellis by the arms and shoves him against the den wall. Mary Lee comes running from her room.

MARY LEE

SENIOR! SENIOR DAMMIT!

She slaps at her husband's arms and back. He swats her away.

SENIOR

You tell her. You tell her what you've been up to.

ELLIS

I don't know what you're sayin'.

MARY LEE

Take your hands off him Senior!

Senior keeps Ellis pinned to the wall with his left hand. He opens up and addresses Mary Lee with his right.

SENIOR

J.J. Crawford said a boat motor went missin' from his stock yard. Said his daughter saw this one and his friend haulin' it off.

This makes Mary Lee pause.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Now you tell me right now, did you steal that motor?

ELLIS
We didn't steal it.

SENIOR
Lie to me again.

ELLIS
We thought it was junk. We didn't
think it was worth anything.

MARY LEE
Ellis?

A cool anger rushes over Senior's face. He releases Ellis
and takes a step back.

SENIOR
You tell me I raised a thief?

ELLIS
I'm not a thief.

SENIOR
You take property that's not yours.
Property that belongs to another
man. That junk is his livelihood.
I'm ashamed of you.

Ellis drops his head. His face flushed.

MARY LEE
Senior.

SENIOR
(to Mary Lee)
Shut your mouth. You think you can
take things and not have him see
it? Neither one of you has any
respect for a man's livelihood. A
life that puts clothes on your back
and food in your stomach.

MARY LEE
Don't you blame this on me. One
doesn't have a thing to do with the
other and you know it.

SENIOR
Don't tell me what I know. If you
can steal a man's life out from
under him in front of your son and
think he won't take a lesson from
it than you're even dumber than you
look.

ELLIS
Stop it dad.

Senior volleys a finger at Ellis.

SENIOR

She's raisin' you a snake like herself, and you can curl up with her 'fore I give a damn. You just remember this when you watch them rip this house apart board by board. You Hear Me!

Mary Lee slaps Senior hard. He turns to her, saying nothing.

MARY LEE

You're a man who's never had the strength to support his own life. I never asked you for a thing, and I've never took a thing from you that I couldn't provide for on my own. If they do tear my home apart the only joy I'll have in my heart is knowin' that they'll be tearing you out of my life for good.

She wipes her eyes and turns her attention to Ellis.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)

Ellis. You'll return that motor from where you found it and you'll apologize in person to the man you took it from. I won't hear about anything like this again.

Mary Lee walks to the front door. She collects her purse and keys and exits quietly.

Senior and Ellis stand in silence, which feels even more uncomfortable than the shouting. Ellis finally speaks.

ELLIS

I can't take that motor back. But I'll pay him for it. I'll pay him what he wants for it.

Senior, stoic, pivots his body away from the boy.

SENIOR

I don't care what you do Ellis.

Senior retreats to the bedroom. Ellis is left alone in the wake.

He looks to his room. The door opens slightly and Neckbone takes a step out. Neckbone doesn't say anything. He just bites at his lip, sympathy for his friend.

105 EXT. ISLAND SHORE LANDING - DAY

105

Charred hunks of driftwood smolder in a ruined pile on the sand. They constitute the remains of a large bonfire. Neckbone and Ellis stare at the ash.

NECKBONE

What the hell's all this?

ELLIS

It's a bonfire.

NECKBONE

I guess he didn't care about bein' seen.

Ellis kicks at one of the burned logs. He bends down and finds the bottle of Jack Daniels, smashed.

ELLIS

He had something else on his mind. Come on.

Ellis leads Neckbone into the treeline.

106 EXT. ISLAND WOODS/CREEK - DAY

106

Mud's yellow shirt hangs, partially ripped, from a tree branch. Ellis pulls it off the limb.

Concerned, they head deeper into the woods, over the fallen tree trunk that bridges the creek.

107 EXT. ISLAND WOODS AND SOUTHERN SHORE - DAY

107

The boys watch Mud through the trees at a distance. He's crouched on the deck of the boat fiddling with wiring. Mud, giving no sign he sees the boys, yells out to them.

MUD

What are ya'll hidin' for?

Mud drops the wiring and scales down to the bank. They emerge from the woods. Ellis carries the yellow shirt.

ELLIS

We found your shirt.

Ellis tosses it to him. Mud tosses it back.

MUD

Keep it. I don't need it anymore.

Mud goes to the motor at the rear to tinker with more wires.

ELLIS

We saw what's left of your bonfire.
(no response)
Somebody could've seen you.

MUD

I guess.

ELLIS

You do some drinkin' last night?

MUD

I did a lot of drinkin' last night.

Mud stops and walks over to address the boys. His face is pale and his manner is curt.

MUD (CONT'D)

Neck I'm gonna need you here to get the motor runnin'. Ellis I need you to do something else for me.

Mud removes a folded note from his back pocket.

MUD (CONT'D)

I need you to take this to Juniper.

ELLIS

Okay Mud.

Ellis takes the letter. Mud goes back to the boat motor. He motions to Neckbone to join him.

MUD

Let's go.

ELLIS

You still takin' Juniper?

MUD

I had a dream last night. I saw Juniper laying in a field with another man. They were making love. I walked out into the field. Walked toward 'em. I was so angry the tips of my ears were burnin'. That's how I knew I was gonna kill this man. But when I got up close enough, I saw that the man she was with had tattoos on his back, just like mine. I moved in closer and the guy turns his head back toward me. Hair for hair, dead truth, the guy she was with was me.

Mud ducks back under the motor. Ellis looks at Neckbone, worried.

MUD (CONT'D)

I'll finish the boat, but I'd be surprised if I live long enough to sail on it. A vision of yourself is a sure sign of death. Neck can you grab me a socket wrench?

Neckbone and Ellis walk to the toolbox sitting nearby. They crouch by it, speaking quietly.

NECKBONE

You be all right?

ELLIS

Yeah. What about you?

NECKBONE

He'll be okay.

ELLIS

Can I borrow your bike?

Neckbone fishes the key out of his pocket. Hesitates.

NECKBONE

Don't tump it.

Ellis nods. Neckbone walks over to Mud with the toolbox.

Letter in hand, Ellis gives a final look toward Mud's labor and walks back into the woods. On his way, he stops to hang Mud's shirt on a tree branch.

108 EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - DAY 108

Ellis rides in the flat bottom boat alone. He stares at the letter in his hand.

109 EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY - DAY 109

Ellis sits on the dirt bike. He scans the parking lot. No black Lincoln. His eyes stop on a green pick-up. Miller, sits inside.

Ellis looks around and finds a pay phone nearby. He gets off the bike and walks toward it. Ellis removes the flier Carver gave him. He dials a phone number copied at the bottom.

ELLIS

(into the phone)

Hello. I saw the guy you're lookin' for...Yeah, he's crazy lookin'. Saw him at the Wal-mart outside of Gillet. He was buyin' some beanie weenie...'bout five minutes ago.

Ellis hangs up the phone. He walks back over to the bike, climbs on and waits.

After a moment, he watches as Miller's green pick-up pulls out of the Piggly Wiggly parking lot and races away. Ellis cranks the bike.

110 EXT. EXECUTIVE INN/JUNIPER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS 110

Ellis, at a slight crouch, keeps his eyes on the Piggly Wiggly parking lot. The green pick-up is nowhere in sight.

At Juniper's door, he knocks twice, softly. The door swings opens. Juniper stands there, holding a lit cigarette.

JUNIPER

I was wonderin' when I'd see you.

Ellis checks over his shoulder and walks inside

111 INT. EXECUTIVE INN/JUNIPER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS 111

The bed is unmade and the room is a bit of a mess. Ellis keeps his head down. Juniper closes the door and takes a seat on the edge of the bed. She grabs the remote control and mutes the television.

JUNIPER

I'm sorry about last night. I didn't plan on...

Before she can finish Ellis has fished the letter out of his pocket and holds it out to her.

ELLIS

I'm supposed to give this to you.

Juniper takes the letter.

JUNIPER

Okay.

Ellis goes to the door. He pulls the bedroom curtain back slightly to check the parking lot. The coast is clear.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

Did you read it?

ELLIS

No. I gotta go.

JUNIPER

Ellis?

He turns to her.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

ELLIS

All you had to do was be there.

JUNIPER

I couldn't.

ELLIS

Then why'd you even come here?

JUNIPER

I came here to leave with him. I really did. But now...now I guess I just came to say goodbye.

His eyes fall to the floor.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

You don't know us Ellis. We've been headin' this way for a long time.

ELLIS

I know he'd do anything for you.

She puts her cigarette out in a Coke can on the floor.

JUNIPER

You really believe that?

Ellis nods. Juniper speaks to him gently, almost smiling. It's a look of resignation.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

Mud's a born liar. That's what makes him so likable. He makes people feel good about themselves. He's a romantic. I don't think he means to hurt people. But when people get close to him, that's what happens.

Ellis watches her as she goes to the sink and wets the end of a towel. She dabs her eyes at the mirror.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)

I do love him Ellis. But I can't spend the rest of my life runnin' with him. I may not know what kind of life I want, but I know that's not it.

Her back to him, Ellis watches as she unfolds the letter and begins reading. He angles himself to see her face in the mirror. He watches her eyes scanning the words. No emotion.

She finishes, folds the letter back up, then turns to him.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)
Tell him I understand.

ELLIS
What's it say?

JUNIPER
It says it's over. Tell him I've
packed my things. Tell him I've
gone.

She takes a deep breath and smiles at him.

JUNIPER (CONT'D)
Bye Ellis.

Ellis turns and walks out.

112 EXT. EXECUTIVE INN/JUNIPER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS 112

Ellis, dejected, no longer bothers to look over his shoulder. He walks to the staircase but stops there. Feeling the need to say something more, he goes back to her room.

He puts his knuckle flat on the door but hesitates. He leans over and looks through the window.

The sliver in the curtain gives him a glimpse. Juniper is curled up on the end of the bed. She is sobbing.

Ellis watches longer than he should before pulling his head away from the window. Ellis heads back downstairs.

113 EXT. INTERSECTION/SONIC DRIVE-IN - DAY 113

Ellis, riding the dirtbike, looks to his left into the Sonic Drive-In parking lot. The high school kids have gathered there again.

He notices a rust colored Ford coup. The driver, an older kid named KYLE(18), sits beside May Pearl laughing.

Ellis steers into traffic and crosses the street. He pulls onto a patch of grass at the edge of the Sonic parking lot.

In one motion, Ellis tumps the bike on its side and makes a b-line for the coup.

INSIDE THE CAR,

Kyle's hand is on May Pearl's knee.

KYLE

So what'd she say?

MAY PEARL

She said she didn't like him that much. I told her I thought he was all right.

Ellis appears with his elbows in the driver's side window. He sticks his head so far in the door that Kyle has to lean back in his seat to make room. May Pearl is surprised. Kyle snorts out a laugh.

ELLIS

You get my phone calls?

MAY PEARL

What?

ELLIS

I've been callin' you.
(motions with his head)
Who's this guy?

KYLE

Get your head outta my car kid.

Ellis takes his right elbow and quickly knocks Kyle in the mouth. It splits his upper lip. Kyle grabs his face.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Shit!

MAY PEARL

Ellis!

ELLIS

I called you twice yesterday. Your sister didn't tell you?

Kyle slings the door open knocking Ellis to the pavement.

From the ground, Ellis can see that Kyle is big and considerably tougher than the skinny kid he punched before.

Kyle's friends from other cars take notice and begin to converge on them.

Ellis makes a move for Kyle's legs but is kicked back to the pavement. Kyle straddles him on the ground and punches him.

Another punch to Ellis' face. May Pearl is out of the car and yelling.

MAY PEARL

Kyle! Stop it Kyle!

May Pearl pulls Kyle by the collar. By his own will, he raises off of Ellis, keeping an eye on him.

A streak of blood stretches from Ellis' nose to his ear. He gets to his feet, dazed.

Ellis wipes at his nose and sees May Pearl shove Kyle. Kyle smiles and turns to his friends, who laugh. The CROWD that has collected consists of older high school guys and girls.

Ellis steps toward May Pearl and is met with a shove too.

MAY PEARL (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doin' here
Ellis?!

ELLIS

What?

MAY PEARL

You can't just run up and punch
people I'm with!

ELLIS

I'm sorry, I just wanted to know
why you hadn't called me back.
I...

MAY PEARL

Why would I call you back Ellis?

ELLIS

Because you're my girlfriend.

The crowd is watching.

MAY PEARL

I'm not your girlfriend! We went
on one date. One!

ELLIS

We kissed.

MAY PEARL

That doesn't matter!

ELLIS

Yeah but...

MAY PEARL

But what Ellis?! What did you
expect?!

ELLIS

I love you.

MAY PEARL
You're fourteen!

ELLIS
Don't. Wait. We can make this
work. We can figure it out. I
love you.

MAY PEARL
What?

Ellis is losing it. His eyes are red. He looks at the crowd of kids. There are smiles and some snickering. May Pearl is speechless. She just stares at him.

Ellis turns and walks back to the dirt bike.

May Pearl's girlfriends gather around her. She shakes her head, dumbstruck.

Ellis lifts the bike off the ground. He looks back at May Pearl who appears to be shrugging off the whole affair in front of her friends. Ellis speeds off.

114

EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT/RIVERBANK - DAY

114

A fire snaps and pops on the riverbank next to Ellis' houseboat.

Ellis drags a piece of particle board from a trash pile nearby. He drops the board onto the fire and stands back to watch the blaze. Neckbone's bike leans on a tree behind him.

Senior's truck rattles to a stop in the gravel just down the bank. He jumps out of the cab exasperated by the fire his son has started by their home.

SENIOR
What the hell are you doin'?!

Ellis says nothing. He doesn't move. Senior, continuing to yell, runs and drags a hose up from the houseboat.

SENIOR (CONT'D)
Ellis dammit! What the hell's
wrong with you?!

The fire hisses as Senior turns the hose on it.

SENIOR (CONT'D)
Ellis? Look at me.

Ellis finally looks up at his father. A phone RINGS from inside the houseboat. Senior holds the hose in front of him.

SENIOR (CONT'D)
Take it. Put this damn thing out.

Ellis takes the hose as Senior stomps on board to catch the phone. Ellis drops the hose.

Senior's voice, speaking into the telephone, faintly carries outside. He's yelling. Ellis turns his head to listen.

SENIOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I don't give a shit! Fine! I
don't care what you do! I'm done
with it!

Ellis moves around the fire so he can see the houseboat through the flames. He hears the phone SLAM down.

Senior appears at the back door. He stares at Ellis through the fire. Ellis moves to the side but realizes Senior isn't staring at him. He's staring at the fire.

Senior disappears back into the house. There is a commotion.

Ellis watches as Senior bursts out of the house holding an armful of woman's clothes. Senior walks up to the bonfire and begins tossing clothes on top piece by piece.

ELLIS
What are you doing?

Ellis watches as dresses and blouses begin to shrivel up in the flames.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Stop it! That's mom's stuff! STOP
IT!

Ellis shoves at Senior. He easily counters the boy with his arm and continues tossing the clothes into the fire. Ellis is screaming and crying.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
STOP IT! STOP!

Ellis tries yanking the remaining clothes out of his father's hands but Senior shakes him off. Ellis stumbles. He watches with tears as Senior tosses all of the clothes on.

Senior watches his wife's clothes burn. Ellis backs away to the bike. He climbs on, cranks the engine and speeds off.

115 EXT. ISLAND SHORE - DAY 115

Ellis grounds the flat-bottom on shore and jumps out.

116 EXT. ISLAND WOODS/CREEK - DAY 116

Ellis thrashes through the woods. His muddy feet stomp across the fallen tree trunk that bridges the creek.

117 EXT. ISLAND/SOUTHERN SHORE - DAY

117

The boat rests on its trailer on the edge of the bank. Mud stands on board looking down at the motor. Neckbone, tools in hand, has his head buried in the motor.

NECKBONE

Try it now.

Mud turns a switch. No result.

MUD

Nothin'.

NECKBONE

Sonofabitch.

Ellis emerges from the treeline. Mud sees him and hops down from the boat. He walks up to him.

MUD

What'd she...

Ellis punches Mud with as much force as he can muster. It's barely enough to turn Mud's face, but it stuns him.

ELLIS

You're a liar. Makin' two kids run around doin' work you're too scared to do yourself. Makin' me tell her it's over 'cause you're too scared to do it yourself.

Mud steps back and gives the boy his space. Neckbone has made his way over and watches from behind Mud.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

You said you loved her and you lied. You gave up on her and she gave up on you just like everybody else. I trusted you. Bonfires and crosses. Wolf's eye bullshit.

Mud tries to approach him but the boy explodes, shoving him.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

EVERYTHING YOU'VE TOLD ME WAS A LIE! You never cared about her. You never cared about us. Not like you said. Not enough to matter. You used us.

MUD

Come on Ellis.

Mud holds a hand out to him. Ellis slaps it away.

ELLIS
You made me a thief!

Ellis walks back into the woods. Mud exhales and turns back to Neckbone.

NECKBONE
Let me talk to him.

118 EXT. ISLAND WOODS/CREEK - DAY

118

Ellis walks through the woods. Neckbone follows.

NECKBONE
Ellis! Ellis, stop for a second!

Neckbone watches as Ellis reaches the tree trunk that bridges the creek. Ellis steps onto the log, but his muddy shoes miss a step. He SLIPS.

Neckbone sees Ellis disappear down into the creek bed.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
ELLIS!

Neckbone rushes over. He cranes his neck out to peer over the edge, a solid eight foot drop into the creek.

Ellis floats face up in the shallow water. He's unconscious. A wound on his head from a nearby rock.

The nest of WATER MOCCASINS has been disturbed; SNAKES WRITHE AROUND ELLIS' BODY.

Neckbone's eyes widen. He darts back toward the shore.

119 EXT. ISLAND/SOUTHERN SHORE - DAY

119

Mud stands at the rear of the boat massaging his jaw.

NECKBONE (O.S.)
MUD! MUD!

Mud hears the yelling. Neckbone explodes from the trees.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
MUD! ELLIS FELL! HE FELL IN THE
CREEK!

Mud rushes forward.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
HE FELL INTO SNAKES! THE SNAKES!

Mud stops.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
MUD PLEASE!

Mud looks around. His shirt hangs from a tree limb nearby. He snags it and darts into the woods.

120 EXT. ISLAND WOODS/CREEK - DAY 120

Mud streaks through the woods as he gets his other arm through the shirt sleeve. He reaches the creek.

Without hesitating, Mud leaps down into the water, scoops Ellis into his arms and scales up the opposite side of the creek bed.

Mud sprints for the north side of the island. Neckbone chases after them.

121 EXT. NORTHERN SHORE AND RIVER - DAY 121

Mud cradles Ellis in his arms as he rushes to the flat-bottom boat. He sets Ellis gently inside. Neckbone on his heels.

Mud shoves the boat into the water and hops in. Neckbone wades out and crawls up the side of the boat.

MUD
Get the motor started.

Neckbone cranks the motor. As they move up river, Mud searches Ellis' body. He looks at his neck, his arms, he pulls up his shirt.

NECKBONE
IS HE OKAY?! Is he bit?!

Mud notices Ellis' jeans leg riding up. He pulls the jeans back. A BITE in the middle of his calf. It's a bluish bruise with two distinct red dots. The skin around the bite has already begun to swell.

MUD
Shit.

He rips the jeans up to the thigh. Mud tears a section of cloth from the bottom of his own shirt and creates a tourniquet just below Ellis' knee.

MUD (CONT'D)
What time is it?

Mud pulls a black Sharpie out of his pocket. Neckbone doesn't answer, just stares.

MUD (CONT'D)
WHAT TIME IS IT?!

Neckbone checks his watch.

NECKBONE
It's four eighteen!

Mud draws a line on Ellis' leg just above the swollen bite. He writes, "418".

MUD
Yell out every 10 minutes!

Mud elevates Ellis' leg then gently cups his head. He dabs the gash on Ellis' forehead.

NECKBONE
Is he gonna be okay?!

MUD
We just need to get him to a clinic! Is there still one in town?!

NECKBONE
Yeah!

MUD
It's the closest?!

NECKBONE
Yeah!

MUD
I'm gonna need your bike!

NECKBONE
Are you bit?!

Mud shakes his head.

MUD
No.

He holds Ellis as they move steadily up river.

122

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

122

The flat bottom boat approaches the riverbank. Neckbone points to the sandy ridge and yells up to Mud.

NECKBONE
My bike should be just over that ridge!

Mud looks at Ellis' leg. The swelling has crept up his thigh. Black lines with numbers mark its progress: "428, 438, 448". Ellis' face has taken on a blue tint.

The boat hasn't reached the shore, but Mud takes Ellis in his arms and jumps into the water. He wades onto the bank.

123 AT THE BIKE, 123

Mud straddles it, turning Ellis' body so they are face to face. He cranks the bike and speeds away.

Neckbone makes it to the top of the ridge in time to see Mud disappear into the trees.

124 EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY 124

Mud speeds the dirt bike down the two-lane highway. He's far too big for the bike and it's even trickier balancing Ellis.

Coming up on a slow moving pick-up overloaded with junk, Mud veers into the opposing lane.

ONCOMING TRAFFIC.

Mud darts back to his lane in time to miss a semi.

125 EXT. CLINIC - DAY 125

A MALE NURSE(36) wheels an ELDERLY MAN through the sliding double front doors of a small clinic.

Mud appears around the corner. The bike speeding toward the entrance.

In a fluid motion, Mud takes Ellis in his arms and lifts his leg over the bike. The bike tilts and slides across the pavement, smacking solidly into the curb.

Mud has managed to stay on his feet with the boy in his arms and rushes through the automatic front doors.

126 INT. CLINIC - CONTINUOUS 126

The reception area has a DOZEN PATIENTS sitting in it. A check-in desk to the left. Mud holds Ellis out in his arms.

MUD
I NEED HELP HERE!

A FEMALE NURSE rushes out of the check-in area.

FEMALE NURSE
Just stay calm. What's going on?

MUD
He's been snake bit.

ANOTHER NURSE rushes off calling for a doctor. The room becomes more frenzied. Patients talking. Nurses shouting.

MUD (CONT'D)
 He's snake bit. A cotton mouth.
 On his calf. Just under an hour.

As quickly as Mud gets this out, a GROUP of NURSES rush out of a door at the end of the room pushing a gurney.

They take Ellis from Mud's arm, place him on the gurney, and speed him into the back of the clinic.

The commotion gone, the reception area feels oddly still. Mud takes a deep breath.

He looks to his right. Patients stare at him. He's beyond disheveled. He's crazy looking.

Mud turns to his left. The Male Nurse stares at him. For the first time, Mud realizes he's out in the open.

MALE NURSE
 Sir?

Mud slowly backs up.

MALE NURSE (CONT'D)
 Sir? We're gonna need some
 information?

Mud backs out of the automatic doors. The entire room stares at him.

127 EXT. CLINIC - CONTINUOUS 127

Mud is outside. The glass doors close. He nervously checks over his shoulders. He spots a bank of trees just down from the clinic. He heads for them.

The front doors slide open and the Male Nurse walks out.

MALE NURSE
 Sir?!

Mud hops into the bank of trees and disappears.

128 INT. CLINIC - CONTINUOUS 128

The Patients in the reception area settle back into their seats and discuss the commotion.

The Male Nurse enters and walks behind the check-in window.

IN THE WINDOW,

The Male Nurse fingers through a pile of papers.

He removes one of the fliers that Carver and his men have been showing. The Nurse studies the photo, looking back at the front doors.

He picks up the phone and dials the number at the bottom.

129 INT. PINES MOTEL - CONTINUOUS 129

In the adjoining room, the phone rings. King steps through the doorway, takes a seat on the bed, and answers.

KING
Hello...Yes...Yessir we are...Uh
huh.

King takes a pen from his shirt pocket and scribbles on a pad on the nightstand.

KING (CONT'D)
Now where'd you say you
were?...Okay...He's gone.
Okay...But you say he left the
boy?...And your name sir?

130 EXT. EXECUTIVE INN - EVENING 130

The sun has been down for awhile. Juniper leans on the railing outside her room taking long drags from a cigarette.

She sees Miller's green pick-up parked below.

Suddenly the headlights pop on and the truck pulls away. She watches, curious, as it speeds out of sight.

A train whistle blows in the distance but is overtaken by a semi rumbling down the street. She watches the semi pass revealing the DAY/NITE Gas Station's parking lot.

A130 MUD STANDS IN THE CORNER OF THE LOT. Half lit by a sodium A130
lamp, he stares up at her.

Juniper raises up. Even in the dim light she knows it's him. She doesn't move.

Mud holds up a hand, waves. Juniper slowly waves back.

She tries to smile at him, but she's about to cry and it's hard to muster.

Mud smiles. After a long moment, he turns his back and disappears in the shadows at the side of the gas station.

Juniper watches after him.

131 EXT. BLACK BAYOU - NIGHT 131

The night sky is dark purple. An unnatural color.

Ellis is on his back. Eyes closed. His head jostles at the SOUND of THUMPING. More THUMPING. It sounds like the hood of a car denting in.

His eyes open. He stares up at an absurdly full moon. It's so bright it totally silhouettes the tree branches overhead.

The THUMPING continues. Ellis puts his hands on the edge of the flat-bottom boat he's floating in and pulls himself up. He leans over the side to see what's causing the noise.

The water is jet black. The entire bayou pulsates. Ellis' eyes grow wide as the THUMPING reveals itself.

THE BAYOU IS FILLED TO THE BRIM WITH SNAKES.

The moonlight illuminates their shiny black backs as they twist and churn in what seems like one giant ball of snakes.

Ellis lies back in the boat bringing his arms close to his chest. He flinches at each THUMP. His eyes squeeze shut.

132

INT. ELLIS' ROOM - NIGHT

132

His eyes open. Ellis bolts up in bed covered in a cold sweat. Mary Lee places a palm on his chest.

MARY LEE

It's okay. You're okay. Just set back.

Mary Lee guides Ellis back down on the pillow. Senior stands with his arm on her shoulder. They look down at their son.

ELLIS

Where am I?

MARY LEE

You're home. We got you home.

Ellis takes a second to get his bearings. His mother lifts a glass of Sprite up to his mouth. He takes a sip.

SENIOR

You had us scared son.

Senior steps forward and kisses Ellis on the forehead. Staying close to his face.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

(whispers)

I'm so glad you're okay.

MARY LEE

The doctors gave you some medicine. You had a snake bite.

ELLIS
How'd I get to the doctor?

MARY LEE
A man brought you in. No one knew
him.

Ellis tries to sit up in bed, but his mother stops him.

MARY LEE (CONT'D)
It's okay. You just need to rest
up now. We can talk all about it
later. Do you need anything? Are
you hungry?

ELLIS
No.

Senior gently pats her shoulders.

SENIOR
Come on. Let's let him rest.

Mary Lee touches Senior's hand on her shoulder. She stands.

MARY LEE
I'll be back in to check on you but
just try and sleep if you can.

ELLIS
Okay.

Senior leads Mary Lee to the door.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
Mom? Dad?

They turn back.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
I love ya'll.

MARY LEE
We love you too Ellis.

They exit the room. Ellis rests his head back on the pillow
and takes a deep breath.

133 EXT. ISLAND/SOUTHERN SHORE - NIGHT

133

Mud and Neckbone shove against the back of the boat trailer.

The wheels of the trailer rock at the edge of the bank's
incline. Sheets of metal roofing taken from the shack Ellis
and Neckbone dismantled line a runway into the water.

MUD
(straining)
Almost there.

The wheels finally turn over. The trailer rolls down the bank and splashes into the water. The boat shimmies.

Mud and Neckbone follow the trailer into knee deep water and shove on the boat. A final push jettisons it into the river.

They step back as the boat drifts out. A rope tied to its back becomes taught as it stretches from a tree on shore.

MUD (CONT'D)
The sun does shine on a dog's ass
some days.

NECKBONE
It ain't sunk yet.

Mud smiles. He holds out his hand, which Neckbone slaps.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
I wish Ellis could see it.

MUD
I know.

Mud walks back on shore and collects his duffel bag.

MUD (CONT'D)
I owe you your end of the deal.

Mud removes the pistol from the back of his jeans. Neckbone's eyes light up. Mud hands it over and Neckbone immediately notices a hole where the clip is missing.

NECKBONE
Where the bullets?

MUD
The deal was for the gun, not the
bullets.

NECKBONE
Shit.

Neckbone begrudgingly crams the pistol into the back of his pants.

MUD
I got one last favor to ask you.

Neckbone sucks his teeth.

134 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT 134

Water gently laps at the side of Ellis' houseboat. The bayou is quiet.

From the darkness, Neckbone and Mud appear in the flat-bottom boat. They paddle with their hands. Approaching in silence.

135 INT. ELLIS' ROOM - NIGHT 135

Ellis stares at the ceiling, unable to sleep. A TAP comes from the window. Ellis sits up in bed. Mud pokes his head in. He whispers.

MUD
Ellis?

ELLIS
Mud?

MUD
Yeah.

Mud pulls his body through the window. It's tight but he manages to make it look somewhat graceful. Mud takes a quick survey of the dark room. Ellis begins to get out of bed.

MUD (CONT'D)
No, don't get up.

Mud motions him back down and pulls the chair from the desk over to the bed. They speak in hushed voices.

ELLIS
How'd you get here?

MUD
Neck brought me.

136 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 136

Neckbone sits in the flat-bottom tied off at the corner.

FROM THE TREELINE ON SHORE,

All EIGHT of the Bounty Hunters sit hunkered in the trees. Carver squats next to a stump. He loads shotgun shells into a 12 gauge pump and motions for the others to fan out along the bank.

137 INT. ELLIS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS 137

MUD
We got the boat in the water.

ELLIS
You did?

MUD

Just now. Smooth sailin' from here
on out.

ELLIS

Good.

MUD

Wish you coulda seen it.

ELLIS

Me too.

MUD

Didn't feel right leavin' town
without sayin' goodbye.

There is an awkward moment.

ELLIS

I'm sorry 'bout what I said.

MUD

No. No. You were right to be mad.
You were right about a lot of
things. I'm the one that's sorry.
I shoulda never gotten ya'll into
all this. I just didn't see any
other way around it. But I
couldn't leave without you knowin'
I never lied about being your
friend. I never lied about that.

ELLIS

I know.

MUD

I don't traffic in the truth too
often. But I did love her. I do
love her.

ELLIS

She loves you too. She said it.

This fact still strikes Mud. He nods.

MUD

I just made mistakes. We both did.
This is a hard life to keep up
with. You can't blame her for
gettin' tired of tryin'.

ELLIS

My dad says you can't count on
women lovin' you. He says you
can't trust it.

MUD

That's not true. Don't judge your life on all of our mistakes. You'll make plenty mistakes of your own, no need takin' on everybody else's. You're a good man Ellis. If you find a girl half as good, you'll be all right.

ELLIS

You're a good man too Mud.

Mud smiles.

MUD

No. I'm not. But maybe from here on out I can be...

A SHOTGUN BLAST rips a fist-sized hole in the flimsy interior wall. Mud, as if by reflex, yanks Ellis from the sheets and shoves him under the bed.

BOOM. BOOM.

Bits of sheetrock fall like snow flakes as more holes blast through the bedroom wall. Mud flinches with each shot. He covers his own head with one hand and the boy with the other.

ELLIS

Mud?!

MUD

Stay put! JUST STAY UNDER THERE!

The SOUND of shotgun shells being slipped into the chamber.

Mud gets to a crouch. Through the holes in the wall, Mud makes out Nelson, the fat bounty hunter, reloading his gun.

138 IN THE DEN,

138

Nelson finishes reloading. The riddled bedroom wall hangs in front of him. A door opens behind him. He swivels around.

Senior, in a robe, rushes from his bedroom with a pistol leveled. He's met with a shotgun blast just above his head. Pellets nick his face. Senior hits the ground and elbows his way back inside his bedroom door.

SENIOR

ELLIS! ELLIS!

Senior screams, his voice cracking.

139 IN ELLIS' ROOM,

139

SENIOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 (muffled through the wall)
 ELLIS!

MUD
 (whispering)
 Don't move Ellis. Just stay put.
 They just want me.

Through the holes Mud sees Nelson approaching Ellis' bedroom. He runs for the window at the foot of the bed. Another shotgun BLAST throws open the door as Mud leaps out.

140 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 140

Mud crashes headfirst onto the edge of the houseboat grasping for anything to keep from sliding off. His hand catches a metal deck cleat. It bends under his weight but holds.

Mud gets to his feet and is met by the tip of a rifle. Miller, the man from the cafe, stands poised to fire.

Mud's hand slips to the back of his pants for his pistol. NOTHING. He looks to the flat-bottom tied at the far edge of the boat. No sign of Neckbone.

Miller's finger curls around the trigger.

SUDDENLY, a BULLET snicks through Miller's neck.

Mud flinches. Miller's hand comes up to his neck but can't hold the blood running from it. He topples into the water.

141 EXT. TOM BLANKENSHIP'S HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 141

Tom Blankenship sits in the folding chair on the roof of his houseboat. He shucks an empty shell from a HIGH-POWERED RIFLE complete with scope. The long suitcase from the photo in Tom's house sits open at his feet. It has compartments for the disassembled rifle.

Tom quickly raises to a new firing position. He squints an eye, searching for another target.

A141 From this vantage point, Ellis' houseboat is clearly visible, A141 partially lit by the two flood lights. FOUR other BOUNTY HUNTERS swarm the boat.

142 INT. ELLIS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS 142

Still under the bed, Ellis tries to hold his breath as Nelson's boots step into the room. They pause for a moment, before sluggishly struggling through the bedroom window.

143 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 143

Mud rushes to untie the flat-bottom.

A BULLET splinters the corner of the dock sending shards of wood into Mud's hand. He sees TWO more GUNMEN skirting toward him on the deck of the houseboat.

Mud takes cover against the wall and finds the muzzle of Nelson's gun teetering out Ellis' window. He grabs the muzzle and yanks the shotgun free.

Nelson, stuck in the window, looks up in time to take a rifle butt in the face. He falls back into the room unconscious.

NECKBONE (O.S.)

MUD!

144 ON THE RIVERBANK, 144

James, the man with the mustache, holds Neckbone in a headlock trying to cover his mouth. Carver stands with his shotgun leveled and fires at Mud.

145 ON THE BOAT, 145

Mud ducks as Carver's shot takes out a chunk of siding. The SOUND of boots rush up the side of the boat.

Mud, gun in hand, jumps back through Ellis' window.

146 ON THE RIVERBANK, 146

Carver turns to Neckbone.

CARVER

Let him go.

James unhands the boy. Neckbone sprints into the woods.

CARVER (CONT'D)

Come on.

They move toward the houseboat.

147 INT. ELLIS' ROOM/HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 147

Mud gets to his feet, stepping over an unconscious Nelson on his way to the bedroom door.

MUD

You still down there bud?

ELLIS

Yeah.

MUD

Stay put.

Mud pops out of the bedroom into the den.

- 148 IN SENIOR'S BEDROOM, 148
- Mary Lee, curled under the bed, frantically dials the phone. Senior, propped against the closed door, uses his undershirt to dab the pellet wounds around his neck.
- Hearing footsteps, he cracks the door open. He sees Mud standing in the den. Senior cocks his pistol
- 149 IN THE DEN, 149
- The front door is KICKED open. Mud dives behind a Lazy Boy as a Bounty Hunter fires through the doorway.
- The back of the Lazy Boy explodes in fluff and fabric. Mud raises up to return fire, forcing the Man back out the door.
- Mud crouches back behind the Lazy Boy. Unbeknownst to him, another MAN appears outside two sliding glass doors. The Man raises his rifle at Mud.
- One of Tom's bullets rips through the Man's chest and shatters the glass door. Mud flinches. Another Hunter steps into the now broken door frame. Mud FIRES the shotgun, blowing the man into the patio grill.
- A149 Mud can see Tom's houseboat silhouetted across the bayou. A muzzle FLASH sparks from the top of Tom's boat. This makes Mud smile. A149
- 150 The Front Door kicks open again and more pellets shatter through the den. Mud raises to return fire. 150
- ONE SHOT, TWO, the third is a dead CLICK. He drops back behind the chair, out of shells.
- 151 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 151
- Carver steps across the plank onto the houseboat followed by James. Carver motions him around back toward Ellis' window.
- CARVER
Flush him out this way.
- Carver walks to the covered carport.
- 152 INT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 152
- IN THE DEN,
- The Hunters at the front door continue taking pot shots at the furniture.
- Mud flinches at each new round fired.
- 153 IN ELLIS' ROOM, 153

Ellis cautiously slides out from under his bed and crouches next to the bedroom door. He peeks through a crack.

He sees Mud pinned behind the Lazy Boy. They make eye contact. Mud's eyes move to something behind Ellis.

Ellis turns to see James passing by his bedroom window.

154 EXT. TOM BLANKENSHIP'S HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 154

Tom scans Ellis' boat through the scope on his rifle. He sees Carver creeping around the carport. He pans right to find James taking a position near the patio doors.

Tom pauses, seeing Ellis appear at the corner of the boat just behind James.

155 INT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - DEN - CONTINUOUS 155

The firing from the front door has stopped. Mud takes a deep breath, sets the empty shotgun on the ground, then rushes out the sliding glass doors as the men out front reload.

156 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT/TOM'S HOUSEBOAT - CONTINUOUS 156

Mud makes it outside, his back to James' leveled rifle.

ELLIS

MUD!

James and Mud both turn at the sound of Ellis' voice. One of Tom's bullets drops James dead.

Carver appears at the carport end of the boat. He raises his shotgun toward Mud.

A156 ON TOM, A156

He snaps the bolt open and closed, but it jams. He jerks at the lever, looking up he sees Carver taking aim.

157 ON MUD, 157

Mud takes a running leap off the side of the boat.

Carver FIRES.

Mud is struck in the back by the shotgun blast. The force of the shot spins him in the air. He crashes into the water.

Ellis screams.

ELLIS (CONT'D)

MUD!

Carver approaches the edge of the boat. He stares down into the swirling dark water. No sign of Mud.

A157 ON TOM,

A157

Tom slaps open the bolt and yanks the spent cartridge out with his fingers. It BURNS.

TOM

DAMMIT!

ON CARVER,

He pumps the shotgun and fires into the murky water. The pellets pepper the surface. Still no sign of Mud.

Carver pumps the shotgun a final time, but before he can get another shot off Tom's bullet rips open Carver's chest sending him sprawling through the broken patio doors.

ON TOM,

He exhales, shucks the bolt once more. His eyes scan the dark water.

158 ON THE HOUSEBOAT,

158

Ellis runs to the edge of the boat.

ELLIS

MUD! MUD!

Senior exits the houseboat, pistol pointed. He sees Ellis and runs to him.

SENIOR

ELLIS!

Senior grabs the boy, keeping his pistol up. Ellis drops to his knees and Senior crouches with him, holding him tight in his arms. Ellis cries.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

It's okay. It's okay.

The two sit alone on the edge of the houseboat. The river seems especially quiet now.

159 I/E. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT/RIVERBANK - PREDAWN

159

The sky shows faint signs of morning, a few streaks of light.

ON THE RIVERBANK,

The blue, red, and white lights from police cruisers and ambulances bounce up into the trees.

A frenzy of Police activity swarms from the aftermath left on Ellis' houseboat. Men in wetsuits prepare a dive. Blanket covered bodies are wheeled off on gurneys.

Two of the Bounty Hunters, unharmed, sit locked in the back of a state trooper vehicle.

160 ON THE HOUSEBOAT, 160

Ellis, Senior and Mary Lee sit huddled together under the carport. They watch the emergency workers stream past. Senior wraps his arms around them.

Ellis looks across the bayou to Tom's boat. Police flashlights bob and weave throughout. No sign of Tom.

161 INSIDE ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT, 161

A LOCAL OFFICER strings caution tape across the broken patio doors. TWO STATE TROOPERS hover over Carver's body.

The Troopers step away and the Local Officer cranes toward the body. He studies Carver's face.

Stepping aside, the Officer takes a cell phone from his pocket and dials. He turns his back away from the Troopers.

162 INT. PINES MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT 162

The phone rings in the Pines Motel. King enters from the adjoining room and takes a seat on the bed. He answers.

KING
Hello...You're speaking to him...

King listens. His face taut.

KING (CONT'D)
He's dead?
(a long pause)
Okay.

King hangs up the phone. He sits at the edge of the bed, overwhelmed by the news.

163 EXT. RIVER - NIGHT 163

It's dark on the river. Moonlight barely shows the ripples in the slow moving current. MUSIC from a country station slips out across the surface of the water.

Galen's jambox sits next to a small lantern in his flat-bottom boat. His Helper snores, fully reclined, with an empty can of Budweiser resting on his gut.

His feet are propped next to a tiny bell rigged to a line that disappears into the water. The bell RINGS.

164 EXT. UNDERWATER - RIVER - NIGHT 164

The river bed swirls inside two, distinct spots of light.

Galen, using his new diving lights, scoops a final mussel shell into the net before tying it off. He tugs at the line.

It's pitch black save for the shafts of light projected from Galen's shoulders. He tilts the lights toward the surface.

The line leading up to the bottom of the boat dances in and out of the high beams. Then...

MUD'S BODY FLOATS BY OVERHEAD.

Only his backside is visible. A cloud of blood trails from the holes there.

FADE TO BLACK.

165 EXT. ELLIS' HOUSEBOAT - DAY 165

A WORKER cinches a thick strap across the deck of Ellis' houseboat.

166 ON THE RIVERBANK, 166

Ellis watches as WORKERS affix straps from his houseboat to a crane resting in the bed of a large truck on the bank.

The SOUND of Neckbone's dirt bike rattles through the trees. He appears behind Ellis and parks.

NECKBONE

Hey.

ELLIS

You got your bike back.

NECKBONE

Mud dinged the shit out of it.

Neckbone takes a seat next to Ellis. They watch the workers.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)

They're really doin' it.

ELLIS

It's the law.

NECKBONE

It's bullshit. They ever find Tom?

The boys focus on Tom Blankenship's boat across the bayou. It sits vacant, covered in police tape.

ELLIS

No. He's gone.

NECKBONE

Your dad not here?

ELLIS
Said he couldn't watch it. He's
pickin' me up in a minute. Got
deliveries today.

They sit in silence as the Workers exit off the houseboat.

NECKBONE
Heard on the news. They still
hadn't found Mud's body.

Ellis nods.

NECKBONE (CONT'D)
You think he's dead?

ELLIS
I don't know. I hope not.

The crane begins lifting up the houseboat. The metal wires
tighten and the entire structure creaks.

A sucking sound as the flotilla separate from the water. The
boat hangs, suspended in the air.

A HORN HONKS behind the boys. Ellis turns to see Senior's
truck.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
I gotta go. Come by the apartment.
Help me set my room up.

NECKBONE
All right.

Neckbone watches Ellis climb into the bed of the pick-up and
take his spot on the coolers. The sound of twisting metal
shifts his attention back to the houseboat being swung over a
flatbed semi.

167 I/E. SENIOR'S TRUCK/RIVERBANK - CONTINUOUS 167

IN THE CAB,

Senior glances at the houseboat being set on the flatbed. He
puts the truck in reverse and pulls away. Not looking back.

168 EXT. SENIOR'S TRUCK/IMAGES OF DEWITT - DAY 168

Ellis rides in the back of the truck on top of the
coolers. He watches the town pass by.

A168 The marina junkyard. The Sonic. Downtown. A168

B168 EXT. FLEA MARKET - DAY

B168

Ellis and his father unload a cooler at the back of a tented flea market. A WOMAN comes out to greet them.

169 I/E. SENIOR'S TRUCK/NEW APARTMENTS - DAY

169

Senior's truck pulls into the parking lot of a newly finished apartment complex. The two-story buildings are modest.

The truck idles out front.

INSIDE THE CAB,

Ellis grabs the door handle. He turns to Senior.

ELLIS

I'll see you next week?

SENIOR

Yeah.

Ellis begins to get out but stops when Senior speaks.

SENIOR (CONT'D)

Ellis? You mind your mother okay? This is a big change for her. She needs your support.

ELLIS

Yessir.

SENIOR

All right. I love you.

ELLIS

Love you too.

Ellis climbs out. He watches as Senior pulls away.

He stands alone in front of the apartments, studying the surroundings. A busy road out front. A gas station and collection of stores. A lot of people and commotion.

A compact car pulls into a parking spot one building down. Ellis watches as three COLLEGE AGE GIRLS climb out dressed in running shorts and t-shirts. Two are heavy set, the other is petite. They joke and laugh. One sees Ellis and waves.

Ellis nods to her. He tracks them as they walk inside. Ellis smirks.

170 EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - DAY

170

The river rushes past. A large motor churns the water.

Tom stands steering Mud's salvaged boat down river. He cranes his neck, seeing something up ahead.

Tom kills the motor. Looking out over the bow, he's pleased by what he sees. His eyes glint, almost a smile. He walks to the small cabin and enters.

171 INSIDE THE CABIN,

171

Mud rests flat on his stomach on the cushioned bench. Shirtless, gauze bandages wrap around his chest and back. He's sleeping.

Tom walks in and kneels next to him. Touches his shoulder. Mud's eyes open.

TOM

Come on son. You need to see this.

Mud, groggy, raises up. Tom helps him to his feet, putting an arm over his shoulders. Tom practically carries Mud outside.

172 ON DECK,

172

Tom and Mud slowly maneuver out the door and take a place near the front of the boat.

Mud pulls his head up. Looks out ahead. The sight in front of him grabs his attention. He perks up.

A tributary from the Mississippi river opens up into a vast stretch of ocean.

Mud smiles, showing the missing tooth.

Tom and Mud stand on deck as their boat drifts slowly into the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The End.