

"N O R E T U R N"

An Original Screenplay

by

Gregory Goodell

[REDACTED]

FADE IN. PITTSBURGH SKYLINE. A LARGE AMERICAN CITY AT ITS WORST. SMOG. NOISE. TRAFFIC. The noise level rises abruptly as we

CUT TO

A CROWDED DOWNTOWN STREET. RUSH HOUR IN FULL FORCE.

A BUS pulls up at the curb and a YOUNG MAN exits, makes his way through the crowd. His greasy UNION 76 mechanic's jumpsuit stands out in a sea of business suits and secretaries.

THE YOUNG MAN'S name is NICK WAGNER. He is not yet twenty. He has close-cropped hair and in his ear is a small diamond stud. His walk betrays the arrogance of a 19-year-old kid who's got the world by the tail.

CUT TO

BANK ENTRANCE. NICK holds open the door for an attractive young SECRETARY, bows formally, then enters leaving a smudge of grease on the door.

CUT TO

TELLER'S WINDOW as NICK removes his savings passbook with a greasy hand, gives it to a spotless TELLER. She holds it with her fingertips as though it were an insect and

NICK

I'd like to close my account.

THE TELLER opens the passbook, trying to touch as little of it as possible. She looks at the amount and

TELLER

(surprised)

You want all of it?

NICK

500 in cash; the rest in traveler's checks.

(beat)

I'm in kind of a hurry.

CUT TO

A RAMSHACKLE ONE-STORY HOUSE in a lower-middle class city neighborhood. NICK approaches at a half-run, quickly unlocks the door

CUT TO

2.
A SMALL BEDROOM IN THE BACK OF THE HOUSE. A large scenic poster of ALASKA hangs on the closet door.

NICK goes to the closet, removes a fully packed backpack. He takes a thick envelope (his money) out of his pocket, stuffs it into the backpack.

A small scraping/tapping noise is heard...

NICK

Hang on a minute.

He reaches into a drawer, removes a paper sack, goes to the window. On the sill sits a GREY SQUIRREL waiting for dinner. NICK opens the window and the SQUIRREL jumps back, sits three feet away on the fence.

NICK

You're gonna get the whole works today, Juno.

He pours the entire bag onto a tray, sets it on the sill, closes the window. The SQUIRREL returns, begins eating...

NICK (CONT.)

Hope you save some o' that for the winter.

OFF CAMERA WE HEAR THE SOUND OF THE FRONT DOOR OPENING AND SLAMMING SHUT. NICK quickly returns his backpack to the closet as

MAN'S VOICE (OVER)

(shouting)

Nick! Gimme a hand in here!

CUT TO

THE LIVING ROOM. THE MAN we just heard is NICK'S father, JOHNNY WAGNER. He's wearing a rumpled sport coat, a skinny black tie and about 85 pounds more flesh than he really needs.

He is clearing debris from the most prominent piece of furniture in the room - A LARGE PROFESSIONAL POKEFR TABLE. NICK enters and

JOHNNY

(gesturing around the room)

What's this?

NICK

(yawns)

I fell asleep.

JOHNNY

Well get that monkey suit off and
gimme a hand. I got people comin'
over!

(now...)

CUT TO

AN UPPER MIDDLE-CLASS SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD FEATURING AN IMMACULATE
TWO-STORY HOUSE.

A car pulls up at the curb carrying four student nurses, all in
uniform. JESSE O'HALLARAN hops out. She's in her late teens
and, in spite of her uniform, quite attractive.

She bounces up toward the house waving 'goodbye' and shouting
'See you tomorrow' and we

CUT TO

INSIDE THE HOUSE. JESSE enters, starts up the stairs when...

MOTHER'S VOICE (OVER)

Jesse?

She stops, turns as

MOTHER (CONT.)

I thought I heard you. Listen, Daddy
called and said he won't be home for
your birthday tomorrow. I told him
you wouldn't mind if we wait and
celebrate Wednesday.

JESSE

No, that's o.k.

MOTHER reaches up to a shelf, takes a torn-open envelope, hands
it to JESSE.

MOTHER

Here's some mail for you. I opened
it by mistake.

JESSE gives her a look that says 'I doubt that' and starts up
the stairs...

MOTHER (CONT.)

(exaggerates)

Well I didn't read it!

CUT TO

A LARGE WELL-FURNISHED BEDROOM ON THE SECOND FLOOR. On the bed sits Jesse's sister, ANGIE. She's a year older, less attractive and seven months pregnant. She is sorting through an enormous pile of clothing but looks up as...

JESSE enters, closes the door behind her and locks it. She does this so quickly and smoothly that it's apparent she is acting out of habit.

JESSE

God, Angie, you're a lifesaver.

ANGIE

That's what big sisters are all about.

JESSE goes to a large closet, opens it. Inside is a solid wall of clothing.

JESSE

God! I can't believe all the stuff I've got.

(shakes her head)

Where do I start?

CUT TO

NICK'S HOUSE. NIGHT. THE POKER GAME IS IN FULL SWING. JOHNNY deals to three other players, all look to be factory workers. On JOHNNY'S right is a bottle of Old Grand Dad. He completes the deal, downs a shot and we

CUT TO

NICK'S BEDROOM. IT'S DARK. NICK LIES ON HIS BACK LISTENING TO THE SOUNDS FROM THE FRONT ROOM. Hold for a brief pause, then slowly...

FADE OUT

BLACKNESS AND SILENCE FOR A BEAT, THEN ABRUPTLY

CUT TO

AN ALARM CLOCK VIOLENTLY SCREAMING I'S MESSAGE. A hand reaches in, shuts it off. The hand belongs to NICK. The clock reads 4:00 a.m....

CUT TO

THE LIVING ROOM. It's lit only by the single lamp above the poker table. The table is littered with the remnants of last night's game. On the couch is NICK'S father, out cold.

NICK enters carrying his backpack and a P-coat. He's dressed in a T-shirt, jeans and high-top sneakers. Around his neck is a leather thong and from it hangs a JADE ROACH CLIP. In his ear, of course, is the diamond stud...

NICK goes to the couch, looks down at his father...

NICK
(quietly)
So long old man.

He bends down, kisses his father on the cheek.

As NICK turns to leave he takes an envelope out of his pocket, tosses it on the poker table. We can read 'DAD' scribbled across the back.

CUT TO

A CITY STREET IN AN OLD PART OF TOWN. It's lit only by street-lights and occasional storefront signs. NICK approaches and again we must be aware of the arrogance in his walk, almost a strut - as if he's walking to the beat of an imaginary 'rock' tune.

He turns toward a run-down UNION 76 STATION, goes directly to one of the stalls and unlocks the large roll-up door. A sudden shattering of sound as the door rattles and squeaks open, then silence again as NICK enters the stall. In the darkness we can barely make out a large canvas-covered vehicle...

CUT TO

CLOSER ANGLE as NICK carefully removes the canvas cover; but it's too dark and we're too close to really tell what's underneath...

Very quiet now... only NICK'S footsteps as he crosses the stall, goes to the main circuit breaker. He throws the switch and instantly the station explodes in a burst of neon light and we

CUT TO

A VEHICLE WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE. Neither has anyone else.

It began as a panel truck in 1949 but today, after three years of work, NICK has turned it into a cross between a camper, a jeep and something you might see in a circus. With oversize tires the vehicle sits nearly three feet off the ground; protective wire-mesh grating covers the windshield; a second pair of headlights and a spotlight are mounted on the roof; behind them are three antennas; large heavy-duty bumpers are welded to the front and back.

The paint job is also worth noting. The roof is a light yellow-orange, the middle is ringed in a darker shade of orange and the bottom third is a deep reddish blue. The total effect is that of a sunrise on wheels. It should be obvious that this vehicle was built for a purpose that has nothing to do with life in Pittsburgh.

61
NICK walks around the truck admiring its perfection, stopping once or twice to polish off a speck of unwanted dust. Thoroughly satisfied, he hops into the cab and slams the door on the CAMERA filling the frame with the words he's neatly inscribed on the door.

THE ALASKAN EXPRESS!

For short, NICK refers to his rig as THE AX.

He fires up the engine with a sudden thundering roar and abruptly

CUT TO

A SUITCASE SLAMMING SHUT ON THE CAMERA; SOMEONE'S REAR END JUMPS ON TOP; a hand reaches in, locks it...

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

JESSE'S BEDROOM. JESSE is on the case; ANGIE is sitting on the bed studying two notes. Their voices are half whispered...

JESSE

Which one do you like?

ANGIE

(holds up one)

Leave 'em the short one.

JESSE joins ANGIE on the bed, studies the 'short' one for a beat, then puts it in an envelope.

ANGIE

I wish my birthdays'd start like this.

JESSE

(warm smile)

I'm gonna miss you.

(refers to Angie's
pregnant tummy)

Wish I could be around in a couple
months.

ANGIE

(smiles, eyes watering)

You'll have your own before long.
Little eskimo babies...

Suddenly a bright light sweeps across their faces and we

CUT TO

THE WINDOW as light sweeps across for a second time.

CUT TO

THE STREET IN FRONT OF JESSE'S HOUSE. NICK is standing by the AX signaling with the spotlight. He makes one more sweep then douses the light, darts around to the side of the house. He stops by the side door, looks up and we

CUT TO

JESSE'S BEDROOM WINDOW AS HER BACKPACK COMES FLYING OUT.

NICK jumps back as the pack crashes to the ground. He looks up, jumps back further as

A LARGE SUITCASE TUMBLES OUT THE WINDOW. Then another, and another, and another. The cases come thundering down landing one on top of the other. Then...

JESSE quietly comes out the side door, runs to NICK with a warm embrace, a big kiss and...

NICK
(half whispering,
referring to the cases)
What's all this?

JESSE
It's my stuff.

NICK
We can't take all this!

JESSE
You should have seen what I left
behind. I need this stuff.

NICK
(shaking his head)
No way.
(and we...)

CUT TO

THE AX SPEEDING ALONG AN ELEVATED INNER-CITY HIGHWAY, four suitcases strapped precariously to the roof... Over this we hear the excited, laughing voices of NICK and JESSE celebrating their new-found freedom.

The first fingernail of sun peers out over the Allegheny Mountains and splashes across the city. The three layers of orange around the AX seems to glow in the morning light. It really does look like a traveling sunrise!

CUT TO

INSIDE THE AX and the joy and excitement must still be with us as

(CONTINUED)

JESSE
(shouting over the
roar of the engine)
This is incredible! I can't believe
we're actually gonna do it!

NICK
(also shouting)
We're doin' it. Did you get the blood
tests?

JESSE
No sweat.
(big smile)
Did you get my present?

NICK reaches into his shirt pocket, produces a small gift-wrapped
box, hands it to JESSE.

NICK
Happy eighteenth!

JESSE
(begins opening)
When you said I could have anything I
wanted for my birthday, did you ever
think I'd ask for this?

NICK
Nope!

JESSE opens the box... it's a gold wedding band.

JESSE
(beaming)
It's beautiful!

NICK
It'll look even better under the
northern lights.

JESSE leans over, plants an enormous kiss on his cheek and we

CUT TO

SILENCE. JESSE'S HAND, CLOSEUP, SHAKING JUST A LITTLE... Then...

JUDGE'S VOICE (OVER)
...in sickness and in health...

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)
...in sickness and in health...

Nick slips the ring on Jesse's finger.

9.
JUDGE'S VOICE (OVER)
... 'til death do us part.

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)
... 'til death do us part.

CUT TO

THE SMILING FACE OF A JOLLY OLD JUDGE AS

JUDGE
You may now kiss the bride!

CUT TO

JESSE'S FACE. CLOSEUP. Tears of joy are misting her eyes. Then slowly, very slowly, NICK touches her cheeks, then her lips. He leans in, kisses her gently and as her eyes close their faces lighten and lighten until they disappear altogether and we complete our

DISSOLVE TO

A CRYSTAL CLEAR BLUE-WHITE SKY.

PAN DOWN TO REVEAL

AN AERIAL SHOT OF THE AX SPEEDING ALONG AN OPEN COUNTRY HIGHWAY.

As we descend on the vehicle we can hear the voices of NICK and JESSE singing, clapping and laughing along with music from the tape deck and we must have the feeling that this is the start of a great, magical adventure... that NICK and JESSE are traveling in a bright orange bubble of sunshine and love...

As we move closer we see that they're not only singing and laughing; they're also eating ice cream cones!

JESSE looks over at NICK, suddenly stops singing...

JESSE
(shouting over
the engine)
You're spilling some!

NICK
(driving, searching
his lap)
Where?

JESSE leans in close to NICK, begins licking his ear...

JESSE
Right here.

she ruffles his hair, continues nibbling on his ear...

JESSE (cont.)

I think I'm getting it...

NICK

You keep that up and the whole truck's gonna melt!

(and on that we...)

CUT TO

A BLAZING FIRE

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

JESSE COOKING OVER THE OPEN FIRE. Rather, she's trying to cook. She's tugging at a steak but it's stuck to the pan. Smoke is getting in her eyes.

In the background, NICK is adjusting the taut lines of their two-man tent. He looks up as

JESSE screams, jumps back from the fire, shaking her hand. Two semi-charred steaks fall to the ground.

JESSE

Damn! I wish my mother'd taught me how to cook.

NICK

(walks over to the steaks)

Your doin' fine but you're using way too much dirt.

(with a spoon he gently sprinkles dirt over the burnt meat)

You have to saute' these things just so.

Nice try, but JESSE looks defeated...

NICK (cont.)

(goes to Jesse)

I'll tell you what. We'll split the work right down the middle. I'll take care of the cooking...

(puts his arms around her, kisses her)

You can take care of the ice cream!

(Jesse smiles and...)

CUT TO

THE CAMPFIRE ONLY NOW IT'S DARK AND NICK IS COOKING. He's quite

(CONTINUED)

11.
11.
an expert. JESSE is sitting alongside watching, her knees tucked up under her chin. She's finishing a joint...

JESSE

(takes a toke)

Remember when you first told me about this trip? The truck was half built and you had all those drawings of how it was gonna look...

NICK

(his mind on the cooking)

Looked a lot different on paper, didn't it?

JESSE

What I remember most is the way you talked about Alaska. About the trees and the lakes and the skies...

(she smiles, stares into the fire)

My Dad used to sound just like that. He used to make up bedtime stories about far off magical places...

NICK

(dishing out the food)

My ol' man used to tell bedtime stories with the back of his hand.

(hands her a plate)

JESSE

(tosses the roach into the fire)

I bet my Dad goes nuts tomorrow when he finds out I'm gone.

NICK

He missed your birthday, huh?

JESSE

Yep. This is delicious. When I was a kid he wouldn't have missed it for anything.

NICK

(also enjoying the meal)

I guess everyone grows up sometime.

(smiles)

'Cept me.

JESSE

Yeah, but only half of us turn into girls.

NICK

(smiles)

Whadya start out as?

JESSE

Well, when you're a kid you're just a kid. It doesn't really matter if you're a boy or a girl. But then the day comes and 'Bang' you find out.

NICK

Just like that, huh?

JESSE

That's how it happened to me. When I was twelve he took me for my first plane ride and right there in the cockpit 'Bang' - I had my first...

(shrugs)

...y'know. Just like that. I had white pants on and all I could think of was 'Why did I have tomato soup for lunch?'

(Nick gives her a sideways look, stops eating. Jesse laughs)

Can you believe that?

NICK

So what'd he do?

JESSE

He just landed the plane, marched me off to the ladies room, told me to stop crying and wait for Mom.

(angry at the memory)

I was in there for five fucking hours.

Can you believe that?

(Nick sets his plate down, lies back)

Anyway, that's when I turned into a girl and he just didn't seem to have much need for me after that.

NICK lights a joint, looks up at the sky. It's littered with stars. Also in the heavens are two tiny flashing red lights.

NICK

Maybe that's him now. Comin' after his little girl...

JESSE

(looks up)

I doubt it.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JESSE (CONT'D)

(she stares back
into the fire)
Did you talk with your Dad?

NICK

(a long pause, then...)
I just wanna erase all that stuff.
My ol' man, your ol' man, Pittsburgh...
(beat...)
It's just you and me now...

JESSE stares into the fire. A quiet flame shoots up sending a warm glow across her face and at that very instant we

CUT TO

THE AX BARRELING PAST THE CAMERA, DOWN THE INTERSTATE. WE'RE WAY OUT IN THE COUNTRY - SOMEWHERE IN INDIANA...

CUT TO

SMALL-TOWN POST OFFICE. MIDDAY. The AX pulls up. JESSE quickly checks through an enormous stack of postcards, then turns to NICK.

JESSE

You sure you don't wanna send some?

NICK

(smiles)
Got nothin' to say.

JESSE

How 'bout your Dad?

NICK

When we get there.
(now...)

CUT TO

THE AX AT NIGHT RACING PAST THE CAMERA, DISAPPEARING INTO THE SKYLINE OF DOWNTOWN CHICAGO. Hold for a beat, then...

CUT TO

FARM SCENES AS THE AX RUMBLES PAST. Cows grazing in a meadow, a tractor plowing the fields, acres of corn, wheat and barley and

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)

I bet next to Alaska this'd look like
downtown Pittsburgh.
(and we...)

CUT TO

TWO YOUNGSTERS ON HORSEBACK AND AS THEY WAVE WE

14.

CUT TO

THE AX. TRAVELING SHOT. NICK IS WAVING BACK, SHOUTING, ONLY THE ROAR OF THE ENGINE DROWNS OUT HIS VOICE. BUT THAT'S O.K.; HE'S HAVING A HELL OF A GOOD TIME AND THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS.

CUT TO

WATER, CLOSEUP, JUST AS A NAKED BODY PLUNGES IN AND
PULL BACK TO REVEAL

A SECLUDED COUNTRY POND as NICK, stark naked, plunges in after JESSE.

CUT TO

THE SURFACE just as they burst through, splashing and laughing. Then abruptly

CUT TO

NICK AND JESSE, side by side, naked on the grass. Their eyes are closed. It's quiet, peaceful... Then...

NICK

(quietly)

I think you missed some o' that ice cream.

JESSE

(eyes still closed)

Huh?

NICK

(eyes also closed,
points to his neck)

Right here.

JESSE looks over... it takes her a beat to get the message, then

JESSE

(smiles)

Yeah, you're right.

She rolls toward NICK, kisses his neck and they begin rolling, playing wrestling, their bodies locked together until suddenly JESSE stops, wrinkles up her nose. Her eyes widen and...

JESSE (cont.)

(giggling)

I think I can feel a whole scoop!
(and on that we...)

CUT TO

AN EXPLOSION OF SOUND AS THE AX ROARS PAST. The terrain is beginning to change. We're heading into the foothills of the Rocky Mountains just inside Wyoming. It's late afternoon and for the first time the sky is dark, overcast. We're going to miss the sunset...

CUT TO

INSIDE THE AX. NICK is driving; JESSE is nodding off to sleep.

NICK

We're gonna need some gas.

JESSE

(yawning)

Great. I've really gotta go.

(rubbing her eyes)

I also wanna get some more postcards.

CUT TO

THE HIGHWAY THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD as we pass a gunshot-pocked sign reading:

CHEYENNE 5 MILES

GAS THIS EXIT

THE AX pulls off the interstate, turns down a local highway and we

CUT TO

A LONE, QUIET GAS STATION. Two men in their late thirties sit on chairs by the door sipping beer. They both wear cowboy hats. One is skinny, the other large and greasy. The large man has several tatoos on his naked torso. Between sips of beer his mouth hangs open and he looks like a giant bullfrog waiting to catch flies. Judging from the grease on his hands it's reasonable to assume that he's the station mechanic.

AS THE AX PULLS INTO THE STATION, the SKINNY MAN walks up to the pump and

NICK

(as he climbs out)

Could ya' fill 'er up with regular?

SKINNY MAN

(starts filling)

What the hell kinda rig is this, anyway?

NICK

(slaps the fender)

The Alaskan Express! I call it the AX for short! Built 'er special for the highway.

SKINNY MAN

Don't look like no highway rig to me.

NICK

Yeah, well the Alaskan Highway's no ordinary highway. It's just a gravel road.

SKINNY MAN

(referring to the grating
on the windshield)

This for flyin' rocks?

NICK

Yep. There's lots o' trucks up there
and I hear they kick up some pretty
big pieces...

As NICK continues to explain about the AX, JESSE hops down.
She's wearing a flimsy tank top and a pair of 'Everlast'
boxing shorts. She stretches for a moment, then heads for the
ladies room.

On her way she passes the tatooed bullfrog. He gives her a cool
eye, watches her disappear around the corner, then stands and
saunters around to the opposite side of the station...

CUT TO

NICK AT THE AX paying for his fillup...

NICK

I also got her rigged with CB, four-
wheel drive and a winch...took me
about three years to get her all set.
(takes his change,
glances to the sky)
Looks like rain.

SKINNY MAN

Yep. Could do.

NICK

Any decent camping places around here?

SKINNY MAN

~~MMMMMM~~, let's see. No, most of 'ems
the other side o' town.

(thinks, then...)

There's one place... kinda rundown.
It's not used much any more. In fact,
I think it's closed... but I doubt if
anyone'd bother you there.

(as he begins to
give directions we...)

CUT TO

17.
JESSE COMING OUT OF THE LADIES ROOM. As she returns to the AX we see in the background the TATOOED MAN coming back from around the station. He repositions himself in his chair, continues sucking on his beer...

NICK climbs into the AX as

SKINNY MAN
(gesturing down the road)
...about three miles down. It's a
little dirt road. Follow it for
about half a mile and you're there.

NICK
(as he drives off)
Got it... thanks...

SKINNY MAN
(calling after)
Good luck in the ice box!

CUT TO

A LITTLE-USED DIRT ROAD as the AX comes barreling towards us kicking up an enormous cloud of dust in its wake.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE AX. NICK and JESSE are bouncing up and down like targets in a shooting gallery as NICK does his best to negotiate around potholes and ruts in the road...

JESSE
(shouting)
This can't be right...

NICK
He said half a mile.

NICK rounds a bend and suddenly slams on the brakes. JESSE is jolted forward, stopping just short of the dashboard...

One of her suitcases crashes down onto the hood blocking their view...

They step from the cab into a cloud of settling dust and we

CUT TO

WHAT THEY SEE: A LARGE TREE HAS FALLEN DIRECTLY ACROSS THE ROAD. Beyond the tree is what used to be a campsite. It's the kind of clearing where the wicked witch of the west probably spent her childhood - several dead trees rotting on the ground, rusty beer cans and other assorted garbage, a weather-beaten picnic table...

It's a foreboding site, dead silent except for a slight wind in the trees... and to top it all off the sky is overcast and getting darker.

JESSE rubs her eyes half because she's tired and half in disbelief

NICK

(smiling)

Home sweet home!

CUT TO

METAL STAKE, CLOSEUP, as it's driven into the ground then

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

NICK as he raises the front end of the yellow two-man tent. JESSE, in the background, is wiping branches and cobwebs from the picnic table...

NICK

We'll have to run into town to get some food. We're low on supplies...

JESSE

(yawning, sitting on the bench)

Why don't I stay here and get the fire started?

NICK

You can't stay here by yourself.

JESSE

Why not?

NICK

This isn't downtown Pittsburgh, you know.

JESSE

Well it's not exactly darkest Africa, either.

NICK

We don't know what this place is.

JESSE

(rolls her eyes)

God, you sound just like my mother. I'll be o.k. Besides, if it rains we'll lose all the dry firewood.

NICK

(looks to the sky)

Maybe you're right.

JESSE

By the time you get back I'll have
a nice toasty fire going and...

(as Jesse continues
to talk we...)

CUT TO

A LONG SHOT OF THE CAMPSITE. We're looking at the area from
between two trees in the foreground. It's an innocent enough
shot until... THE CAMERA BEGINS TO MOVE... very slowly... past
one of the trees... and we hear a few leaves rustle in a pattern
of careful footsteps...

We watch NICK as he goes to the AX, pulls the suitcase off the
hood. In the distance we hear

JESSE (cont.)

...leave my brown case. I want to
change into something warmer...

THE CAMERA CONTINUES MOVING EVER SO SLOWLY. SUDDENLY WE HEAR
A BRANCH SNAP AND ABRUPTLY THE CAMERA STOPS. Hold for a beat,
then...

CUT TO

NICK AT THE AX unloading the brown case and his backpack. He
removes a small hatchet from his pack, takes it to JESSE. He
plants the hatchet in the picnic table with a loud THUNK!! and

NICK

Know how to use one o' these?

JESSE

I think I can figure it out.

NICK

(gives her a big kiss)
I'll be back in a flash...
(as he goes to the AX...)

CUT TO

THE SAME WIDER SHOT AS BEFORE, STILL LOOKING THROUGH THE TREES.
The AX departs and we watch JESSE as she stands, removes a few
things from her case. Then... SLOWLY THE CAMERA BEGINS TO MOVE...
just a little... and the sound of a growing wind in the trees
is joined by the rustling of leaves underfoot...

CUT TO

NICK IN THE AX bopping along with rock 'n roll music blaring
from the cassette deck. He's singing... things couldn't be better

CUT TO

INSIDE THE TENT as JESSE climbs in carrying her warmer clothes. She removes her blouse. It's very quiet... only the wind and the intimate sound of her clothing. SUDDENLY A TWIG SNAPS AND SHE FREEZES... LISTENS... WHATEVER WAS WATCHING THROUGH THE TREES IS GETTING CLOSER. THREE BEATS... THEN...

CUT TO

NICK ENTERING A SMALL GROCERY STORE. He greets the cashier with a broad smile and

NICK

Afternoon.

CASHIER

(checks her watch)

Not anymore...

NICK quickly selects items from the shelves. He seems to know what he's after but at the meat counter he pauses, looks through the steaks.

NICK

(to the butcher)

You cut meat to order?

(and we...)

CUT TO

INSIDE THE TENT as JESSE slips on a button-down sweater. There isn't much room and she has to struggle a bit to get it on. Then...

BEHIND HER A SHADOW SLOWLY RISES ON THE TENT WALL. THE CANVAS IS SHIFTING IN THE WIND, RIPPLING THE SHADOW, DISTORTING ITS SHAPE SO WE CAN'T TELL WHAT IT IS...

WE ARE WATCHING JESSE IN CLOSEUP AS THE SHADOW GROWS DARKER... WHATEVER IT IS OUT THERE IS LEANING IN VERY CLOSE... THEN... JUST BEHIND HER HEAD A KNIFE BLADE SILENTLY PENETRATES THE CANVAS WALL... SLOWLY IN... SLOWLY OUT... STEADILY SLICING DOWNWARD.

AS JESSE FASTENS THE FIRST BUTTON OF HER SWEATER SHE CATCHES THE KNIFE OUT OF THE CORNER OF HER EYE AND ABRUPTLY TURNS. IN THAT FIRST SPLIT SECOND SHE FREEZES, SUCKS IN HER BREATH... HER EYES BULGE IN DISBELIEF AND IT TAKES JUST A MOMENT FOR THE HORROR TO REGISTER BUT IN THAT MOMENT SHE IS ALREADY INSTINCTIVELY BACKING AGAINST THE OPPOSITE WALL.

THE KNIFE CONTINUES ITS WORK CUTTING SLOWLY DOWN THE SIDE OF THE TENT...ONE INCH... TWO INCHES... THEN...

A SUDDEN BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM FROM JESSE AND INSTANTLY THE KNIFE SLICES DOWN HARD. LARGE HANDS RIP OPEN THE SIDE OF THE

(CONTINUED)

TENT WITH A LOUD WRENCHING SOUND AND BEFORE WE CAN BLINK AN ARM IS REACHING IN, GROPING FOR JESSE AND THE TENT COLLAPSES AROUND HER AND SHE'S FLAILING IN THE CANVAS, SCREAMING LIKE A DEMON AS

CUT TO

BEEFSTEAK, CLOSEUP, as a knife slices in and chops it into cubes for stewing. THE BUTCHER expertly wraps the meat, hands it to NICK and

CUT TO

THE CHECKOUT COUNTER. NICK pays for his groceries, heads out the door, then stops, returns to the cashier and

NICK

(with a mischievous smile)

Where could I find the ice cream?

CUT TO

NICK IN THE AX tooling down the road, turning in toward the campsite. The sky has gotten very dark, threatening an impending storm...

AS THE AX HITS THE DIRT ROAD the frame fills with a cloud of dust and we

CUT TO

INSIDE THE TRUCK as NICK negotiates his way toward 'home sweet home...' As he rounds the final bend to the campsite

CUT TO

THE VIEW THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD AS THE AX COMES TO A HALT AT THE FALLEN TREE. It's much darker than before and the trees are blowing in the wind.

JESSE is by the picnic table, almost exactly where she was when NICK left only now she's sitting on the ground with her back to us. She's curled up in a little ball... her sweater is draped over her shoulders... her head rests on the bench... she could be sleeping.

The only thing out of order is the collapsed tent but that could have been the wind. It's blowing harder now...

CUT TO

JESSE. CLOSEUP. Her head is buried in her arms so we can't see her face. What we can see is her bloody hand clutching the hatchet, holding it close to her body, trembling...

In the background NICK climbs out of the AX...

With a devilish grin, he takes the quart of ice cream, slowly sneaks up behind JESSE and

NICK

Caramel cus...

AND THE VERY INSTANT HE TOUCHES HER SHOULDER

CUT TO

JESSE ABRUPTLY SPINNING, SCREAMING, VIOLENTLY SWINGING THE HATCHET IN ONE FEROCIOUS SWEEP AND

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. SHOCK. THE HATCHET SWINGS AGAIN AND HE JUMPS BACK AS WE

CUT TO

JESSE ATTACKING, SWINGING AGAIN. HER FACE IS SWOLLEN, BLACK AND BLUE, HER HANDS, ARMS AND LEGS ARE SOAKED WITH BLOOD AND SHE'S SCREAMING LIKE A MAD HYENA.

ANOTHER SWING WITH THE HATCHET AND SUDDENLY SHE TURNS, TRIES TO RUN BUT AFTER THREE STEPS COLLAPSES ON THE GROUND WRITHING IN PAIN... HALF WHIMPERING, HALF SCREAMING SHE TRIES TO CRAWL...

CUT TO

NICK RUNNING AFTER, HORROR IN HIS VOICE

NICK

OH MY GOD, OH MY GOD, MY GOD!!!
JESSE!! JESSE!! JESSE!!

HE TRIES TO HOLD HER, TO STOP HER, BUT SHE'S STRUGGLING TO GET FREE, CONVULSING HYSTERICALLY IN A MUDDY POOL OF DUST AND BLOOD AND IT TAKES ALL OF NICK'S STRENGTH TO HOLD HER... HE CLUTCHES HER HEAD, HER SHOULDERS, HOLDS HER TIGHT AND

NICK (cont.)

(SCREAMING)

JESSE!!!!!! JESSE!!!!!!

AND SUDDENLY THE FRENZY STOPS BUT THE PANIC FOR NICK IS JUST BEGINNING AS HE PICKS HER UP AND RUNS WITH HER TO THE AX.

SHE QUIVERS SPASMODICALLY IN HIS ARMS... HER BODY IS COVERED WITH BLOOD AND SHE'S SLIPPERY AS HELL... NICK HAS A TOUGH TIME HOLDING HER. IT'S AWKWARD, HYSTERICAL, BUT HE'S RUNNING LIKE A BASTARD.

He gets her into the front seat, grabs a blanket to cover her trembling body, jumps into the cab and

CUT TO

THE DIRT ROAD as the AX races past without regard to the potholes and

CUT TO

NICK. His hands are bloody and it's hard keeping a grip on the wheel. He wipes them on his pants and shirt but it doesn't help much... it's like trying to hold a wet snake...

CUT TO

THE AX ROARING OUT ONTO THE HIGHWAY. The tires squeal as the truck fishtails down the road and

CUT TO

NICK, CLOSEUP, sharing his concentration between JESSE and the road and there is panic in his trembling voice as

NICK

Hang on baby... hang on... we're two minutes away. Just hang on...

CUT TO

JESSE, CLOSEUP, wrapped tight in the blanket, trembling, panting, then suddenly doubling up in pain, crying out and

CUT TO

THE EDGE OF TOWN AS THE AX SCREAMS PAST. It's dark now, the streetlights are on and it's hard to see but that doesn't matter. ZOOM!!!!!! through a residential district. Nothing is going to slow them down and

CUT TO

NICK, CLOSEUP, looking dead ahead then quickly left, then right and

CUT TO

THE STREET THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD as the AX races through an intersection, screams around a corner and

CUT TO

NICK as he slams on the brakes, looks around frantically, then charges ahead and

CUT TO

THE AX screeching to a halt at another intersection then bolting off to the left and

CUT TO

NICK, CLOSEUP, and he doesn't have the foggiest idea where he's going and suddenly JESSE screams again and NICK guns the engine and races down another random street and he's really coming apart at the seams as

NICK
(desperately)
The hospital! The fucking hospital!
(screaming now)
GODDAMMIT WHERE IS SOMEONE!!!!

CUT TO

THE VIEW THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD. We've driven into the heart of the warehouse district. It's silent... still... deserted... but the AX is moving full speed through one intersection, then another and

CUT TO

NICK, CLOSEUP, suddenly slamming on the brakes, throwing it into reverse and

CUT TO

NICK'S POV PAST JESSE THROUGH THE PASSENGER WINDOW. DOWN THE STREET ON THE LEFT IS A LONE FIGURE WALKING UNDER A BRIGHT RED NEON "COKE" SIGN...

AS NICK MAKES THE TURN THE CAMERA SHIFTS TO THE WINDSHIELD KEEPING THE FIGURE IN FRAME AND WHEN WE'VE ALMOST REACHED HIM

CUT TO

JESSE, CLOSEUP, AS HER MOUTH DROPS OPEN, HER EYES BULGE IN TERROR AND SUDDENLY SHE SCREAMS

JESSE
IT'S HIM!!

AND BEFORE THE AX COMES TO A STOP NICK IS OUT THE DOOR LEAPING LIKE A LEOPARD ACROSS THE HOOD OF A CAR... THE MAN IS ABOUT NICK'S AGE AND HE'S QUITE A BIT LARGER BUT HE REACTS JUST A MOMENT TOO LATE AND IN THAT SPLIT SECOND THE THRUST OF NICK'S BODY CAREENS HIM INTO THE BRICK WALL AND HE DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE BECAUSE NICK'S FURY IS EXPLODING IN A BURST OF VIOLENT RAGE AND AS HE POUNDS INTO THE MAN WE

CUT TO

THE AX COMING TO A SUDDEN STOP AS IT'S GIANT BUMPER SCRAPES INTO A PARKED CAR AND

CUT TO

NICK POUNDING AWAY, SCREAMING INCOHERENTLY AT THE MOTHERFUCKER, TOTALLY OUT OF CONTROL, SLAMMING HIM INTO THE BRICK WALL THEN ONTO THE PAVEMENT AND GOD ONLY KNOWS WHAT HE WOULD HAVE DONE IF IT WEREN'T FOR JESSE SCREAMING SUDDENLY IN A BURST OF PAIN AND NICK DOESN'T THINK TWICE. HE SPINS AROUND, RUNS TO THE AX AND

CUT TO

A QUIET STREET AS THE AX RACES PAST IN HOT PURSUIT OF THE PHANTOM HOSPITAL AND

CUT TO

THE MAN ON THE PAVEMENT, TWITCHING SLIGHTLY THEN TRYING TO CRAWL AND

CUT TO

JESSE, CLOSEUP, half screaming, half whimpering in the AX. She's in deep trouble, the pain unbearable and

CUT TO

NICK'S POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD as suddenly a sign for the hospital appears in the headlights and

CUT TO

NICK abruptly spinning the wheel and gunning the engine with a frantic squeal of tires and

CUT TO

NICK'S POV AS A LARGE WELL-LIT SIGN DIRECTS HIM INTO THE EMERGENCY AREA AND JUST AS NICK MAKES THE TURN A MAN STEPS DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE AX. NICK HITS THE BRAKES AND WE

CUT TO

JESSE. CLOSEUP. HER MOUTH DROPS OPEN, HER EYES BULGE IN TERROR AND SUDDENLY SHE SCREAMS

JESSE

IT'S HIM!!

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. A BEAT... THEN IT HITS HIM. HORROR GROWS IN HIS EYES AS HE TURNS TO JESSE AND

CUT TO

26.
JESSE. CLOSEUP. SHE'S TREMBLING, HYSTERICAL, HER EYES ARE THE SIZE OF SAUCERS AND

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. A FROZEN MOMENT... THEN HE GRABS HER, SHAKES HER AND

NICK

Jesse No!!

JESSE

(sudden scream)

NO!! IT'S HIM!! NO!!!!

Then abruptly she stops, doubles up in pain and cries out as we

CUT TO

INSIDE THE EMERGENCY ROOM as NICK pushes through the entrance door with a bleeding, trembling JESSE in his arms and

NICK

(shouting at the top of his lungs)

HELP ME!! SOMEBODY!!!!

A CLERK AND A DUTY NURSE SIT BEHIND A WINDOW. THE NURSE jumps up, races toward NICK...

NURSE

(shouting back to the clerk)

Get the crash cart!

CUT TO

A PAIR OF SWINGING DOORS as two orderlies push through with a gurney. JESSE is laid on top, the NURSE takes her pulse and

NURSE (cont.)

(calling to the clerk)

Get the Doc and the I.V. nurse!

and immediately the gurney is wheeled through the swinging doors with NICK just a step behind.

CUT TO

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SWINGING DOORS AND WE'RE IN THE EMERGENCY PREPARATION ROOM. NICK is trying to talk to the orderlies and the nurse but they're too busy to pay any attention.

The moment they enter the preparation room JESSE'S mouth is

(CONTINUED)

covered with an oxygen mask, EKG leads are fastened; her clothes are quickly cut away... in the midst of this chaos...

NICK

(voice trembling)

I just found her there... I wasn't gone ten minutes... Jesus! She's bleeding like crazy...

(tears in his eyes now as...)

THE GURNEY IS WHISKED THROUGH ANOTHER SET OF DOORS BUT THIS TIME AN ORDERLY PREVENTS NICK FROM FOLLOWING.

NICK (cont.)

Christ, what's happened to her!?!?

ORDERLY

(shrugs)

Don't know yet.

(leads Nick to a sink)

Let's get some of this blood off you.

NICK

(washing his hands)

When can I see her?

ORDERLY

Can't say.

NICK wipes the blood from his arms and frantically heads out the door.

CUT TO

EMERGENCY ENTRANCE AREA as NICK races through and

CLERK

Hey! Wait a minute. I need some...

but before he can finish we

CUT TO

THE AX as NICK hops in, squeals out of the lot...

CUT TO

NICK IN THE CAB looking this way and that, trying to retrace his steps to the hospital. Desperation shows on his face...

CUT TO

NICK'S POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD. He tries one street, then another and

CUT TO

THE AX suddenly turning left, charging down the street and

CUT TO

NICK looking left and right as he races past the streets and

CUT TO

NICK'S POV and it feels like the right part of town but...

CUT TO

NICK and he's really not sure until... abruptly he hits the brakes, slides through an intersection, throws it into reverse and we

CUT TO

NICK'S POV through his side window and half a block down is the red neon "COKE" sign and the flashing red lights of two police cars and an ambulance. A small crowd has gathered...

NICK quickly parks the AX, grabs his P-coat (to cover the blood on his shirt) and slowly approaches the milling crowd and as he does we must be aware of a sudden change in tempo, perhaps with the intrusion of a surreal, dreamlike strain of music. We have arrived here at breakneck speed, coming from a series of incident that bordered on madness but now all that changes.

There is no panic here. Police are seeing to it that people are held back but no one's pushing, no one's yelling. Even the ambulance attendants are relaxed. The doors are open at the back of their rig but they're sitting on the bumper lighting cigarettes and exchanging gossip. It doesn't make sense until we

CUT TO

ANOTHER ANGLE OF THE CROWD as a BLACK STATION WAGON snakes its way in and on the side door we can read the words:

COUNTY CORONER

CUT TO

NICK. Shock registers on his face as what used to be the real world turns rapidly into a nightmare and NICK stands frozen... you could light a cherry bomb in his ear and he still wouldn't budge...

CUT TO

ANOTHER ANGLE OF THE CROWD as an UNMARKED POLICE CAR arrives and screeches to a halt. DETECTIVE VINCE BULGATI jumps out and pushes through the crowd...

He is in his late thirties but working at looking 25. He's wearing a smart blue blazer, a fancy dress shirt unbuttoned past his chest, a contemporary razor-cut hair style and just a shade too much jewelry.

Following BULGATI is his partner MAT SHOEMAN. SHOEMAN is in his mid-40s, tall, lanky, dressed in a plain brown sport coat. He's chewing gum and looks as though he should be out in the fields pitching hay...

The policemen snap to as the DETECTIVES approach and

BULGATI
I want those people held back!!

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. Still frozen, his face ghost-white. The first drops of rain strike his cheek but nothing moves... until suddenly his eyes begin to change and if they were saucers before they're rapidly becoming dinner plates as we

CUT TO

NICK'S POV AS THE CROWD IS PUSHED BACK AND WE SEE FOR THE FIRST TIME THE SHEET-COVERED BODY OF HIS VICTIM... IT'S LIFTED SLOWLY, LOADED INTO THE CORONER'S WAGON AND

CUT TO

NICK, NO LONGER FROZEN BUT BACKING AWAY SLOWLY AS IF AT ANY MOMENT THE SHEET COULD SIT BOLT UPRIGHT, POINT A FINGER AND SCREAM

"IT'S HIM!!"

NICK progresses backward until he bumps into a small group of people, is harshly shoved out of the way as

SHOVER
Watch it asshole!

NICK doesn't even blink; he continues backing up, staring at the crowd...

CUT TO

BULGATI, agitated now as his dapper outfit soaks up the rain and

BULGATI
(shouting)
Get me photos of the entire area.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BULGATI (CONT'D)
Christ, why didn't you shoot this
before it started raining!!
(he turns as...)

OLD MAN
(shouting to Bulgati)
Someone smashed the shit out of my
car over there!

BULGATI
...and get a snap of that scraped up
car, too!
(shouting continues
as we...)

CUT TO

NICK RETURNING TO THE AX. It's raining harder and he's soaking
wet but the look on his face hasn't changed... He climbs into
the cab and we

CUT TO

IGNITION. CLOSEUP. NICK'S trembling hand fights to insert the
key. He tries twice... fails...

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. He's shaking badly...

CUT TO

NICK'S VIEW THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD. The crowd is suddenly lit
up by a bolt of lightning; thunder roars across the sky and we

CUT TO

THE EMERGENCY ROOM AS NICK ENTERS. He's soaked to the bone,
dripping from head to foot...

NICK
(to clerk)
How is she?

CLERK
(annoyed)
Where the hell did you go?

NICK
(urgently)
How is she!?

CLERK

(shrugs)

I don't know. They brought in the surgery team so I expect she'll be here awhile.

NICK is suffering from an adrenalin rush equivalent to a hefty dose of free-base. His hand makes four quick passes through his matted hair; his eyes dart wildly about the room; his toe taps rapidly on the floor.

CLERK (cont.)

Listen, I need a lot of information. Her full name and address and, most important, is she insured?
(and on that we...)

CUT TO

TWO UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS entering the emergency room. They're wearing full ponchos and rain hats and they're dripping wet

OFFICER #1

(to the clerk)

Howdy Vic. This the man?

CLERK

That's him.

(Nick looks uneasy)

OFFICER #1

You were with the assault victim?

NICK

(he's still not sure)

Huh?

CLERK

Your friend... the girl...

NICK

My wife. Yeah... I mean no. I wasn't with her. I just left her for a few minutes and...

OFFICER #2

Where did this happen?

NICK

About two miles outside of town. Near 85... It's an old campsite...

OFFICER #1

Johnson Acres.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)

(looks to #2)

That's out in the county.

(to clerk)

How 'bout givin' the Sheriff a call,
Vic. This one's his.

CUT TO

THE SCENE OF THE KILLING and whatever quiet dreamlike quality existed when NICK returned has been washed away with the rain. It's coming down in buckets. Chaos reigns as thunder and lightning join the popping flashbulbs of the police photographer and local newsmen.

BULGATI pulls SHOEMAN aside and

BULGATI

I think we'd better call the Chief.
He'll wanna tell Wallis about this
himself.

SHOEMAN

It ain't a call I wanna make!

CUT TO

HOSPITAL LOBBY/WAITING ROOM. A couch, a t.v., a few old magazines. It's late, probably past midnight. NICK is alone in the room, standing by the window. All we hear is the steady beat of the rain. His face is reflected on the glass and the raindrops look almost like tears...

DR. THOMAS LEVINE enters wearing surgical greens. He's clearly exhausted...

NICK

(quickly)

How is she?

LEVINE

It's too early to tell but I can give
you a rundown on what happened.

NICK

(flatly)

I know what happened. Somebody beat
the shit out of her and raped her.

LEVINE

Not exactly. She was sexually abused
but not actually raped.

(a beat... then...)

They used a tree branch.

NICK
(horrificed)

What?!??

LEVINE
She suffered severe lacerations to
her female tract; she lost a lot of
blood; she also has a dislocated hip.

NICK
(sits, buries his
head in his hands)
My god...

LEVINE
There may be additional complications
but it's too early to tell.

NICK
(looking up, his eyes
wet with tears)
Can I see her?

LEVINE
Not 'til tomorrow. There's nothing
more either of us can do tonight.
The best thing you can do now is go
home and get some rest.

LEVINE exits leaving NICK alone once again. His face draws taut, his teeth clench and we must have the feeling that he could literally explode at any second... one knee trembles up and down and suddenly his arm lashes out at an ashtray and violently flings it against the wall. It bursts into a million pieces shattering the silence. Then quiet again... only the rain... then, in the distance we hear sirens and we

CUT TO

OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL MAIN ENTRANCE as NICK pushes through the door. The sirens grow louder as he walks down the steps to the street. The rain continues in a light misty drizzle...

We hold on NICK'S face as he walks... the noise of the sirens grows and grows until it's practically on top of us and as red lights flash across NICK'S face we

CUT TO

A POLICE MOTORCADE splashing through the night at breakneck speed. A sleek black limousine is sandwiched between four squad cars...

CUT TO

INSIDE THE LIMO. In the back seat are two men. They both look as though they were sound asleep ten minutes ago. The most imposing of the two is a severe-looking man in his late 40's with graying hair. His name is DUKE WALLIS. The flashing red light of the lead squad car pulsates across his face exposing a rugged complexion, deep-set dark eyes and a look of fierce determination...

THE SECOND MAN is smaller, balding and scared...

THE MOTORCADE COMES TO AN ABRUPT STOP IN FRONT OF A NON-DESCRIPT GOVERNMENT BUILDING. The limo door is opened by a police officer and the two men step quickly into the light rain.

DUKE WALLIS is tall and stocky but he moves rapidly, gracefully. The balding man rushes after him, donning a police cap as he goes

DETECTIVES BULGATI AND SHOEMAN emerge from the lead squad car and follow into the building. Behind them scurry four uniformed officers.

CUT TO

A CORRIDOR IN THE BUILDING. DUKE leads the procession with such ferocity that even a brick wall would step out of his path. Down the corridor... through a large gray door... and now

CUT TO

THE ROOM THEY'VE JUST ENTERED. DUKE comes to a halt. Behind him is the balding man identified now by the name tag on his blue blazer - CHIEF KIRTCHKE. DETECTIVES BULGATI and SHOEMAN follow them into the room but the uniformed officers remain in the hall.

Hold for a beat on the four men, all staring at something in the room which we have not yet seen. The CHIEF and the DETECTIVES look to DUKE, then back to whatever he is staring at and

CUT TO

WHAT THEY SEE. A FULL SHOT OF THE ROOM and in the center is a QUIET LOOKING MAN wearing a white lab coat standing next to a table and on the table is a sheet-covered body...

CUT TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. He stares for a moment longer wishing he were still asleep, wishing he would wake up... then he steps forward, stops at the edge of the table. CHIEF KIRTCHKE joins him and we

CUT TO

THE SHEET as the QUIET LOOKING MAN gently lifts one corner and when we see just enough to recognize the battered face of NICK'S VICTIM we

CUT TO

DUKE suddenly closing his eyes, clenching his teeth and

DUKE
(quiet fury)
Put it back.

KIRTCHKE motions for the sheet to be replaced then turns and

KIRTCHKE
Duke I... I'm sorry...

DUKE turns white-hot with rage and revulsion. His eyes glow like burning embers and he's trembling, much like NICK a few moments before only there's no ashtray to throw...

We wait for the explosion... everyone waits...

Then slowly he turns and moves to the door. BULGATI and SHOEMAN step out of his way hoping that he'll keep walking but at the door he stops, turns back to the room, stares at KIRTCHKE, BULGATI and SHOEMAN. He looks at each of them for a long, intimidating beat then points to KIRTCHKE and

DUKE
(breathy, almost out
of control)
You find him...
(pause, then...)

BULGATI
We'll find him.

DUKE
When you do, you call me...
(beat)
and I'll come down... and...
(beat... then
suddenly screaming,
almost in tears)
AND WE'LL HANG THE FUCKER!!!?!!??!

He charges out of the room pushing the four uniformed officers out of his way.

KIRTCHKE removes a white handkerchief from his blazer pocket, looks to BULGATI and SHOEMAN, wipes his brow and we

CUT TO

AN ANGRY MOTORIST slamming on his brakes.

The CAR slides to a stop inches from NICK but NICK just continue across the street without looking up. He walks slowly, steadily his head bent to the ground. His face and hair are soaked from the rain; his hands are thrust in the pockets of his P-coat; the collar is pulled up around his neck.

DISSOLVE TO

THE CHEYENNE SKYLINE JUST BEFORE DAWN. The rain has stopped. On the distant horizon there is a faint yellow glow...

CUT TO

A CITY STREET. The streetlights and traffic signals are reflected in the wet pavement. It's very quiet... the only sound comes from the footsteps of a lone figure approaching the camera.

The figure, of course, is NICK only this isn't the NICK we met in Pittsburgh. The arrogance has left his walk. He's no longer strutting to the beat of some imaginary tune. He's hunched over looking small, alone and cold...

CUT TO

AN ALL-NIGHT DINER. NICK ENTERS. There are a few early morning patrons, mostly truck drivers exchanging local gossip. NICK takes a seat at the counter...

COOK

Coffee?

(Nick stares at the counter, simply nods)

As the COOK sets the coffee in front of NICK the door swings open and a PAPERBOY brings in a stack of the morning edition.

NICK still hasn't looked up from the counter but when he reaches for his coffee he hears

COOK'S VOICE (OVER)

Holy shit!

NICK looks up for the first time, sees the headlines:

WALLIS BOY SLAIN!

One beating, one death as violence hits Cheyenne.

NICK picks up a copy of the paper. Beneath the headlines are 'before and after' photos of NICK'S victim. In one he is wearing a graduation cap; in the other he lies face-down on the pavement.

The camera moves in close on the strong, handsome face of the recently-graduated young man and when this image fills the frame

CUT TO

INTENSIVE CARE UNIT. MIDDAY. NICK is wearing the same clothes as the night before and they haven't completely dried... a copy of the newspaper is tucked under his arm. A NURSE leads him through a set of double doors, past the duty station and

NURSE

(pointing)

She's behind the second curtain.

I'll have to call you in five minutes.

NICK steps behind the curtain. JESSE is sound asleep.

Her face is covered with bandages; one eye is badly swollen; her left leg is mounted in a parasplint; I.V. lines extend from her neck and arm and in her wrist is an arterial line for monitoring blood pressure. She is heavily sedated, breathing slowly, peacefully...

NICK leans in close, kisses her on the forehead, touches her cheek and

NICK

(whispering)

Jesse.

Slowly her right eye opens and for a moment she stares right past him... blankly... quietly... but as she focuses a fear registers and the fear grows as

JESSE

(hoarse whisper)

No...

NICK

(gently)

Jesse. It's me... Nick.

JESSE

(a little louder)

No. No!

(suddenly screams)

NOOOOO!!!!!!?!!!!?!!

ABRUPTLY SHE ROLLS OVER, PANICS, DESPERATELY TRIES TO GET AWAY BUT NICK HOLDS HER TO THE BED AND IT'S DEJA VU, JUST LIKE AT THE CAMPSITE AND

NICK

JESSE! IT'S ME!

(over his shoulder)

HELP!!

TWO NURSES RUSH IN, USHER HIM OUT AND ROLL JESSE INTO PLACE. As one NURSE checks her I.V. and arterial lines, the other exits and we

CUT TO

TRACKING SEOT WALKING DOWN THE CORRIDOR WITH NICK AND THE NURSE.

NICK'S head shakes back and forth as he walks; his hand makes several quick passes through his hair as

NURSE

This kind of acute psychotic reaction is not uncommon. She's been through an awful lot. She's also on Demerol.

They stop at the door... NICK looks at the NURSE... He tries to speak but his lips quiver and he stops himself. He swallows hard, unable to say a word...

The NURSE puts a hand on his shoulder...

NURSE (cont.)

(softly)

Give it some time, Nick. Lots more has to heal than just her body.

(now...)

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. We're seeing him through a wire-mesh grating and he's obviously traveling in a vehicle but it's not the AX.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

NICK in the back seat of a Sheriff's car. The grating separates the TWO DEPUTIES from their passenger, NICK.

Mud splashes up around the car and from the bumps in the road it's pretty clear where we're going.

CUT TO

THE CAMPSITE as the patrol car arrives. Several DEPUTIES are already on the scene. They're wearing wading boots, splashing through the mud, gathering evidence. Last night's rain has made quite a mess of the place.

The man in charge is the COUNTY SHERIFF, JAKE PITTMAN. He wears a conventional uniform except for his hat. It's one of those African safari hats with one side pinned up and a leopard-skin band wrapped above the brim. He's a rough, craggy-looking man who may have smiled once as a child but has long since forgotten how.

SHERIFF

Sorry to have to bring you out here,
son, but I'm gonna need for you to
go over exactly what happened here.
Rain's gonna make it pretty tough
to piece this mess together.

NICK has changed clothes but he still hasn't slept. He looks
around the campsite and slowly the memory returns...

CUT TO

THE COLLAPSED TENT now muddy and drenched with rain. In the
distance, the very far distance, we hear JESSE'S screams from
the night before and

CUT TO

JESSE'S BROWN SUITCASE AND NICK'S BACKPACK both in a deep puddle,
half under water and the screams grow a little louder and

CUT TO

THE HATCHET in a pool of mud and the distant screams continue -
distorted, echoing in NICK'S mind as we

CUT TO

NICK, CLOSEUP, his face trembling, his eyes angry and

SHERIFF'S VOICE (OVER)

You o.k., son?

NICK blinks, the screaming stops and

NICK

Huh?

SHERIFF

You o.k.?

NICK is burning with hatred as he slowly goes to the hatchet,
picks it up from the mud. He walks over to the picnic table,
stands for a beat, then violently plunges the hatchet into the
tabletop.

THE DEPUTIES all stop work, stare at NICK. He hesitates,
swallows hard, then...

NICK

She was right here when I left.
(now...)

CUT TO

JESSE'S BANDAGED FACE, CLOSEUP, sound asleep in her hospital bed and

NICK'S VOICE (CONT.OVER)

She was going to change into warmer clothes and get a fire started.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL JESSE'S HOSPITAL ROOM

Nick is seated in a chair by her bed... watching, waiting... Three beats... A soft 'rock' song intrudes on the silence and we

CUT TO

HOSPITAL PARKING LOT. NICK is in the AX with a bucket of soapy water and a sponge. He's cleaning the blood off the seat, doors and steering wheel. In an effort to get his mind off the unpleasant task he's listening to the radio and whatever song is playing should complement his mood... nothing too fast... but soon the song ends and

RADIO ANNOUNCER

In the headlines today police are still searching for the man who killed Conrad Wallis.

(Nick abruptly stops working, listens to the broadcast as...)

That same evening a young girl was violently beaten and raped. Police are currently speculating on a possible connection between those two crimes.

CUT TO

HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. NICK stands by the drinking fountain popping open a bottle of aspirin. He shakes four into his hand and as he swallows them...

WOMAN ANNOUNCER'S VOICE (OVER)

Police have not yet uncovered a motive for the killing.

CUT TO

TELEVISION SCREEN CLOSEUP AND ON THE SCREEN IS

WOMAN ANNOUNCER (CONT.)

Duke Wallis, father of the victim and a strong contender for the office of District Attorney in next month's election, identified the body of his son only hours after the slaying.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

THE HOSPITAL LOBBY. NICK is seated with several others on the couch. He is holding an enormous Styrofoam coffee cup. His eyes are glued to the television as

WOMAN ANNOUNCER (CONT.)

Late this afternoon he agreed for the first time to talk with reporters about the incident.

THE SCENE ON THE TELEVISION SHIFTS TO DUKE WALLIS IN CLOSEUP only he's not the angry boorish man we met the night of the killing. Here, in front of the cameras, he is the supreme politician. He appears dignified, sincere, humble...

DUKE

(with quiet difficulty)

This is a great tragedy in my life as it is in the lives of many people. However, I have faith in God and in the law enforcement agencies of our great city that justice will ultimately prevail.

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. The camera moves in on his eyes as he stares intently at the father of his victim...

DUKE'S VOICE (CONT. OVER)

Unfortunately, because of my personal association with this...tragedy... I will have to remove myself from any legal or investigatory involvement.

THE SCENE shifts to the WOMAN ANNOUNCER and we

PAN DOWN TO

NICK'S HANDS, CLOSEUP. The Styrofoam cup crumbles in his clenched fist as

WOMAN ANNOUNCER (OVER)

Funeral arrangements for Conrad Wallis are planned for Tuesday at ten a.m. in the Rolling Hills Cemetery.

CUT TO

A DIESEL TRUCK RUSHING CLOSE PAST THE CAMERA, wiping on a familiar red "COKE" sign. It's rush hour, nearly dusk. Crowds of warehouse workers scurry past.

SHIFT FOCUS TO

NICK IN THE FOREGROUND, CLOSEUP, watching the scene from across the street. He lights a cigarette, crosses the street.

On the pavement beneath the "COKE" sign we can barely make out the faded chalk-line image of CONRAD'S BODY. Boots and shoes continue past.

NOTE: If music was utilized to enhance the surreal, dreamlike quality when NICK returned here the night of the killing, that music should quietly intrude upon this scene as well.

NICK stops beneath the "COKE" sign, takes a deep drag on his cigarette and moves slowly forward.

CUT TO

THE PAVEMENT as NICK carefully positions his shoes over the image of CONRAD'S feet... Hold for a beat, then...

CUT TO

A COUNTRY ROAD. It's a gray, misty day... silent until... Down the road, over a small hill, appear two sets of flashing red lights of police motorcycle escorts who roll out at the first intersection to stop cross traffic. Next over the rise we see several black limousines, all with headlights on. Then the hearse...

All of this is what we expect to see in a funeral procession but what we don't expect is that the hearse is followed by ten more sets of flashing red lights on police escort motorcycles which in turn are followed by at least a dozen more limousines. Behind the limousines are several squad cars, each flashing blue and red lights and behind them is a line of shining, new, oversized all-American cars. Nothing smaller than a Pontiac Grand Prix and nothing older than a year. Nothing, that is, until the end of the procession when the last vehicle in the parade appears over the hill...

It's THE ALASKAN EXPRESS, all four headlights paying tribute to the deceased. The AX look like an old-fashioned caboose at the tail of tomorrow's Amtrak. Hold for a beat... Then...

CUT TO

THE CASKET, covered with flowers, as it's lowered into the ground and

PRIEST'S VOICE (OVER)

...ashes to ashes, dust to dust, etc...

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

DUKE WALLIS standing over the grave. On his right is a tall thin woman wearing a black veil. Her hair is pulled straight back creating a cold, severe impression. To her right is a fidgety 13-year-old boy. He wears heavy thick-rimmed glasses and a dark blue three-piece suit. On either side of this trio are several lovely teenage girls, all about 17 or 18 years old, all impeccably dressed, all crying...

Surrounding them are approximately 20 couples, mostly in their 40's and 50's, mostly dressed in black. There are also about 30 uniformed police officers standing in military formation and off to the sides are scattered younger people who, if grouped together, would make up a good chunk of last year's high school graduation class. They, too, are impeccably dressed in conservative suits and dresses. And then there's NICK...

NICK has done his best. He's wearing a black turtleneck sweater, his best pair of black jeans and his P-coat. His hair is neatly combed and if we look closely we'll see that his DIAMOND EARRING AND LEATHER THONG ARE MISSING. We'll also see that his skin is pale and the rings beneath his eyes are getting darker.

He's doing his best to blend with the crowd, to appear small and inconspicuous, but it's not working and he knows it. His eyes register fear and guilt; his hands are trembling...

When the service ends the departing people pay their respects and offer sympathy to DUKE and his family. Tears well up in DUKE'S eyes but he's a stoic fellow and he never lets them escape. The last of the sympathizers is SHERIFF JAKE PITTMAN. He pats DUKE on the shoulder, then leaves.

DUKE'S WIFE

Shall we go?

DUKE doesn't look up from the grave; he simply nods. His WIFE turns and a moment later he turns to follow when

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)

Mr. Wallis?

(Duke turns and we...)

CUT TO

NICK standing a few feet away. He's by himself looking very small and very alone. When DUKE turns NICK'S eyes go immediately to the ground.

DUKE

Yes?

NICK'S stomach is in knots; his mouth is drying up fast... Still staring at the ground he sucks in a deep breath, slowly shakes his head and...

NICK

I'm sorry.

and on the words he swallows hard and

DUKE

Did you know Connie well?

NICK

(looks up for the
first time)

Who?

DUKE

My son. Conrad.

NICK

(looks back down)

No... No, I didn't know him.

(a beat... his mouth
dry as a bone)

My wife... she was almost killed the
same night and... I just know how
you feel, that's all.

Another beat... NICK is looking past DUKE, around him, at the
ground, everywhere but at him.

DUKE

You're Nick Wagner?

NICK looks up, startled. DUKE moves closer, puts a hand on
his shoulder...

DUKE (CONT.)

(gently)

I read about your wife... I'm sorry...

NICK nods, takes a deep breath... he's got more to say but the
moment is lost as

DUKE'S WIFE

(calling)

Duke...?

DUKE

(to Nick)

Let's go.

He leads NICK toward the cars, his arm around NICK'S shoulder.

DUKE (CONT.)

(referring to the AX)

Is that what you came in?

NICK

It's all I had.
(they stop by
the AX)

DUKE

You build it yourself?

NICK

Took me three years.

DUKE

Conrad liked to work on cars, too.
'Course he never built anything quite
like this.

DUKE'S WIFE

(joining them)

Duke....?

DUKE

I'm coming. Nick, this is my wife,
Melanie.

NICK

(hesitates, then
extends his hand)

Happy to meet you.

(Melanie reluctantly
returns his handshake)

DUKE

He built this rig himself.

MELANIE looks at the AX, forces a smile. She's clearly embarrassed
by its presence.

MELANIE

Very nice.

DUKE

I appreciate your coming out here, son.

(takes a card from his
wallet, hands it to Nick)

If there's anything I can do for you,
please call me.

(leaves with Melanie)

CUT TO

DUKE BOX, CLOSEUP, as weathered old hands push selected buttons.
slow, drippy C & W love song pours from the machine...

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

A SLEAZY BAR. It's a dim, smokey place filled mostly with has-been cowboys and aging hookers. A more depressing place would be hard to find.

A burst of light momentarily fills the room as NICK enters, finds a lonely seat at the end of the bar. He takes out his wallet, studies the card DUKE gave him...

THE BARTENDER approaches. He is a tall, mean-looking man with bloodshot eyes.

NICK

Whiskey straight.

BARTENDER

(laughing, announcing
to the entire room)

He says he'll take a whiskey straight!

(then to Nick,
sotto voce)

You got I.D.?

NICK opens his wallet, surreptitiously reveals a ten-spot.

NICK

I got I.D.

THE BARTENDER leans in very close to NICK... We can almost smell his breath.

BARTENDER

(intimidating)

Where you from, boy?

NICK

Pittsburgh.

BARTENDER

You like it there?

(Nick shakes his
head 'no')

You like it around here?

NICK

(cautiously)

Yeah, it's o.k...

(and on those words...)

THE BARTENDER'S HAND FLASHES ACROSS THE BAR, GRABS NICK BY THE HAIR AND LIFTS HIM RIGHT OFF THE STOOL. NICK IS ON HIS TIP-TOES AS

BARTENDER

(shouting)

WELL WE DON'T LIKE YOU, BOY!! SO TAKE
A HIKE!!!

AND HE GIVES NICK'S HEAD A VIOLENT SHOVE SENDING HIM SPRAWLING INTO THE SAWDUST. The PATRONS hoot, holler and clap with

PATRON
You tell 'im, Leroy!!

BUT SUDDENLY ALL THAT STOPS BECAUSE NICK IS UP IN A FLASH HURLING THE NEAREST CHAIR TOWARD THE BAR. LEROY DUCKS AND THE CHAIR SAILS PAST HIM CRASHING INTO A WALL OF BOOZE BOTTLES AND BY THE TIME LEROY AND THE PATRONS ARE ON THEIR FEET LIGHT FLOODS THE ROOM AND NICK IS OUT THE DOOR.

CUT TO

INTENSIVE CARE UNIT. NICK opens the curtain around JESSE'S bed; his face is scraped from his encounter with Leroy. JESSE is sound asleep...

NICK
(half-whispered)
Jesse...?

A beat, then... she opens her eyes, stares up at NICK. She is still heavily sedated and could easily drift back to sleep. Then slowly, very slowly, her eyes focus and she smiles...

JESSE
Nick...

TEARS OF JOY IN NICK'S EYES as he leans in, kisses her gently on the lips, then pulls back and takes a long, loving look at his bride.

NICK
(barely managing)
I've been so scared, Jesse.
(wipes the tears)

JESSE
(as if in a trance)
Me too...
(she reaches out,
touches his cheek)
I'm glad you're here, Nick.

NICK
I'm glad you're here.
(beat)
Does it still hurt?

JESSE
No...
(beat)
You look different...

NICK

Jesse, so much has happened. Do you remember what happened?

JESSE

(thinks, then...)

I remember the picnic table...

NICK

Do you remember that guy, Jesse? The one we stopped...?

(no response)

NICK reaches into his pocket, removes the newspaper clipping about CONRAD WALLIS. His hands tremble, clutching the paper...

NICK hesitates. Thinking about what happened is one thing; saying it is another... finally...

NICK

He's dead.

(a beat; he nods his head)

That's right. I killed him.

(tears now)

I went to the funeral... and...

JESSE'S smile vanishes; her lips quiver... Three beats, then...

JESSE

Oh, Nick...

(a tear rolls

down her cheek)

I wanted to have babies...

NICK

We'll have babies, Jesse. We'll have lots of babies.

He wipes the tear from her cheek. She smiles again; she is heavily sedated...

NICK (CONT.)

Please listen to me, Jesse. Please. I have to talk to you.

JESSE

You can talk to my mother, Nick. She's here.

NICK wasn't ready for this surprise. It's not something he wanted to hear. Then...

JESSE (CONT.)

She's disguised as a nurse. It's the only way she could get in. They don't

(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)
believe I work here, Nick. I don't
know how I'm going to get out. She's
trying to help but they have guard
dogs at every exit.

NICK is trying not to let the shock show on his face. He puts
the newspaper clipping back in his pocket.

NICK
(afraid to ask)
Where's your mother now?

JESSE
I can't tell you.
(points to the
EKG monitor)
You see that red light? That means
they're recording everything we say.
(beat)
I've seen the dogs, Nick. They're
enormous and at night they let them
run loose in here.
(beat)
Could you bring me some dog biscuits?

NICK
Yeah. I'll bring you some tomorrow.

JESSE
(sudden fright)
No! Tonight. I need them tonight,
Nick.

NICK
(takes her hand)
O.K. Jesse. I'll bring them tonight.

JESSE
(smiles)
I'm glad you're here, Nick.

NICK smiles back but inside he's a mess. He's fighting tears as

CUT TO

NURSES' STATION, INTENSIVE CARE UNIT. NICK stands at the counter;
the first UNPLEASANT NURSE we've encountered sits behind the
desk. She doesn't bother to look up from her stack of 'important'
papers as

UNPLEASANT NURSE
There's nothing more common on this
ward than hallucinations.

NICK
(agitated, nervous)
And you're dead certain her parents
haven't been here?

UNPLEASANT NURSE
(sing-song)
Yes I am...

NICK
How long'll this last?

UNPLEASANT NURSE
Oh, off and on for a week maybe...

WITH A LOUD CRACK NICK SLAMS HIS HAND AGAINST THE COUNTER.

NICK
(to himself)
Shit!!

The UNPLEASANT NURSE looks up for the first time and we

CUT TO

A 4 PINT OF OLD GRAND DAD as an ancient, trembling hand lifts it
from the shelf.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL .

A WINO INSIDE A LIQUOR STORE. NIGHT. On his way to the cash
register he selects two bottles of the cheapest wine in the place.

CUT TO

THE WINO WITH NICK in a darkened alley. He hands NICK the half
pint of whiskey and

NICK
I said a pint!!

THE WINO mumbles incoherently and NICK storms off into the night
unscrewing the bottl as he goes...

CUT TO

INSIDE THE BACK OF THE AX. It's dark, quiet... NICK'S bedroll
is laid out on the floor but NICK isn't sleeping. He's sitting
against the wall wrapped in a blanket, writing on a pad of paper.

His brow is furrowed. Whatever he's writing isn't coming easy.
Suddenly he tears the sheet from the pad, throws it on the floor
with several other 'rejects'... Also on the floor is the newspaper
clipping about the killing...

NICK looks up, takes a swig from the now half-empty bottle. His entire body twitches as Old Grand Dad journeys down his throat. Over this we hear...

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)
Coming to see you like this is probably
the hardest thing I've ever done.

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. He's standing on a deserted street lit by the faint glow of dawn. It's chilly and still... His eyes are tired and bloodshot...

NICK (CONT.)
I mean I don't expect forgiveness.
Hell, I don't even want it.
(hiccups)

He pauses, trying to remember his train of thought. He looks down and unfolds a 'cheat-sheet' from which he's memorizing... Also in his hands is the near-empty bottle...

NICK (CONT.)
Well, what the hell would you have
done?
(beat... thinks...)
You probably would have killed him,
too.
(as he speaks we...)

PAN OVER TO REVEAL A DUKE WALLIS POSTER ON THE SIDE OF A BUILDING. IT'S A LARGE BLOW-UP OF HIS CHISELED FACE WITH THE WORDS "DUKE WALLIS FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY."

NICK hesitates, then begins again...

NICK
Coming to see you like this is probably
the hardest...
(beat, he thinks)
Oh, fuck it.
(directly at the poster)
And fuck you, too!

He hurls the empty bottle at the poster and it explodes in the center of DUKE'S face, dripping the remains of the whiskey...

CUT TO

THE HOSPITAL, MID-DAY, bustling with activity...

WE TRACK WITH NICK as he walks urgently down the corridor. He's never looked worse - he hasn't slept, hasn't eaten, hasn't shaved and he hasn't bathed. He's rapidly becoming a 19-year-old version of a Cheyenne wino...

And maybe he's losing his mind because in his arms is an enormous bag of DOG BISCUITS.

As he passes the INTENSIVE CARE NURSES STATION the UNPLEASANT NURSE jumps up and

UNPLEASANT NURSE
Visiting hours aren't until three.

A LARGE DESK CLOCK tells us that's 5 minutes away.

NICK
(flatly, almost to
himself)
Fuck off.

CUT TO

THE CURTAIN AROUND JESSE'S BED as NICK opens it with a shaky hand but...

THE BED IS EMPTY. NO JESSE...

NICK stands for a moment questioning his sanity, then...

CUT TO

NURSES STATION and

NICK
Where is she?

UNPLEASANT NURSE
(without looking up
from her index file)
You are a very rude young man.

NICK has all he can do to keep from climbing over the counter and smashing her face in...

NICK
Where the fuck is she?!
(no response)
Pleeeeezz.

UNPLEASANT NURSE
(with measured
slowness)
She was taken out early this morning.
You'll find her on Ward "C".

NICK
(quickly)
Where is it?

HOLD ON THE UNPLEASANT NURSE, CLOSEUP, as she takes her sweet time finding a particular index card. Then...

UNPLEASANT NURSE

(without looking up)

There's a directory by the elevator.

(and on that we hear...)

A SUDDEN RIPPING SOUND BUT SHE LOOKS UP JUST A MOMENT TOO LATE AS 25 POUNDS OF DOG BISCUITS TUMBLE OVER HER DESK AND IT LOOKS AS THOUGH SHE MIGHT HAVE A HEART ATTACK BUT WE DON'T WAIT TO FIND OUT. INSTEAD WE

CUT TO

WARD "C" as NICK arrives out of breath and

NICK

Jesse Wagner. Where is she?

ELDERLY NURSE

I'm terribly sorry, but visiting hours are over at three o'clock.

THIS IS TOO MUCH FOR NICK. HE STORMS INTO THE WARD, BEGINS PULLING BACK THE CURTAINS, TERRIFYING THE PATIENTS AND

NICK

(to the nurse)

Well, I'm sorry too, but I've driven straight through from Alaska; I haven't slept in six days and goddammit I've got to see her and I've got to see her NOW!!

HE FLINGS OPEN ANOTHER CURTAIN. THE PATIENT SCREAMS. THE NURSE GRABS HIS ARM AND

ELDERLY NURSE

Please!!! I'll call the guards!!

NICK STARES AT HER FOR A LONG, INTIMIDATING BEAT. FINALLY...

ELDERLY NURSE (CONT.)

You'll have to keep it very short.

CUT TO

JESSE as the curtain is pulled back and light splashes across her face. She's sound asleep and unlike NICK she's looking better than ever...

NICK

(whispering)

Jesse...

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

(then louder)

Jesse.

(no response,
then louder)

Jesse!

(tears now)

For god's sake!

He rotates her head gently towards him but she's lost in a world of Demerol and dreams... the ELDERLY NURSE comes up behind him and

ELDERLY NURSE

I just gave her a shot ten minutes ago. Maybe you could come back tomorrow.

NICK looks at her, nods his head rapidly, then throws his arms into the air and

NICK

Yeah. Tomorrow.

(walks away)

Tomorrow. Tomorrow... Fine...

Tomorrow...

(further away,

talking to himself)

No problem. Tomorrow's just fine.

Sure...

(Now...)

CUT TO

SEVERAL SMALL OBJECTS DUMPED ONTO A SHEET OF WHITE TYPING PAPER - a hair pin, a Juicy Fruit gum wrapper, a roach clip... NICK'S roach clip!

DETECTIVE BULGATI'S VOICE (OVER)

These are all the alien objects we picked up at the scene...

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

A LARGE, PLUSH, EXECUTIVE OFFICE. On the walls are the stuffed heads of several big game animals - moose, bighorn sheep and elk.

Against one wall is a formal wet bar; against another is a couch and coffee table. At the far end of the room is an impressive oak desk and behind the desk is DUKE WALLIS.

The 'alien' objects and several photographs taken the night of the killing lie on the desktop. DETECTIVE SHOEMAN is seated, chewing gum. BULGATI is standing by the desk.

BULGATI (CONT.)

We've sent 'em all through the lab
but so far they've come up with zip.

DUKE picks up one of the photos, studies it. He looks tired,
haggard...

CUT TO

A CITY STREET. NICK walks along studying his cheat-sheet. He
is mouthing the words, memorizing them... He stops by a brass
wall plaque: LAW FIRM OF WALLIS, HARTLIDGE & CRANE.

CUT TO

DUKE'S OFFICE.

BULGATI

We checked out the people who might
have had a grudge against him but
none of 'em have any prior-pattern-
of-violence.

DUKE

(refers to the
'alien' objects)

So all we've got is this little pile
o' shit and the murder weapon.

BULGATI

(nods)

Yeah, the brick wall.

SHOEMAN

What we still don't have is a motive.
(intercom buzzes)

DUKE

What is it?

SECRETARY'S VOICE

There's a young man in reception who
insists on seeing you.

DUKE

Turn him over to Phelps.

SECRETARY'S VOICE

I tried that. He says it has to be you.

DUKE

What's his name?

SECRETARY'S VOICE

Nick Wagner.

DUKE
 (thinks, then...)
 Send him in.
 (goes back to
 the photo)

CUT TO

THE OFFICE DOOR AS NICK ENTERS. Once again he's done his best to look presentable but there's no hiding the lack of sleep, the lack of food and his trembling knees.

DUKE glances up at Nick and

DUKE
 Looks like you haven't had any sleep,
 either.
 (goes back to
 the photo)
 Have a seat on the couch. This won't
 take long.
 (Nick sits. The couch
 is a ways away but he
 can still hear as...)

BULGATI
 (picks up photo)
 This scraped up blue wagon's the
 closest thing we've got to a motive.

DUKE
 Chase it down. And get that reward
 info out to every newspaper, radio
 and television station between here
 and Rawlins.

BULGATI
 That ought to help. Fifteen grand's
 a lot of money.

DUKE
 Is it? Then make it 25. Make it 50
 if you have to. I don't really give
 a shit so long as you find the
 sonofabitch!

BULGATI
 (gathers up photos
 and 'alien' objects)
 We're doin' the best we can, Duke.

DUKE
 The best you can do is find the
 bastard. I believe that.
 (he stands, shakes
 their hands)
 We'll talk tomorrow, huh?

BULGATI

(nods)

Hope you get some rest, Duke.

DUKE

I'm hoping none of us gets any rest
'til this thing's over.

Until today, NICK'S only knowledge of DUKE had come from the television interview and the meeting at the funeral. This is his first exposure to the 'real' DUKE.

THE DETECTIVES pass NICK on their way to the door but don't acknowledge him. He takes out his 'cheat sheet', then sits without moving.

CUT TO

DUKE sitting quietly behind his desk, rubbing his chin, ignoring NICK which is just fine with NICK. Then...

DUKE

(into intercom)

Get Chief Kirtchke on the phone.

A beat... He picks up a pencil, begins tapping it on the desk. He's so lost in his thoughts that he's forgotten completely about Nick.

CUT TO

NICK. He hasn't budged. It's very quiet... only the sound of the pencil tapping slowly on the desk...

CUT TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. He's talking to himself but so quietly that we can't make out what he's saying. What we can make out is the growing anger on his face... tap... tap... tap... from the pencil. He shakes his head slowly. Tap... tap... tap... THEN SUDDENLY HE THRUSTS THE PENCIL HARD INTO THE DESKTOP SNAPPING IT IN TWO AND

DUKE

(under his breath)

Fuck 'em!!

Then he sits quietly again, mumbling as if trying to decipher a secret code in his mind and

CUT TO

NICK watching the intimacy of this man's most private moments. He's sweating like mad not knowing whether to speak up or hide behind the couch. Then...

THE INTERCOM BUZZES and

DUKE

Yes?

SECRETARY'S VOICE

Mr. Hickie is still waiting.

DUKE

(smiles to himself)

O.K. Send him in...

Suddenly he sees NICK, does a double-take, coughs and

DUKE (CONT.)

Nick... Yes. Well, I... What can I do for you?

If this moment is difficult for DUKE it's doubly so for NICK. He folds his arms tightly, crosses his legs as if protecting himself from a cold wind. He's about to speak when...

DUKE (CONT.)

(embarrassed)

Those two men who just left are after the guy who killed my son and... well... this just isn't easy, that's all.

(beat, then...)

We're no closer to the sonofabitch now than we were last week.

NICK doesn't bother correcting him. DUKE rubs his eyes, then...

DUKE (CONT.)

What can I do for you, Nick?

NICK

(stammering)

I-I heard you on the news saying you weren't gonna get so... personally involved...

DUKE

Not get involved? Officially, I'm not.

(he stands)

But some sonofabitch comes out of the blue and for no goddamn reason butchers the most important person in my life and lemme tell you something - I'M INVOLVED!

(he paces)

A man's gotta live with himself, for Christ's sake. How'd you like somebody telling you not to go after the guy who got your wife? Euh?

(MORE)

DUKE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Who knows? Maybe we're both after the same guy.

(continues pacing)

I'll tell you one thing, I'm goddamn glad this state's got the death penalty 'cause if that little bastard is lucky enough to get caught by the police before I get my hands on him he'll frv!!

The vehemence in his voice is terrifying as he spits his words across the room. NICK'S adrenalin glands have gone berserk; his right foot is jumping up and down rapidly.

DUKE (CONT.)

(quieter)

I just wish I could be there to pull the lever.

(a beat as he pulls himself together)

I'm sorry. This isn't easy.

(small laugh)

Hell, if anyone'd understand I guess you would. Right?

NICK forces a smile, quickly puts the 'cheat-sheet' back in his pocket.

DUKE (CONT.)

How's your wife?

NICK

(quickly)

Fine.

DUKE

Fine?

NICK

I mean... she's not fine.

(beat)

She's a mess.

DUKE

I plan to pay her a visit when she's back on her feet.

NICK

(quickly)

What for?!

DUKE

She was jumped the same night as Conrad. Maybe there's a connection. Believe me, if there's a rock to turn over I'm gonna take a peek!

(MORE)

DUKE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Listen, enough of that. What can I do for you?

NICK

Nothing. Really, nothing...

(Duke walks towards him)

Nothing at all...

DUKE

Well you came here for something.
What is it?

DUKE walks right up to NICK, stops two feet away. NICK'S body is drenched in sweat but his mouth is dry as a bone. His eyes grow wide as he looks up at the towering figure. He's white, jittery, too scared to speak...

DUKE (CONT.)

You feeling o.k.?

NICK quickly nods 'yes' then takes a deep breath, building courage and...

NICK

I came... I came because...

A LONG BEAT... We hold on this moment until the tension peaks and we're certain that NICK is about to blurt out the truth and tell DUKE that the man sitting in his office is the bastard who murdered his first born son and just at that very instant...

THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN AND IN WALKS A JOLLY-LOOKING MAN wearing a pale blue leisure suit, a red tie and a pink carnation. Under his arm is a rolled-up poster. His name is JIM HICKLE but everyone calls him JIMBO.

JIMBO

Duke! You won't believe it! We've got this one in the bag.

(he claps his hands together)

Arnold says contributions are pouring in like crazy and

(to Nick)

Pardon me.

(shakes Nick's hand, winks)

Jimbo Hickie. I don't know what you did but you've got the best lawyer in the state. I'm gonna put him in the D.A.'s seat next month.

He goes to the wall, starts tacking up the poster which he has not yet unrolled...

JIMBO

This'll just take a second. You gotta see it. This is gonna push us right over the top.

He unrolls the poster. It's a large blow-up of DUKE'S HEAD; the expression tells us he's a man who means business. Above the head, in large bold letters are the words:

IF ANYONE UNDERSTANDS
CRIME IN THE STREETS...

and at the bottom of the poster:

VOTE DUKE WALLIS
FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY!

JIMBO is unaware that perhaps these words bring back painful memories...

JIMBO

Well? Whadya think?

DUKE

(dead serious)

It's a joke, right?

JIMBO

(his bubble burst)

No...

DUKE

Street Crime's not a major issue in this campaign.

JIMBO

Well, sure it is. At least it is now...

Just then the INTERCOM BUZZES and

SECRETARY'S VOICE

Chief Kirtchke on line three.

DUKE picks up the phone and his mood changes abruptly.

DUKE

(expansively)

Billy! Just wanted to say your boys are doing a real fine job.

(pause, then quietly)

We'll fry the little cocksucker.

(smiles)

I appreciate that.

DUKE hangs up the phone, looks to NICK.

DUKE (CONT.)
You sure your feeling o.k.?
(Nick nods)

JIMBO
(smiling)
This is a top-drawer campaign, Duke.
You gotta trust me on this.

DUKE considers JIMBO for a moment, then...

DUKE
(into intercom)
I want Kirtchke to have a case of
Chivas in his hands by 5 o'clock.

SECRETARY'S VOICE
Official?

DUKE
Personal.
(he leans back)

JIMBO
(refers to the poster)
It can't hurt, can it?

DUKE
What do you think, Nick?

NICK
I... I don't know... it's a good
picture of you.

DUKE smiles broadly, then laughs; JIMBO cautiously follows suit.

DUKE
You oughta be a politican. You really
like it?

(Nick nods)
Well you can have it 'cause it's not
going out in the streets.

(serious now)
Nobody on this campaign is going to
capitalize on Conrad's death. Is
that understood?

JIMBO
(turning red)
Yeah... but I've got 1,000 of these
things.

DUKE

Fine. Cut off the tops. Anyway, how the hell are you going to hang 1,000 posters without any help?

JIMBO

I've got the volunteer staff and...
(he'd rather not say it)
well, I'm takin' applications for Conrad's spot.

DUKE

(studies Nick for
a beat)
What're you doing with your time these days?

NICK

Killin' it mostly, but...

DUKE

Well you can't spend all day at the hospital.

(to Jimbo)

His wife's in the hospital.

JIMBO

(winks at Nick)

Pregnant?

DUKE

She was raped.

(Jimbo's smile fades)

One of your street crime victims. They were headin' up to Alaska. You oughta see the truck he built. Took him three years. Right, Nick?

(Nick nods)

The reason I ask is that since Conrad died Jimbo's been runnin' my campaign single-handed. He's got the weight o' the world on his shoulders.

NICK

(nervous laugh)

Oh, No... No way...

JIMBO

I could sure use a hand with these posters.

DUKE

You've got to keep busy, Nick. Get your mind off things. Just between you and me you look like hell.

The INTERCOM BUZZES and

SECRETARY'S VOICE

Mr. Snyder on two.

DUKE

Put him on hold.

(to Nick)

You'd be doing everyone in this room
a big favor, yourself included. How
much did you make at your last job?

NICK stands, holds his hands in the air as if he were standing
at gunpoint and

NICK

Hey, wait a minute. It's impossible.
There's just no...

DUKE

How much?

NICK

Five and a quarter, but...

DUKE

No buts. It'll do you good. Jimbo,
give the boy a raise.

(picks up phone)

Tom! I've gone through the offering
and discussed it with...

and as he digs his way deeper into the conversation we

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. THUNDERSTRUCK.

CUT TO

JIMBO. He looks at NICK with a big fat smile, shrugs, and we

CUT TO

SOAP SUDS EXPLODING ACROSS THE SCREEN. We're in a self-service
car wash. A high-pressure hose discharges water and soap across
the windshield of the AX.

NICK cuts the water pressure, pulls a Brillo pad from his back
pocket and scours the BLUE PAINT from the bumper where it scraped
into the STATION WAGON the night of the killing. He's made
a decision to bury the past.

CUT TO

SELF-SERVICE CAR WASH. LATER. NICK is drying the windows at the back of the AX and when he gets them good and dry he peels off the back of a bumper sticker, attaches it to the back window. It reads:

VOTE DUKE WALLIS
FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY!

HOLD ON THIS AS

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)

It was just one of those things, you know? We just hit it off.

(Now...)

CUT TO

THE HOSPITAL. NICK is seated by JESSE'S bed. It should be clear that JESSE is still a bit drugged and dreamy and that NICK is speaking as much to himself as to JESSE. In fact, he's not even looking at her as

NICK (CONT.)

So I'm getting paid for helping someone I like, and I've got nothing to do with my time anyway, right?

(he looks at Jesse)

JESSE

(dreamy)

I'm happy you've got the job, Nick.

NICK

Yeah. It's incredible. I mean the guy's incredible.

(beat)

Hell, the poor guy lost his son and...

(he looks at Jesse;

her eyes are shut)

Jesse?

(no response)

Jesse?

(she's fast asleep)

He stares at her for a moment, then gently takes her hand, holds it to his cheek, and

NICK

(quietly)

You and me, Jesse.

CUT TO

A TELEPHONE POLE. NICK is standing with his back to us staple-gunning a poster. He turns and

NICK

How's that?

CUT TO

JIMBO IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT OF A BRIGHT RED CADILLAC EL DORADO CONVERTIBLE WITH THE TOP DOWN. The tip of the hood is ornamented with a pair of bull horns that look to be about three feet wide.

JIMBO

(shouting)

I don't think there's a naked pole left in the city. Let's head for the rodeo grounds.

CUT TO

THE BRIGHT RED BULL traveling through town and

JIMBO

How 'bout if we hold off lunch 'til we get the rodeo covered? Then we'll break and start lickin' envelopes.

NICK

How come you're so dedicated to all this? I mean you seem more anxious that Duke wins the election than he does.

JIMBO

He doesn't let too many people know what he wants. I guess he wants everyone to think he's already got it.

(laughs)

The truth is that next to finding the asshole who killed Conrad, this election's the most important thing in the world to him.

CUT TO

A MONSTROUS BRAHMA BULL LEAPING INTO THE AIR, THEN CRASHING TO THE GROUND IN A HORRIFYING SPRAY OF ROCKS AND DUST. ON THE BULL'S BACK IS A COWBOY HOLDING ON FOR ALL HE'S WORTH.

We're in the Cheyenne RODEO GROUNDS. This arena houses annually the greatest rodeo in the world, what cowboys call "The Daddy of 'em All!"

The arena is empty save for a few cowboys, the bull and our two campaigners, NICK and JIMBO. They walk along deserted bleachers carrying posters and a staple gun.

JIMBO

I've known Duke a long time and there's only two things he's ever been attached to - I mean really attached. One was Conrad, the other's gettin' into the Senate. That's where all this is leadin' y'know.

(stops, unrolls poster)

Hell, I don't know. Maybe he's got his eye on the White House.

NICK

(stapling)

Did you know Conrad pretty well?

JIMBO

Hell yes!

NICK

Was he a lot like Duke?

JIMBO

They were plenty close but they weren't the same. 'Course Duke thought they were.

NICK

Why's that?

JIMBO

'Cause that's the way he wanted it. When Duke wants to see something a certain way, that's the only way it is. He's got a head you could bend horse-shoes on.

A SUDDEN LOUD SNORT FROM THE BULL. BOTH MEN TURN AND WE

CUT TO

THE BEAST JUMPING AROUND LIKE A SON-OF-A-BITCH, JERKING IN ONE DIRECTION, THEN JUST AS QUICKLY OFF IN ANOTHER. THE CAMERA MOVES IN CLOSER AS

JIMBO'S VOICE (OVER)

You wanna learn about Duke, keep your eye on that bull down there. He'll teach ya' about Duke.

WE'RE CLOSE ON THE BULL NOW AND GETTING CLOSER AS IT SUDDENLY STOPS, TURNS, SPINS THIS WAY AND THAT AND THE ROCKS AND DIRT ARE FLYING AND THE SOUND IS HORRIBLE, JUST BRUTAL... AND WHEN THE CAMERA IS VERY CLOSE AND THE NOISE IS DEAFENING WE

CUT TO

HOSPITAL PARKING LOT. MID-AFTERNOON. THE AX squeals into the lot. NICK hops out carrying a small paper bag, runs toward the hospital and we

CUT TO

THE CURTAIN AROUND JESSE'S BED as NICK, out of breath, opens it but... he stops short, his eyes widen in sudden fear and we

CUT TO

DUKE SEATED ALONGSIDE JESSE'S BED. On the table is an enormous bouquet of flowers.

NICK
(flushed)

Hi.

JESSE
Hi. Where've you been?

DUKE
We were getting worried.

NICK
Oh, I just got hung up.
(nervous laugh)
Hung up hangin' posters. 1,000 of
the damn things.

DUKE
Well, listen, time's almost up.
(stands)
I'd better leave you two alone.
(turns to Jesse)
Remember, if anything about that night
comes sneakin' up on you, I wanna
hear about it.

JESSE
(nods)
O.K. Thanks for the flowers.

DUKE
(smiles)
Don't mention it.
(exits, pats Nick
on the shoulder)
So long, Nick.

NICK and JESSE stare at each other for a beat, then...

NICK
What'd he want?

JESSE

(without affect)

He wanted me to tell him who killed
his son. I think he's pretty whacked
out on the subject.

NICK

(nervous laugh)

Yeah, he is...

JESSE

How come you're late?

NICK

(his mind on
other things)

Oh, I was in Jimbo's car and...

(shrugs)

...we just ran late, that's all.

(sits on the bed)

What else did you guys talk about?

JESSE

We talked about his son; we talked
about you.

(Nick waits for more)

He said nice things about you.

(Nick shifts uneasily)

I wait around all day for visiting
hours.

NICK

I said I'm sorry.

JESSE

No you didn't.

NICK

O.K. I'm sorry.

JESSE

What's wrong with you?

NICK

Whadya mean 'What's wrong?' Nothin's
wrong.

JESSE

Well you sure act like there is.

NICK

(snapping)

I worked all day! I'm tired. That's
all.

(beat, then...)

I'm sorry I was late.

JESSE

That's o.k.
(it's not really)

An awkward beat, then...

NICK

(referring to the
paper bag)
Want some ice cream?

NICK reaches into the bag, produces a carton, two paper plates and plastic spoons.

He scoops the ice cream in silence. He and JESSE have never been more apart. Hold on this for three depressing beats, then...

CUT TO

OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL. REAR ENTRANCE. NICK exits, his head bent to the ground, but when he looks up he stops and we

CUT TO

DUKE by the AX, bending over to take a close look at the chassis. Or maybe he's checking out the front bumper... In any case, he looks a bit silly doing this in his well-tailored three-piece suit

NICK approaches slowly. DUKE stands and...

DUKE

You do all this welding yourself?

NICK

Every seam.

DUKE

Jesse tells me you're living in this thing.

NICK

That's what it's made for.

DUKE

Well, I think we could work out something a little more comfortable for you.

NICK

This is fine, really. I can wash up in the hospital and... it's fine.

DUKE walks around to the back, sees the Duke Wallis sticker on the back window, peers inside.

DUKE

Well it sure doesn't look too comfortable.

NICK opens the back door. The two walls are lined with cabinets and kitchen facilities, all carefully constructed and varnished to a spit-shine.

NICK

It's kinda crowded for two but for me
it's perfect.

DUKE

I guess when you've got a girl like
Jesse, you don't need much room, huh?

NICK

(smiles)

I started building this before I knew
she was comin' along.

DUKE walks around to the cab, kneels down to check out the front suspension.

DUKE

Looks like you did a hell of a good job.
(stands)
You ever had a chance to really test
this thing out?

NICK

Whadya mean, test it out?
(and on those words)

CUT TO

THE AX BOUNCING AROUND LIKE A CORK IN THE OCEAN AS IT BARRELS
CROSS COUNTRY OVER A ROCKY HILL. IT JERKS TO THE LEFT, THEN TO
THE RIGHT AND IF THIS MOVEMENT REMINDS US OF ANYTHING IT'S THE
BRAHMA BULL WE SAW AT THE RODEO GROUNDS.

SUDDENLY THE AX TAKES A PLUNGE DOWN A STEEP EMBANKMENT AND JUST
WHEN WE'RE CERTAIN IT'S GOING TO SOMERSAULT RIGHT OVER ON TOP
OF ITSELF WE

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CAB AND... DUKE'S DRIVING!! He's shed his coat and
tie and he's hanging on for dear life as

DUKE

(shouting)

It's a good thing I didn't have one
of these when I was your age!

NICK

(scared shitless,
also shouting)

Why's that!?

DUKE
I'd have killed myself!
(and abruptly we...)

CUT TO

THE AX COMING TO A SUDDEN STOP AT THE EDGE OF A ROAD. DUKE hops out and

DUKE (CONT.)
(slapping the fender)
You weren't kiddin'! This thing'll go anywhere. I wish the boys up on the ranch could see this. I'll tell you who'd have gotten his rocks off over this thing - that's Conrad.
(Nick's expression pales; he says nothing)

DUKE
(sobering)
Sorry. I didn't mean to bring that up again.
(beat)
It's just kinda hard to get him outta my mind, that's all.
(and on that we...)

CUT TO

A GROVE OF TREES. A QUIET STREAM. A DIRT PATH. DUKE and NICK walk side by side. DUKE'S coat is thrown over his shoulder, his hands are thrust in his pockets and somehow, in this setting, the two men look as if they belong together.

DUKE
(in the middle of the conversation)
He'd lost it about a year ago but the other day I was goin' through some things in the basement and there it was. You know what I did? I went:
(shouts)
CONRAD! Just like that. Like he was right upstairs. For a minute there something snapped in my mind and I forgot he was dead.

DUKE picks up a rock and we follow it in closeup as he tosses it into the stream - kerplunk! And on that we

CUT TO

DUKE AND NICK IN THE CAB OF THE AX. NICK is behind the wheel but the truck's not moving. In fact, the engine isn't even running. It's very quiet; both men stare straight ahead. Then...

DUKE

(out of the blue, still
staring straight ahead)

Something I've never told anyone: The
night Conrad died a big piece of me
went with him. And there was something
mighty strong urging the rest of me
to join him.

(after a pause)

You know what held me back?

(looks directly at Nick)

The man that killed him.

(Nick swallows;

Duke turns away)

You might say that man saved my life.

'Cause if I didn't believe I'd live

to pay him back, I'd have called it quits.

We watch NICK in CLOSEUP as he listens with every ounce of
concentration he's got, trying to determine if maybe there's
more to what DUKE is saying than meets the eye. We hold on
NICK... then...

SUDDENLY BEHIND HIM IN THE DRIVER'S SIDE WINDOW LOOMS THE LARGE
HEAD OF THE TATOOED BULLFROG WE MET AT THE GAS STATION!

TATOOED MAN

Eight bucks!

(Nick jumps; Duke reaches
for his wallet and...)

DUKE

I'll get this.

PULL BACK TO

WIDER SHOT OF THE STATION as the AX pulls out and

CUT TO

AN ATHLETIC FIELD. THE AX DRIVES ALONG BY THE FENCE AS...

DUKE'S VOICE (OVER)

I was sitting right up over there.
I couldn't believe it.

(excited)

I was jumping up and down, yelling
and screaming!

(he's really into it)

That Gold Star's the highest track
award you can get!

(more distant as
the AX drives off)

There's too many candy asses left in
the world, you know that?

CUT TO

THE AX IN LIGHT CITY TRAFFIC. NIGHT. We're looking at NICK and DUKE through the windshield...

DUKE

I grew up on a ranch so I learned young that when something dies it's not really the end. Nope. Somethin' always comes along to...

(Nick turns left;

Duke stops in mid-sentence, then...)

Why'd you do that?

NICK

What?

DUKE

Why'd you turn there?

NICK

No reason, I...

But NICK looks ahead and there, down the road, is the RED NEON "COKE" SIGN - the site of Conrad's death. It's the ultimate 'faux pas.' NICK'S face is pale as a ghost as we

CUT TO

THE AX ROARING PAST AND WE LINGER FOR JUST A MOMENT ON THE SIGN, THEN ABRUPTLY

CUT TO

NICK, CLOSEUP, SHOUTING VIGOROUSLY INTO THE CAMERA.

NICK

DUKE WALLIS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

HE'S YOURS FOR THE ASKING. DUKE WALLIS!

We're outside a busy supermarket. Midday. NICK is handing out campaign leaflets...

CUT TO

DUKE WALLIS POSTER as NICK unrolls it, tacks it to a wall. Over this we hear...

JESSE

I really don't want it, Nick.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

JESSE'S HOSPITAL ROOM. More flowers have arrived. NICK is tacking the poster to the wall above her head. He finishes, steps down and

NICK

It'll mean a lot to him. Anyway, you
can't even see it from there.

CUT TO

SERENITY'S CONVENTION. DUKE IS SPEAKING TO A SEA OF FOSSILIZED
FACES, ALL WEARING PURPLE HATS WITH GOLD TASSLES.

NICK and JIMBO are handing out campaign literature and as
DUKE winds up his speech with a rousing close the audience
bursts into applause and NICK, caught up in the moment, claps
as loud and as hard as any of them and from this explosion of
sound we abruptly

CUT TO

JESSE. LATE AT NIGHT. NO SOUND. The poster of DUKE hangs
on the wall above her head. More flowers have arrived - the
room looks like a shrine for a deceased politician.

JESSE studies herself in a small hand mirror. Her lips are dry
and cracked, her hair is mussed and her left eye is still a
little discolored.

She opens a small make-up box revealing a photo of herself and
NICK taped to the inside cover. A young, vibrant, happy couple...

JESSE selects a small sponge from the box and dabs some powder
over the bruise on her eye. She winces; the bruise is still
tender. She tries some lipstick, then checks herself in the
mirror. It's not working. She throws the lipstick back into
the box, looks at the photo, then picks up the mirror, studies
her reflection.

A look of sadness crosses her face and we might expect a tear
but instead her expression hardens and she tilts the mirror up
to reflect the poster of DUKE.

Her hand trembles slightly, shaking the image,

THEN SUDDENLY SHE THRUSTS THE MIRROR BACK INTO THE BOX,
BLURRING THE ENTIRE FRAME AND AT THAT SAME INSTANT WE

CUT TO

JIMBO'S HANDS, CLOSEUP, folding a sheet of campaign literature,
stuffing it into an envelope, passing the envelope to

NICK'S HANDS, CLOSEUP, stamping the envelope and passing it to

RECEPTIONIST'S HANDS, CLOSEUP, sealing the envelope.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

the well-oiled 'stuff, stamp and seal' machine...

76.
76,
The three look up as the door opens and DETECTIVES BULGATI
AND SHOEMAN ENTER FOLLOWED BY SHERIFF JAKE PITTMAN.

RECEPTIONIST

Go right in, gentlemen. He's expecting
you.

They nod, proceed through the reception area. NICK stares
after them, worry on his face as

JIMBO

(elbows Nick)

Wake up. We got corn to grind!

CUT TO

ENVELOPE, CLOSEUP, AS NICK STAMPS IT, THEN TAKES ANOTHER
ENVELOPE ONLY THIS ONE ISN'T COMING FROM JIMBO'S HANDS...
IT'S COMING FROM JESSE'S! AND...

JESSE'S VOICE (OVER)

I don't know why I'm doing this. I
hate the guy.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

NICK ON JESSE'S HOSPITAL BED. He's actually brought his work
with him this time and he's engaged JESSE'S help. Stuff, stamp,
seal... JESSE is doing the stuffing...

JESSE

That's not true, actually. I'm doing
this 'cause I want him to win.

NICK

That's a change.

JESSE

Not really. Have you thought about
what's gonna happen when I get out?
If he loses, I mean.

NICK

Whadya mean, 'what's gonna happen?'

JESSE

You think he'd be willing to lose
you, too?

NICK

What the hell is that supposed to mean!?

JESSE

He's already lost one son.
(MORE)

JESSE (CONT'D)

(Nick clenches his
teeth, says nothing,
continues folding)

I lie around here all day waiting for
you. So we can be together. And
what are we doing? We're licking
envelopes for that guy!

NICK

(abruptly)

Forget the envelopes.

(he gathers them,
stuffs them in a box)

JESSE

(takes his hand)

I just want to leave here, Nick.

NICK

(flatly)

So do I.

JESSE

(eyes watering)

I wish I really believed that.

(no response)

Do you still love me?

NICK

Course I love you!

JESSE

(crying now)

I don't blame you, Nick... I must
look so ugly to you.

(crying more)

I'm all stitched up and...

(Nick abruptly
covers her mouth)

NICK

STOP IT!!

(Jesse pushes his
hand away)

JESSE

(shouting, angry)

Maybe you don't like the idea of being
married to someone with their insides
all torn up! Someone who's been raped!!!

She's trembling with rage, the explosion building for weeks
now, and she hurls the box of envelopes across the room and

JESSE (CONT.)
 (sobbing, screaming)
 WELL I WASN'T EXACTLY A VIRGIN WHEN
 I MET YOU, EITHER!!!

she buries her head in her hands, weeps heavily and

JESSE (CONT.)
 I can't help it, Nick. I can't help it...

This is too much for NICK. He wraps his arms around her, rocks her, comforts her... Tears are pouring down JESSE'S cheeks...

NICK
 (he hates himself)
 Don't ever think that, Jesse... Don't
 ever think that...

JESSE
 Talk to me, Nick... You haven't talked
 to me in so long... just talk to me...

NICK
 I love you, Jesse... I really love you.
 (he closes his
 eyes and we...)

CUT TO

A CELEBRATION PARTY!!! CHAMPAGNE BOTTLES, STREAMERS, BALLOONS
 AND A BAR-B-QUE!! 40 or 50 distinguished couples crowded into
 the home of DUKE WALLIS.

DUKE stands like a mountain, full of vigor and animation. A
 continuous stream of people shake his hand and offer congratulatio
 His wife, MELANIE, is by his side, also accepting congratulations.

NICK, as usual, doesn't belong. He's standing by the hor d'oeuvre
 table when he catches the eye of SHERIFF PITTMAN. They stare at
 each other for a brief, awkward moment, then PITTMAN nods and
 turns away.

Then something else catches NICK'S eye. MELANIE is staring
 directly at him from clear across the room. She stands dead
 still in a sea of movement. NICK stares back for a beat, then
 turns and disappears into the crowd.

MELANIA watches him go, then turns her glance up toward the top
 of a staircase and there, sitting in shadow on the very top
 step, is the 13-year-old boy we met at the funeral.

His chin rests in his cupped hands; he looks very much alone,
 clearly set apart from the fun below.

MELANIE watches him for a moment, then turns to DUKE; leans in
 close and

MELANIE

(half whispered)

He's not going to come down unless
you ask him to.

DUKE

(irritated whisper)

If he wants to come down he'll come
down. If you want him to come down,
then you ask him!

(he turns toward
another handshake
and we...)

CUT TO

A LARGE TROPHY CASE in a quiet corner of the room. NICK stares at the contents - awards, medals, plaques. In addition, the case contains old sepia photos of rugged cowboys, cattlemen and ranchers. They look almost like Mathew Brady photos of the old west and in almost every one there is a consistent face - a young boy. The boy, of course, is DUKE and as we

PAN ACROSS THE PHOTOS

he becomes a man and with him in every recent photo is a bright-eyed, handsome son who grows into a tall, athletic-looking young man. These are photos of DUKE and CONRAD, always together on fishing trips, hunting trips, sporting events and birthday parties.

NICK jumps when behind him

JIMBO

NICK!!

NICK turns and JIMBO throws an affectionate arm around his shoulder. He's had a few too many...

JIMBO

We did it, Nickyboy!!

NICK

You did most of it.

JIMBO

(broadly, with
false modesty)

Oh, hogwash!! We all did it. You've
done as much for Duke as anyone!

NICK stares at him for a beat, turns back to the photos, refers to the young boy in the wild west photos...

NICK

Is that Duke?

JIMBO

Hard to believe, huh? He grew up on his daddy's ranch. Rough country.

(belches)

Listen, he's gonna be on the news in a coupla minutes an' if we go over there right now we'll get us a coupla front row seats.

NICK

(referring to recent photo)

This Conrad?

JIMBO

(hiccups)

Used to be.

(and on that we...)

CUT TO

TELEVISION, CLOSEUP, and

ANCHOR MAN

It was no surprise in today's election that the office of District Attorney fell to Duke Wallis.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

THE TELEVISION IN JESSE'S HOSPITAL ROOM. The room looks pretty much like before only the flowers aren't quite so fresh.

ANCHOR MAN (CONT.)

Reporter Mark Abernathy was on the scene as Mr. Wallis met briefly with reporters outside his office late today.

THE TELEVISION SCENE SHIFTS TO THE FRONT OF DUKE'S OFFICE BUILDING. DUKE exits followed by a few of his associates and we

CUT TO

NICK and JIMBO at the party in their front-row seats.

JIMBO

(elbowing Nick)

Hey! That's us!!

(and we...)

CUT TO

81.
81.
THE TELEVISION and sure enough there are NICK and JIMBO emerging from the building. When DUKE stops they stand close behind, like two sentries on either side.

CUT TO

JESSE WATCHING. She's seeing NICK'S other life for the first time... on television! NICK ON TELEVISION!

He's smiling proudly, enjoying the attention. He's living a new, exciting, glamorous life... without JESSE.

DUKE is about to begin his speech but just before he does he turns to NICK, puts a hand on his shoulder and says something which we don't hear. NICK smiles, nods and we

CUT TO

JESSE. CLOSEUP. SEETHING as

DUKE'S VOICE (OVER)

This day marks a new start for Laramie County. For me it's a day of celebration, but it's also a day to begin...

JESSE SUDDENLY TURNS, REACHES UP AND YANKS THE POSTER OF DUKE FROM THE WALL. She crumbles it in her hands and the sound of crushing paper becomes spontaneous applause as we

CUT TO

NICK at the party clapping along with the others at something DUKE just said on television and

CUT TO

JESSE shoving one of the flower pots and CRAAASH!!!!!! as it hits the floor and

CUT TO

MORE APPLAUSE AT THE PARTY and the applause continues as we

CUT TO

ANOTHER FLOWER POT. CRAAAAAASHSH!!!!!! and

CUT TO

JESSE hurling still another pot at the television but it's mounted high on the wall and the POT FALLS SHORT AGAINST THE WALL. CRAAASH!!!! AND OVER THIS THE APPLAUSE CONTINUES AND GROWS UNTIL

JESSE SLAMS DOWN HARD ON THE REMOTE SWITCH ON HER NIGHT TABLE AND SUDDENLY EVERYTHING IS SILENT AS WE

CUT TO

THE TELEVISION just in time to see the image of DUKE fade to black.

JESSE glares angrily at the darkened set, then grabs the mirror from her night stand. She abruptly pulls her hair behind her head... no good... she tries piling it on top... still no good. Then...

She reaches for the scissors, holds her hair out to the side and makes a severe, irrevocable cut... she smiles and at that same instant the silence is broken by an approving burst of applause and we

CUT TO

THE PARTY. DUKE accepts congratulations and pats on the back but at the soonest possible moment he breaks away, crosses the room...

MELANIE chats happily to a group of partygoers but suddenly stops in mid-sentence. Her expression registers serious concern as we

CUT TO

MELANIE'S POV THROUGH THE CROWD. She watches as DUKE approaches NICK and JIMBO at the hor d'oeuvre table. He says something to NICK, then leads him off across the room and out through the patio door.

CUT TO

THE GARDEN BEHIND THE HOUSE. It's a large, well-manicured area with several pathways and chairs. In the background we can see the party in full swing but out here it's so quiet that all we hear are the crickets. DUKE and NICK walk slowly...

DUKE

(a little nervous)

I really don't know if I should even bring this up, Nick, but I've got something to ask you. I've gone up and down about this but I guess it can't hurt to ask, right?

NICK

I hope not.

DUKE

I imagine you and your wife'll be leaving soon, huh?

NICK

In about a week, I guess.

A beat... We've never seen DUKE at a loss for words but there's a first time for everything...

DUKE

It's funny. I can talk to ten people; I can talk to a hundred people; I can even talk to a hundred thousand people but sometimes I have a hell of a time talking to just one person.

(small laugh)

Hell, you've done so damn much for me I hate to ask for another favor.

NICK

I haven't done you any favors.

DUKE stops, looks at NICK. A beat, then more nervous as...

DUKE

Listen, every year I go up to the mountains with some friends and we always work in pairs. Everyone's got a partner and... well, this year with Conrad gone I'm kinda stuck.

(beat... Nick

swallows hard)

Listen, I know I've got no business asking you to come along, but...

He waits for a reply... NICK hesitates, then...

DUKE (CONT.)

(angry with himself)

Forget it. Hell, you don't owe me a damn thing, right? If you don't wanna go, it's o.k. I shouldn't have brought it up.

NICK

(quickly)

No. It's o.k. I'd like to go. It's only for a couple days, right?

DUKE

Right.

NICK

No sweat.

DUKE

I guarantee you're gonna...

(but he's cut off as...)

MELANIE'S VOICE (OVER)

(calling)

Duke...?

(MORE)

MELANIE'S VOICE (CONT. OVER)
(sing-song)

Du-uke!!

CUT TO

MELANIE AT THE PATIO DOOR CALLING INTO THE NIGHT. NOW...

CUT TO

THE HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. NICK walks toward camera with a look of serious determination. He's prepared for a confrontation.

He maneuvers around several ambulatory patients in the hallway. A man on crutches passes him on the left; he walks around a person in a wheelchair moving in his direction, steps into JESSE'S room and

NICK

Je...

CUT TO

THE ROOM. AN EMPTY BED. NO JESSE.

NICK checks the number on the door, then turns back to the corridor as

JESSE'S VOICE (OVER)

Psssssssst!

CUT TO

JESSE. She was the patient in the WHEELCHAIR that NICK passed on his way in. Only she's changed. She's wearing street clothes, a little makeup and her hair is cut short. In some ways this is the best we've seen her look. The short hair complements her personality. She looks more childlike and there is a gleeful, almost devilish smile on her face.

JESSE

Well, what do you think?

NICK

(he's not sure)

It's great. You look great.

JESSE

You really like it?

NICK

Yeah, but...

(small laugh)

what'd you go an' do that for?

JESSE

(shrugs)

I just got tired of it the other way.

(she slaps the chair)

And this. Isn't this terrific? I'm gonna be out of here in a week! God, I can't wait!

CUT TO

THE GROUNDS OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL. NICK pushes the wheelchair...

JESSE

(she's in great spirits)

The doc says I'll be good as new in three months. I was thinking maybe we could take it easy for a while after I'm out. Maybe go out to the coast and then up to Alaska.

NICK stops under a tree, takes a seat on a bench. He looks off into the distance.

They sit for a moment, just long enough for the silence to become awkward, but JESSE'S not going to let it spoil her day...

JESSE (CONT.)

Whadya think about the coast?

NICK

Yeah, that'd be fine.

(another pause, then...)

JESSE

You really like my hair?

NICK

Jesse, listen. I've got something to ask you that I don't expect you to understand.

(beat...)

Duke asked me to go up to the mountains with him for a couple of days.

(Jesse can't believe

what she's hearing)

He needs a partner, like you need two people to paddle a canoe... that kind o' thing.

JESSE

(sarcastic)

Oh, that's terrific. Great. I was planning on spending the next few days in the Bahamas anyway.

(bigger)

I think it's fucked! I just got outta bed for Christ's sake!!

NICK

(also angry)

Hey, it's not like I want to go, Jesse.
I don't give a shit about going up to
the mountains. But the guy's been so
damn good to me...

(beat...)

I owe him a hell of a lot.

(Jesse immediately
shuts her eyes tight
and...)

Wait. I didn't mean that.

(he stands, paces)

Shit.

JESSE

(opens her eyes)

I don't get it, Nick. What about me?
Look at me. I gave up everything for
you and look at me!

(Nick doesn't have
an answer for that.
Then, after a pause...)

NICK

I didn't start this by askin' you to
understand. I don't want you to.
I'm not askin' you to.

JESSE

I hate him.

NICK

The minute I get back we'll hit the
road and you'll never hear his name
again. I promise. We'll head right
for the coast. Whatever you want.

JESSE

(tears now as she
buries her head in
her hands and...)

I just want you to stay with me.

NICK, tortured, stares down at his wife, then closes his eyes,
swallows hard and we

CUT TO

THE STREET IN FRONT OF DUKE'S HOUSE. DUSK.

We're looking out through the living room window; the curtain
is held back by a hand in the foreground. DUKE'S black limousine
pulls into the driveway and signals the automatic garage door.

Not far behind comes NICK'S mobile sunset - the AX. NICK parks on the street directly in front of the house and we

CUT TO

THE FIGURE IN THE WINDOW. It's DUKE'S WIFE, MELANIE. She does not appear pleased. She closes the curtain and we

CUT TO

INSIDE THE HOUSE as DUKE and NICK bound up the stairs to the second floor. In the background we hear a lovely Beethoven Sonata

NICK
Your wife play piano?

DUKE
That's Jerry...

NICK
She plays real good.

CUT TO

A CLOSET DOOR FLUNG OPEN. DUKE'S arm reaches inside, removes a red plaid hunting jacket which he hands to NICK. He turns back to the closet and

DUKE
Might be a little big but it'll keep
you warm.

and as he speaks, NICK unbuttons the jacket but stops abruptly when he reads the name on the inside collar: CONRAD WALLIS. Now..

CUT TO

DUKE'S STUDY. It's an impressive room with old world antique furniture, three walls of books and one wall of guns which is where DUKE and NICK are standing. DUKE unlocks the largest gun case and removes A VERY LARGE RIFLE. It looks more like a bazooka; the scope alone is about two feet long.

NICK
When you said the mountains I thought
you meant hiking or... canoeing maybe.

DUKE
(he's in great spirits)
Not in these mountains. We're goin'
up to big game country. Here.

NICK takes the gun. His arm drops suddenly from the unexpected weight.

DUKE (CONT.)

338 magnum! Ever seen a prettier gun?
It'll drop any animal on the continent!

DUKE removes another rifle, stands it butt-down on the floor, then removes a third. All are different but all look as deadly as the first.

DUKE (CONT.)

I always bring a spare...

NICK

(still holding
the rifle)

This is a real beauty but... I don't
think I'll be doin' much shooting.

DUKE

'Course you will! Even if it's just
target practice. You'll get to spit
out a few rounds.

CUT TO

A BOX OF BULLETS, CLOSEUP, dumped onto a desktop...

DUKE (CONT.)

You gotta get the right size ammo
for the beast.

(picks up a bullet)

This soft-point bullet doesn't make
much of a hole going in but expands
almost instantly BAWHOOOMM!!!!

(gestures with
his hands)

doing plenty of damage on the inside.
Hopefully it stays there... If the
animal's too small you still won't
notice the hole going in but it'll
make a hell of a mess comin' out the
other side...

NICK

What size game are we goin' after?

but as he speaks a distant 'chime' sounds and

DUKE

That's the dinner bell.

CUT TO

A LARGE FORMAL DINNER TABLE IN A LARGE FORMAL DINING ROOM.
The table is set for four - one at either end and one on either
side. This puts people just far enough apart so they feel like

(CONTINUED)

they're dining alone. DUKE'S WIFE, MELANIE, is seated at one end of the table but no one else is in the room. Also, there's no food on the table. The door swings open and DUKE enters with NICK.

DUKE

Have a seat, Nick. You've met my wife!

NICK

Yes. We ah...

MELANIE

(simple statement)

We met at the funeral.

A frozen moment. She did that on purpose. Then the door opens and in comes the 13-year-old boy with dark-rimmed glasses. He goes to his chair without speaking or looking at anyone.

DUKE

This here's my son, Jerry.

NICK

Oh, I thought Jerry was a...

DUKE

(interrupting)

Have a seat, Nick.

NICK does (obviously in CONRAD'S old chair) and...

DUKE (CONT.)

(bowing his head)

Bless us oh Lord and these Thy gifts
which we are about to receive from Thy
bounty through Christ Our Lord, amen.

An awkward pause. NICK has never eaten at a table where there's no food and he's not sure what to do. He looks around at the others. For a moment no one moves. Dead silence, then...

MELANIE

What happened to your ear, Nick?

NICK

My ear?

MELANIE

Your ear.

NICK

(reaches up, touches
his lobe...)

Oh, my ear.

(nervous laugh)

I caught it on a fence when I was a kid.

MELANIE considers him for a moment. She doesn't smile. Another awkward, silent moment. No one moves, then... MELANIE rings a dainty dinner bell and instantly the kitchen door swings open and in comes a heavy-set Indian woman carrying a tray of food. Now...

CUT TO

JESSE AND A YOUNG MAN, BOTH IN WHEELCHAIRS, MOVING DOWN A CORRIDOR IN THE HOSPITAL. The young man is talking, clearly interested in JESSE but she's off in another world.

As they pass a phone booth, JESSE suddenly stops. She considers the phone for a moment but before she makes a decision we

CUT TO

DUKE'S HOUSE. DINNER IN FULL PROGRESS. Duke takes a huge mouthful of steak and potatoes and

DUKE

'Course the law doesn't say you have to take antlered elk. Hell, the license says you can take any elk. But we've been doing this for years now and face it, antlered elk's more of a challenge.

(smiles)

More man to man, if you know what I mean.

JERRY

(without looking up)

I can see how that would be terribly rewarding. But did you ever think that the elk might have a different point of view?

DUKE

(dead serious)

You know what I think? I think I'm a successful politician 'cause the only point of view I care about is my own!

(an awkward,
silent pause)

NICK

Well, antlers or no antlers I don't have a license so I guess...

DUKE

Don't worry about it. You'll be huntin' with the D.A. and the County Sheriff.

This takes NICK by surprise. Where did the Sheriff come from? Another stiff moment passes... very formal... very awkward... the

MELANIE

Nick, is that your... car... parked outside?

NICK

(proudly)

Yes, ma'am. The Alaskan Express! I call it the AX for short. I built it myself from the ground up.

MELANIE

Would you mind terribly leaving it in the garage while you're gone?

NICK'S momentary bubble bursts and before he can answer we

CUT TO

NICK IN THE CAB OF THE AX as he fires up the engine. He pauses for a moment deciding between the open road and the driveway. He's clearly upset by the hole he's dug for himself. Beat, then..

He pulls into the driveway, picks up the remote control garage door gizmo, pushes a button and the door immediately opens. He pulls into the empty stall and as he does the headlights reveal JERRY perched on a stack of lawn seed bags. NICK steps from the cab and

JERRY

Well, what do you think?

NICK

Of what?

JERRY

The happy Wallis family.

NICK

(he's not sure what to make of this kid)
I dunno... it's o.k. I guess.

JERRY

(holding up a joint)
Care to join me on the veranda?
(he motions to the roof and we...)

CUT TO

THE GARAGE ROOF. NICK and JERRY lie on their backs smoking the joint. They're watching something in the distance...

JERRY

They look about three inches tall
from here...

CUT TO

WHAT THEY'RE WATCHING. They have a clear view of the back of the house. Through an open lighted window they can see into the master bedroom and from here DUKE and MELANIE really do look 3 inches tall.

DUKE is sitting on one of the twin beds cleaning his rifle. MELANIE is propped up on the other bed. They're talking but we're too far away to hear. Instead we hear...

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)

You don't much care for him, do you?

JERRY'S VOICE (OVER)

Neither do you.

CUT TO

THE GARAGE ROOF. NICK takes a toke, hands the joint to JERRY and

NICK

Y'know, it's funny... 'til tonight I
didn't know Duke had another son.

JERRY

Most people don't. He thinks I'm
queer which is fine with me.

NICK

Why's that?

JERRY

(hands Nick the joint)
'Cause I've got it wired around here.
She gives me anything I ask for and
he leaves me alone.

(takes a long toke)
I ve got a girlfriend, believe it or
not. But if I ever brought her around
here I'd blow the whole thing.

(small laugh)
He'd probably drag me off on a hunting
trip!

NICK

That so bad?

JERRY

(shrugs)
Conrad like it.

(MORE)

JERRY (CONT'D)

(bitter)

He and Dad were like a couple of fags.
He's the only one Dad ever gave a shit
about. Aside from himself, of course.

(hands the joint
to Nick)

I wouldn't want to be around if he ever
gets his hands on the guy who killed him.
(and on that we...)

CUT TO

INSIDE THE MASTER BEDROOM. DUKE sits quietly cleaning his
rifle. MELANIE sits a few feet away, propped up in bed. From
the expression on her face it's clear that she's waiting for
a reply to something she just said. A beat, then...

MELANIE

I just don't want to see this affecting
your career, that's all. I know a
pierced ear when I see one. For all
we know he wears lipstick and a dress,
too.

DUKE

His father's a nigger; his mother's a
whore. Anything else?

MELANIE

He's taken advantage of every weakness
you've got. Can't you see that? You'd
do somersaults for him just like you
would for...

(stops herself)

DUKE

(looks up)

Say it.

(Melanie says nothing;
then, bigger...)

Say it!

MELANIE

(after a pause)

Conrad left a big hole; I know that.
But you have someone who could fill
that hole. I loved Conrad. But when
he died I thought to myself that maybe
now, for the first time, you'd need
Jerry.

DUKE

(goes back to his
rifle)

He doesn't seem to have much need for me.

MELANIE

What do you expect of him? He's spent his entire life being treated by you like he doesn't exist and now you expect him to need you?

(pleading)

You have to make the first move.
Can't you see that?

(Duke's body tightens

like a coiled snake;

Melanie shakes her head)

No, I guess you can't see that. The only way you can see things is the way you want to see them - the Duke Wallis way!

(bigger, pushing harder)

Well I wish that for once - just once - you could stand in somebody else's shoes and take a good look at yourself. Jerry's got a lot to offer but you'll never know it. Instead you'll hook up with some bum in a circus truck!

WELL HE ISN'T CONRAD!!!!

(and the instant she
says it Duke lashes out,
slaps her hard with...)

DUKE

I was waiting for that.

MELANIE

(glaring)

So was I.

THREE FROZEN BEATS... THEIR EYES ARE LOCKED... NEITHER OF THEM MOVES... THEN...

MELANIE

(with quiet venom)

What you're doing is pretty obvious to an awful lot of people. I hope you know that.

DUKE

Well maybe I'm doing some things that aren't so obvious, too.

(and on that he slams
home the bolt of the rifle
and...)

He'll be gone soon enough.

CUT TO

THE GARAGE ROOF.

JERRY

I can't figure out why you're doin' this. Goin' up to the mountains with him.

NICK

(almost to himself)
Neither can I.

CUT TO

THE BACK OF THE HOUSE. THE SINGLE LIGHTED WINDOW. DUKE stands, sights down the barrel of the gun and

JERRY'S VOICE (OVER)

He's a pretty good shot. I bet he could blast our brains out from there.

DUKE lowers the gun, goes to the door and suddenly the light goes out.

BLACKNESS AND SILENCE FOR A BEAT, then... in the distance, a bird chirps and we

FADE IN

TO THE MOST SPECTACULAR, GLORIOUS RANGE OF MOUNTAINS YOU CAN IMAGINE. GOD'S COUNTRY. AWESOME. UNCHANGED. UNSPOILED. Hold for a beat, then

PAN DOWN A LITTLE

TO THE HIGHWAY. Off in the distance a vehicle approaches and as it gets closer we see that it's an elevated FOUR-DOOR PICKUP TRUCK - a loud, powerful macho machine. It's closing on us fast and before we know it it's on top of us and it's amazing that it doesn't knock the camera right off the highway as it roars past and we

CUT TO

INSIDE THE TRUCK, THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD. We're looking at six men singing in unison

MEN

...take one down, pass it around,
68 bottles of beer on the wall...

SHERIFF JAKE PITTMAN is at the wheel, DUKE rides shotgun and NICK is in between. In the back seat is JIMBO popping open another can of beer, tossing his empty out the window. Next to JIMBO are two rugged-looking characters who we'll get to know as the BIRCH BROTHERS, VERN and OZZIE but first we...

CUT TO

A PLACE WE'VE NEVER SEEN. Neither have most people. It's a very secluded part of the forest... quiet, peaceful. Sunlight filters down through the trees. Then over a slight rise appears the four-wheel drive macho machine snarling its way through the woods.

THE TRUCK COMES TO A HALT IN A SMALL CLEARING and the men climb out. Rather, they stumble out. DUKE, NICK and the SHERIFF have had a few beers but JIMBO and the BIRCH BROTHERS are pretty far gone.

I'll get to where we've stopped in a moment, but first a word about the BIRCH BROTHERS. They're country boys. Ranch hands, actually. VERN, the older of the two, is about the size of a small garbage truck and he has a face to match. On his belt is hung the nastiest hunting knife you ever saw.

OZZIE isn't a guy you'd want to mess with either. He's not as big as his brother but the scars on his face spell out 'mean motherfucker.' The dark brown stains on his teeth testify to years of chewing 'Mail Pouch' tobacco and, on his head, is a black and white skunk-skin cap complete with tail.

The men take a moment to stretch their legs and suck in some fresh mountain air...

JIMBO

(breathing deeply)

Just like downtown!

DUKE

(to Nick, motioning
past the camera)

There it is...

(and we...)

CUT TO

WHAT'S BEHIND THE CAMERA. A LARGE, ANCIENT CABIN THAT LOOKS AS THOUGH IT'S STOOD THERE FOR FIVE HUNDRED YEARS.

DUKE (CONT.)

(unloading his gear
from the truck)

We built this place over twenty years
ago. Took us three seasons.

VERN walks over to the cabin, reaches up to the overhanging roof and yanks down a piece of rotting wood.

VERN

It ain't gonna last twenty...

(then suddenly...)

KABLAAAAAAMMMMMM!!!!!!!

and everyone jumps, spins around and we

CUT TO

OZZIE standing by the front of the pickup, his smoking rifle pointing to the sky. He lowers the gun and stands for a beat, like Mat Dillon after a duel. It's respectfully silent. Then, OZZIE grins like a Cheshire cat and

JAKE

You sure let 'em know we're up here.

OZZIE

(shrugs)

It's only fair.

DUKE unloads a rifle, hands it to NICK.

DUKE

Ever shoot one o' these?

NICK

Nothin' this big.

OZZIE

(grinning)

Ever kill anything?

NICK looks at him for a silent beat... he looks around at the others...

He's already made too much of the question. Then, laughing nervously...

NICK

Just flies.

JIMBO

Well, shit. Watch this!

He takes his gun, loads it with what looks more like a miniature ICBM than a bullet and takes aim at a tree.

CUT TO

A LARGE BRANCH, MAYBE FOUR INCHES THICK. A SQUIRREL is perched securely on top, chewing on an acorn. God only knows what he's doing there after OZZIE'S attempt to kill the sky but there he sits... enjoying his lunch.

CUT TO

JIMBO, CLOSEUP, taking careful aim... a bead of sweat appears on his forehead and as he's about to pull the trigger

CUT TO

THE SQUIRREL busily working away, its eyes occasionally darting around to make sure no other squirrel sneaks up to steal his treasure and

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. Panic on his face as his eyes dart back and forth between the squirrel and the gun and we're hoping he'll shout or throw a rock or do something but he just stands there sweating... watching... silent...

CUT TO

THE OTHERS - DUKE, JAKE, VERN and a grinning OZZIE. All watching all waiting... and

CUT TO

JIMBO, CLOSEUP, sweating more now. He's intent on the kill as we

CUT TO

THE SQUIRREL THROUGH THE SCOPE SITES OF JIMBO'S GUN AND THE SITES ARE MOVING SLIGHTLY, THEN... STEADY... STEADY... DEAD CENTER... HOLD... THEN...

CUT TO

JIMBO'S FINGER, EXTREME CLOSEUP, AS HE SLOWLY SQUEEZES THE TRIGGER AND

CUT TO

THE SQUIRREL THROUGH THE SCOPE AND THE CROSS-HAIRS ARE DEAD CENTER AND

CUT TO

THE TRIGGER FINGER AS

KABLAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAMMMMM!!!!!!

AND

CUT TO

THE FOUR-INCH BRANCH EXPLODING BENEATH THE SQUIRREL. A MILLION FRAGMENTS FLY TWENTY FEET INTO THE AIR AS THE SHOT FROM THE GUN ECHOES ON AND ON AND

CUT TO

THE GROUND as the branch thunders down and out from beneath it scrambles a little creature that's scared so shitless its feet don't even touch down as it darts away into the underbrush and

CUT TO

THE GROUP bursting into a roaring fit of laughter. Everyone except NICK and JIMBO. Even the SHERIFF seems to be enjoying himself.

JIMBO

Shit!!

DUKE

Guess you're gonna have to stalk smaller game, Jimbo.

OZZIE

Yeah, like flies!!!

JIMBO

(under his breath)

Dumb fuck squirrel...

Now...

CUT TO

INSIDE THE CABIN. NIGHT. IT'S PRIMITIVE. A few double-tiered bunk beds, a few windows, but no running water, no latrine and no electricity. Just the basics. The only thing this cabin has more of than it needs is twenty years of graffiti carved into its walls.

The place is lit by a roaring fire in a crude stone fireplace and a few kerosene lanterns hanging from the rafters. The men are seated in front of the fire on rough chairs and logs. All except for OZZIE who's balanced precariously on the woodpile sipping a pint of brandy.

VERN stirs something in a large pot on the fire, scoops out two plates, hands them to JAKE and NICK.

VERN

Buffalo shit stew!

JAKE

(takes a bite)

Tastes more like rabbit turds.

VERN

Yeah, I got some o' those in there, too.

(scoops out two
more plates)

NICK

This must be the way people lived a hundred years ago.

DUKE

Shit, I grew up in a place like this.
 Didn't have electricity or running
 water 'til I was twelve years old.
 You remember that far back, Vern?

VERN

I remember the first time I flushed
 a toilet up there.

OZZIE

(from the woodpile)
 That the time you got your head stuck?

VERN

The only thing I ever got stuck in a
 toilet was my dick. Damn thing hangs
 down so far.

JAKE

I can't eat this shit.

VERN scoops some glop onto a plate for himself, eats ferociously as

VERN

I remember one time...
 (he starts laughing,
 then to Nick...)
 Hey Conrad...
 (stops short)
 Rick, I mean... Oh, hell. You wouldn't
 remember...
 (a tense pause,
 then...)
 Sorry, Duke...

DUKE

Forget it.
 (the tension hangs)

VERN

Well, hell... it ain't hardly possible
 to come up here without thinkin' about
 him.

(he looks to the
 others for support)

OZZIE

(still on the wood-
 pile, very drunk)
 When you find the motherfucker I hope
 you bring 'im up to the ranch. I'd
 like to cut his balls off.

JAKE
I guess we all would.
(Nick is plenty
nervous)

VERN
You got any ideas, Duke? Who did it?

DUKE sets his plate down, moves his chair closer to the fire
as if to keep warm.

DUKE
I've got a pretty good idea.
(this takes them all
by surprise but especially
Nick)
Isn't that right, Jake?
(Sheriff nods)

VERN
Well let's go get the motherfucker!

DUKE
(staring into the
fire)
We will.

He stirs the dying fire with a stick. A few flames shoot up
sending quick shadows across the room.

OZZIE
Bring 'im up here. I'll cut off his...
(drifting now, too drunk
to continue)

CUT TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. He's staring directly into the burning embers
and as we move closer his eyes reflect the fire and appear to
burn as

DUKE
(quietly, with menace)
You cut off a man's balls, he can
still crawl away... Conrad couldn't
do that...

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. He's not looking into the fire; he's staring
at DUKE. Guilt gnaws deep in his soul but what shows through
his eyes is fear. He is watching a man intent on violent revenge...

CUT TO

DUKE, CLOSEUP, fire still burning in his eyes. His teeth are clenched and the muscles in his jaw work slowly back and forth and it looks as though he's about to pounce on some unseen victim and commit whatever unthinkable act is festering in his mind. Suddenly he spits into the fire and we

CUT TO

A BURNING EMBER as the spittle sizzles and bubbles and

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. He looks around uneasily. Everyone else is staring quietly into the dying fire. No one moves.

The flames die down and the coals pulsate with hues of orange and red; occasionally a flame flickers and dies out. The total effect is mesmerizing, hypnotic...

Perspiration on NICK'S forehead.

If someone tapped him on the shoulder he'd probably die of fright.. it's dead quiet... tension... then

CRAAAAAASHSH!!!!

AND NICK IS UP LIKE A SHOT. HE SPINS AROUND, SUCKS IN HIS BREATHE AND

CUT TO

OZZIE lying on the floor as pieces of firewood tumble down on top. He lies very still.

VERN

Must be time to turn in.

No one moves to help OZZIE from his bed on the floor. He just lies there snoring and it looks as though he'll be there all night.

NICK wipes sweat from his brow and watches as DUKE unfastens his bedroll, tosses it onto his upper bunk and climbs the ladder without a word...

NICK sits on the lower bunk, removes his shirt, climbs into his bag and looks out at the room.

CUT TO

NICK'S POV as the others prepare for bed. A kerosene lantern burns by JIMBO'S bunk... the fire still glows... OZZIE hasn't moved... all we hear are crickets and the wind...

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. He rolls over hoping to forget tonight forever when right before his eyes, not six inches away, crudely carved into the wall are the words:

THIS BED BELONGS TO CONRAD WALLIS

NICK'S eyes widen, his body goes rigid... he rolls over, stares straight up at DUKE'S bunk. NICK is a haunted man. His face is lit by the orange glow of the kerosene lantern but off camera we hear JIMBO blowing it out and the warm light fades from NICK'S face leaving only moonlight which casts a blue, cold, cadaver-like color.

The only warmth is in NICK'S eyes. Moisture in them grows and glistens in the moonlight. A single tear rolls down his cheek. He reaches up, wipes it away and slowly we

FADE OUT

but before you know it we quickly

FADE IN

and last night is a forgotten memory because we're staring out at A MAGNIFICENT SUNRISE. IT'S A STUNNER OF A DAY. Birds are singing; the day is glowing and it's wonderful to be alive!

Hold on this for a pleasing moment...

THEN, SLOWLY, THE FRONT END OF A RIFLE BARREL PENETRATES THE FRAME moving very cautiously, very slowly, from left to right like a giant penis saying 'fuck you' to mother nature.

The morning mood changes abruptly; the sound of the birds fades to silence. THE RIFLE is black, menacing, cold, and on a morning like this you just wish the thing would go away. But it keeps coming. First the barrel, then the scope, then the stock with a hand gently cradled around it. And it keeps moving... left to right... slowly, cautiously, until the midsection of the man holding it also enters frame and we

CUT TO

DUKE AND NICK walking side by side. DUKE'S eyes and ears have never been more alert. NICK follows. He's a little uneasy, a little scared...

SUDDENLY DUKE STOPS, holds out a halting hand and they both freeze. DUKE looks down and we

CUT TO

DUKE'S HAND as he reaches out to a bush and gently takes hold of a broken twig. It's been broken by something moving in the same direction as DUKE and NICK and the break is still moist.

DUKE looks to NICK who nods his understanding... No words are spoken. DUKE proceeds; NICK follows just a step behind.

CUT TO

THEIR POV as they make their way through the forest. There are patches of clearing and patches of thick brush. They reach a large clearing, almost a meadow, and just before they step into the open DUKE freezes, holds up a hand and we

CUT TO

THE MEADOW. Empty... silent... nothing...

CUT TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. He looks as though he sees something the rest of us don't.

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. His eyes dart back and forth searching for whatever it is and

CUT TO

THE EMPTY MEADOW only it's not empty for long. Out of the brush, about 50 feet away, steps the most magnificent creature you have ever seen - a BULL ELK with a 16 point crown. Suddenly it turns its nose into the wind and darts back into the brush and

JUMP CUT TO

DUKE AND NICK moving quickly now. They're passing along the edge of the meadow...

JUMP CUT TO

DUKE AND NICK moving through another part of the forest... quickly... quietly. Too quietly, in fact. It's almost eerie. They're moving rapidly and DUKE has a look of determination on his face that reminds us of the first time we saw him marching down the corridor to face his dead son.

NICK is breathing heavily, getting tired... he's having a tough time keeping up but DUKE just keeps going. It's as if he has some extraordinary built-in machine pumping him through the forest.

NICK is practically running when DUKE comes to an abrupt halt. NICK stops just short of crashing into him.

CUT TO

A SMALL CLEARING. Not twenty feet ahead of them stands the ELK only now it looks twice as big, twice as regal... a proud,

(CONTINUED)

arrogant giant. It stands calmly as though it knows what's about to happen and in a last defiant act holds its head high into the wind as if to say 'I dare you.'

Held for a beat... everything frozen... We're waiting for DUKE to aim his powerful 338 magnum and blast an expanding hole the size of a baseball through the heart of this god-like creature... but instead he turns to NICK and motions him around to the other side of the clearing.

Again, no words are spoken, just sign language. NICK obeys. He moves slowly, cautiously. He's carrying a gun but it's more of a hinderance than anything else.

CUT TO

THE ELK. It just stands there sniffing the air and

CUT TO

DUKE taking position now and

CUT TO

NICK stopping, watching as we

CUT TO

DUKE slowly aiming his rifle and

CUT TO

THE ELK not knowing, not caring, then

CUT TO

NICK staring at the ELK, magnificent now but about to fall, writhing in pain, slaughtered for sport and it's clear that NICK wants to warn it, to set it free, to do something... but it's like the squirrel. He just stands there helpless, watching... He looks to DUKE and as we

CUT TO

DUKE we realize that MY GOD!!! He's not pointing the gun at the ELK, HE'S AIMING AT NICK, DEAD CENTER INTO THE CAMERA AND

CUT TO

NICK IN DISBELIEF and for a frozen moment he just stands there, then moves slowly to his left and

CUT TO

DUKE and the gun follows NICK'S every move and

CUT TO

NICK as he moves right, then left again and we can see panic growing in his eyes as we

CUT TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. His face quivers and his hand trembles as he slowly begins the eternal pull on the trigger and

CUT TO

NICK and

NICK

Duke!!!

DUKE

(shouting, his
voice shaky)

Did you enjoy it?

NICK

DUKE!!!

DUKE

(screaming this time)

Did you enjoy it, NICK!!!!!!!

AND SUDDENLY NICK TURNS TO RUN BUT WE

CUT TO

NICK'S POV and twenty yards ahead is the SHERIFF, gun pointed at NICK, ready to shoot and

CUT TO

NICK as he spins the other way and the camera begins to swirl around him and

CUT TO

ANOTHER WAY OUT but JIMBO stands with his gun poised trapping NICK again and

CUT TO

NICK as the camera continues to spiral and whatever surreal music was introduced when NICK returned to the scene of his killing should enter here and it should build to a frenzy as the camera continues to swirl around NICK and each time he spins we

CUT TO

NICK'S POV and at each turn someone is waiting... VERN has taken position and he's smiling, aiming at NICK and MY GOD THIS REALLY

(CONTINUED)

IS THE END AND NICK BOLTS SUDDENLY INTO THE CLEARING WHERE THE ELK STOOD ONLY MOMENTS BEFORE BUT ABRUPTLY HE STOPS AGAIN AND WE

CUT TO

OTTIE, PERCHED IN A TREE DEAD AHEAD, HIS GUN AIMED AND READY AND

CUT TO

NICK STANDING IN THE CLEARING EXACTLY WHERE THE ELK STOOD... TRAPPED, HELPLESS AND

CUT TO

DUKE, CLOSEUP, HIS TREMBLING FINGER PULLING GENTLY ON THE TRIGGER

CUT TO

THE CROSS-HAIRS IN HIS SCOPE ZEROING IN RIGHT BETWEEN NICK'S EYES. HIS HEAD IS ABOUT TO BE BLOWN RIGHT OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH AND THE BULLET MAY NOT MAKE MUCH OF A HOLE GOING IN BUT IT'LL MAKE A HELL OF A MESS COMING OUT THE OTHER SIDE.

NICK'S GUN DROPS FROM HIS HAND; HIS ARMS TREMBLE AT HIS SIDES AND

NICK
(at the top
of his lungs)
NO!!! DUKE!!!

BUT IT'S NOT DOING ANY GOOD AND

CUT TO

DUKE'S TRIGGER FINGER IN EXTREME CLOSEUP AS IT SQUEEZES BACK AND

CUT TO

NICK THROUGH THE SCOPE AND HE'S NOT MOVING, JUST STANDING, SCREAMING, AND HIS HEAD IS DEAD CENTER IN THE SITES AND WHEN THIS MOMENT BUILDS TO AN INTOLERABLE TENSION

CUT TO

THE TRIGGER FINGER HEADING HOME AND

KABLAaaaaAMMM!!!!!!!

(AND ABRUPTLY)

ZOOM IN

TO NICK. IT'S THE BULLET'S POV BUT JUST AT THE VERY INSTANT WE EXPECT NICK'S HEAD TO BURST INTO AN EXPLOSION OF BRAINS AND BLOOD AND BONE

CUT TO

BLACKNESS. BUT THE SCREAMS CONTINUE.

A match flares up suddenly, lights a kerosene lantern and we

CUT TO

NICK IN HIS BUNK, squirming, writhing, screaming and

CUT TO

MAYHEM as DUKE, VERN, JIMBO and JAKE come crashing from their bunks, stumbling in the darkness, running to NICK and

CUT TO

DUKE reaching in, urgently shaking NICK to his senses and

DUKE

(shouting)

NICK! JESUS, NICK...

(and...)

CUT TO

NICK shaking, fighting DUKE'S grip just like JESSE fought NICK'S grip back at the campsite and suddenly NICK'S eyes pop open and we

CUT TO

DUKE'S HEAD LOOMING LARGER THAN LIFE AND THIS ISN'T WHAT NICK NEEDED TO SEE WHEN HE OPENED HIS EYES.

He screams in terror and pulls back as far into the corner of his bunk as he can get and

CUT TO

DUKE pulling back from the frightened, cowering NICK and

CUT TO

NICK. Suddenly he stops screaming, looks around, and maybe he remembers where he is.

CUT TO

THE OTHERS WATCHING... confused, concerned... silent...

CUT TO

NICK pulling himself together.

He's embarrassed now and doesn't know quite what to do.

DUKE
(gently)

Nick?

NICK nods, forces a smile, then...

JIMBO
Bad dream, huh?

NICK
(embarrassed)
Yeah, I guess.

He moves out toward the edge of the bed, still shaking. DUKE pulls a blanket around NICK'S shoulders and in a warmer gesture than we've come to expect from this man he puts his arms around NICK, holds him tightly, comforts him, rocks him.

DUKE
I understand, son.

NICK
(shakes his head)
No...

Suddenly his lips quiver and tears erupt in his eyes. He buries his head in DUKE'S shoulder, sobs heavily...

JIMBO, JAKE and VERN stand nervously, embarrassed by the intimacy of this private exchange. An unexpected warmth has penetrated their macho world...

DUKE
You've got a right to some bad dreams.
(beat)
I've had a few myself.

NICK pulls himself together, wipes his tears and accepts a pint of brandy from VERN. He sips. It's a peaceful moment when all we hear are crickets and the wind. Hold on this for a brief pause, then...

CUT TO

HOSPITAL MAIN ENTRANCE. NICK charges through the door and across the lobby. He's cleaned himself up, changed clothes, but he has that same stunned, haunted look that he had in front of the campfire.

CUT TO

THE DOORS TO WING "C" as NICK pushes through and it's a good thing no one tries to stop him because it's obvious no one could and

CUT TO

NICK'S POV AS HE ENTERS JESSE'S ROOM. She's dressed in street clothes, her short-cropped hair neatly combed, wearing a touch of makeup. She's propped up against three or four pillows on top of a fully made bed. Alongside is a pair of crutches...

She is writing on a pad of note paper but when NICK enters she looks up, startled, and quickly sets the pad face down on the bed.

NICK

(urgently)

Jesse, listen, don't ask me any questions. We've gotta start packing. I know this sounds crazy but we have to leave here. Tonight.

(pulls open a dresser drawer... it's empty)

If ever in your life you've got to trust me, now is the time. We'll head for the coast, any place you...

(flings open the closet... also empty)

Where's your stuff?

JESSE

I've already packed.

NICK

Great ! That means...

(stops short...

tears in Jesse's eyes)

What's wrong?

JESSE

I'm going home.

CUT TO

A GRAINY, BLACK & WHITE IMAGE OF CONRAD'S DEAD BODY LYING ON THE PAVEMENT BENEATH THE NEON "COKE" SIGN.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

MORE PHOTOS, DIAGRAMS, NOTES, SCRIBBLINGS, BLOOD ANALYSIS REPORTS, ETC. AND SLOWLY PAN ACROSS THESE OBJECTS, STOPPING ON

DUKE'S HAND, CLOSEUP, tapping a pencil. Tap... tap... tap...

PAN UP TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. His face is taut, pale... his eyes fierce, determined, angry... violence simmers just beneath the surface... tap... tap... tap...

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

DUKE'S OFFICE. With him are SHERIFF PITTMAN, DETECTIVES BULGATI & SHOEMAN and CHIEF KIRTCHKE.

Most of the furnishings have been removed in preparation for DUKE'S move to the D.A.'s office. The animal heads, the paintings and the books are gone. A few open shipping cartons remain on the floor.

SHERIFF PITTMAN is pacing nervously... after a beat...

CHIEF KIRTCHKE

We all know he did it, Duke... At least we all believe he did. But we've got a hell of a burden of proof on our hands.

(silence for a beat, then...)

BULGATI

We'll have to rely on the girl.

KIRTCHKE

You wanna take that chance, Duke?

(the tapping stops...
silence, then...)

DUKE

(to the Sheriff)

Bring 'im in, Jake.

CUT TO

SHERIFF'S HEADQUARTERS as he unlocks a gun case and removes four powerful shotguns. He hands three of them to DEPUTIES, keeps one. He cocks it, loads a cartridge and snaps it closed. No words are spoken... Now...

CUT TO

INSIDE A COFFEE SHOP. LATE AFTERNOON. NICK and JESSE sit by the window; her crutches are propped alongside. Neither of them is very animated. Outside it's beginning to snow...

JESSE

(after a pause)

Angie had a baby boy... eight pounds.
(dead silent, then...)

NICK

Why don't you give me a break, Jesse.
Give it a month. We'll go to the coast.
If it doesn't work out, o.k. You go back. But just to leave me like this...

JESSE

(bitter)

How can you say that to me!? You left me a long time ago... Don't you see that?

(eyes misting)

I'm gonna miss you when I go back, Nick. But not any more than I miss you right now.

NICK

(takes her hand)

Jesse... Let's forget about all this. Let's just erase it. Cheyenne, Pittsburgh, everything. Let's just hop in the AX and hit the road. You and me. Right now.

JESSE

We did that once before. When we started this trip I needed you.

(tears now; this is the hardest part)

I don't need you anymore.

(She wipes back the tears, pulls herself together and...)

I wish you were coming back with me.

NICK

You know I'm not goin' back there. And God knows I'm not stayin' here. What am I gonna do?

JESSE

What are you gonna do?

(a silent, thoughtful beat...)

CUT TO

SHERIFF PITTMAN AT THE WHEEL OF HIS PATROL CAR. A DEPUTY rides shotgun. THE SHERIFF is concentrating on the job ahead... his face is stern, determined... his eyes never leave the road as he picks up the radio mike and

SHERIFF

When this happens I want it to happen fast. One big surprise... I'm passing the fork now so you can start your move, Tony.

CUT TO

ANOTHER PATROL CAR parked on the side of the road and as it pulls out we

CUT TO

THE DOOR TO A LADIES ROOM AT THE SIDE OF A GAS STATION. Five twelve-year-old girls bundled in overcoats are gathered outside.

TALLEST GIRL
(knocking on the door)
C'mon, Amy, we all gotta go!

CUT TO

INSIDE THE LADIES ROOM. We're looking down on AMY through a grating high up on the wall near the ceiling. She stands at the mirror adjusting her tiny breasts.

In the background we hear the TALL GIRL knocking but up close we can hear the intimate sound of someone breathing heavily, almost panting and

AMY
(annoyed)
Just a minute, you guys!

CUT TO

SHERIFF PITTMAN AT THE WHEEL and

SHERIFF
(into mike)
Twenty feet...

DEPUTY'S VOICE
(heard over radio)
Ditto.
(and we...)

CUT TO

SHERIFF'S POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD and up ahead we see the GAS STATION where NICK and JESSE stopped the night of the rape and killing. Parked at the pump is a TWELVE-PASSENGER MINI-BUS from the local junior high school and around the bus stand half a dozen boys and girls and the SKINNY STATION OWNER.

CUT TO

HIGH ANGLE OF THE STATION as the TWO SQUAD CARS pull in executing a perfectly timed maneuver. They come to an abrupt stop and before you can say 'bingo' the four uniformed men are out with shotguns at the ready, surrounding the station.

THE SKINNY MAN doesn't know whether to pee or pump gas but the kids are enjoying the action.

CUT TO

SHERIFF PITTMAN moving quickly to the SKINNY MAN and

SHERIFF

(no nonsense)

Where's Billy Dee?

SKINNY MAN

(raising his hands)

I-I-I d-don' know. Out b-back maybe...

SHERIFF

(to the kids)

Get in the bus.

He and a DEPUTY move quietly around either side of the building; the other two DEPUTIES remain in front.

CUT TO

HIGH ANGLE OF THE LADIES ROOM seen through the grating as the TALL GIRL stands in the stall and pulls up her pants and

CUT TO

EXTREME CLOSEUP SIDE ANGLE OF A MAN'S FACE... greasy, sweating, panting. It's cold enough so we can actually see his breath. His eyes bulge as he stares through the air vent grating and OFF CAMERA we hear a toilet flushing and

CUT TO

SHERIFF PITTMAN AND THE DEPUTY moving cautiously around the station and

CUT TO

SHERIFF'S POV and ahead of him is the DEPUTY rounding the corner to the back of the station... they are facing each other, moving closer. Dead center between them is a half-opened door leading to a darkened storage area.

THE TWO UNIFORMED MEN stop at either side of the door and as quickly and silently as a cat SHERIFF PITTMAN jumps into the doorway, gun ready and leveled for fire and

CUT TO

INSIDE THE STORAGE ROOM. Against the opposite wall, balanced precariously on a stack of empty oil drums is the large TATTOOED MAN, his back to camera, his right hand obviously working away at his groin. He's so lost in his fantasy that he's unaware of the SHERIFF'S approach...

CUT TO

THE SAME EXTREME CLOSEUP SIDE SHOT AS BEFORE of the man's panting, sweating, greasy face. He's on the verge of a glorious climax when

KEEEEEEEERRRRRRRAAAAAASHSHSHSHSHS!!!!

AND ABRUPTLY HIS FACE DROPS FROM FRAME, HIS NOSE CATCHING ON THE LEDGE OF THE VENT AS HE FALLS AND

CUT TO

A WIDER ANGLE OF THE ROOM as the TATOOED MAN comes crashing down in a sprawling, flailing motion amidst half a dozen oil drums and the sound is deafening as the man desperately scrambles to his feet, or tries to, but falls again and suddenly freezes when he looks up and

CUT TO

THE TATOOED MAN, blood spilling from his split-open nose and

TATOOED MAN

(nasal)

What the fuck???

SHERIFF

Move and you're dead...

TATOOED MAN

Hey, bullshit man...

But the SHERIFF cocks his gun and suddenly it's all very serious. The TWO DEPTUIES from the front of the station rush up behind the SHERIFF, look into the room and

CUT TO

THE TATOOED MAN, wide-eyed as a final oil drum bounces onto his head and on that we

CUT TO

THE HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. NICK and JESSE walk somberly to her room.

NURSE

(passes them)

Tomorrow's the big day, huh Jesse?

(Jesse smiles)

Oh, there are two men waiting for you in your room.

(walks off)

NICK

Jesse, wait. Let's not go in there.

JESSE

(without stopping)

Why not? All my stuff's in there.

She walks toward her room, NICK just a step behind and as they enter they stop short because there on the bed sit DETECTIVES BULGATI & SHOEMAN!

BULGATI

Hello, Nick.

(smiles his most radiant
woman-killer smile)

You must be Jesse.

JESSE

Who're you?

CUT TO

POLICE STATION ENTRANCE as BULGATI strides in followed by JESSE, then NICK, then SHOEMAN. They're moving quickly. NICK is nervous. If they'd slow down for just a minute he'd ask them what the hell is going on but they keep marching... into a doorway, past a receptionist and

CUT TO

INSIDE CHIEF KIRTCHKE'S OFFICE as the four enter. Already in the room are THE CHIEF, SHERIFF PITTMAN and DUKE WALLIS. DUKE walks to JESSE and

DUKE

(warmly, taking
Jesse's hand)

Hello, Jesse.

JESSE

(she doesn't like him)

Hi. What is all this?

KIRTCHKE

(puffing on a
big cigar)

We're sorry to do this so unexpectedly but there was no way to avoid it... We think we've apprehended the man who attacked you, Jesse.

(referring to
the Detectives)

Gentlemen?

SHOEMAN

Would you mind coming with us for just a moment? We'd like to ask you a few questions in private.

JESSE hesitates, nervous, then BULGATI and SHOEMAN lead her through another door. NICK starts to follow...

DUKE

Would you mind staying with us, Nick?

NICK turns back to the room; DUKE is staring intently out the window.

NICK looks from face to face. No one speaks; no one moves...

CUT TO

INSIDE THE OTHER ROOM as the DETECTIVES dump the paper bag of alien objects onto a piece of typing paper.

BULGATI

I want you to think carefully. Take your time and see if you can't recognize any of these items...

JESSE

(picks up the roach clip)

This one. It belongs to Nick.

BULGATI and SHOEMAN exchange a glance, then...

SHOEMAN

I'd like you to think back to the incident. I know you don't remember much from that night but think back to the last thing you remember before you woke up in the hospital...

CUT TO

KIRTCHKE'S OFFICE. Silence hangs in the air like a death sentence. Then...

NICK

(reluctantly)

Hey, Duke. What's this all about?

CUT TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. He stares for a long beat out the window at the setting sun. The orange glow reflects in his eyes much like the embers of the campfire... finally...

DUKE

We know who killed my son, Nick.
(dead silence)

A long beat as NICK looks from face to face... then...

KIRTCHKE

Now it's up to Jesse to point the finger.

NICK

(nervous, his mouth dry)

Why Jesse? I mean...
(no one responds)

DUKE STARES OUT THE WINDOW.

KIRTCHKE PUFFS THOUGHTFULLY ON HIS CIGAR.

THE POKER-FACED SHERIFF STARES SILENTLY AT NICK.

TENSION NOW AS WE...

CUT TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. As he speaks he looks only out the window at the setting sun, never at NICK...

DUKE

(with great restraint)

I don't want Jesse to know this, Nick, because I don't want to shake her up. But the man who killed my son is in this police station... right now... as I speak. And if she doesn't tell us who he is by the end of the day we'll have to turn him loose...

(more difficult)

and if we turn him loose I'm going to be stuck with a murder rap by tomorrow morning because... because he won't live to see the sunrise.

NICK

(too quickly)

She doesn't remember anything from that night...

DUKE

Let's hope you're wrong.

NICK

But even if she remembers... How would she know who... I mean...

(he looks quickly
at all the faces
in the room...)

I mean how could she...

(he's frantic now)

DUKE turns to NICK, his eyes cold and piercing. NICK trembles... he's on the verge of blurting out the truth when

KIRTCHKE

What happened is this, son. At least this is the hypothesis... We found some foreign particles of blood and strands of hair on Conrad's clothing which we assumed belonged to the assailant. We've since learned that

(MORE)

KIRTCHKE (CONT'D)

they belong to Jesse which says pretty clearly that one man committed both crimes.

THIS HITS NICK LIKE A TON OF BRICKS AND WE WATCH HIS FACE IN CLOSEUP AS

KIRTCHKE (CONT.)

The suspect is a fella name of Billy Dee Ames. He works at the gas station where you stopped the night of the crime. His partner tells us he never left but we're hoping Jesse'll tell us different.

(he lights his
dead cigar)

SHERIFF

He's got a rap sheet a mile long. Mostly drugs. This oughta put him in the electric chair.

KIRTCHKE

(with a big
puff of smoke)

Anyway, we figure he was probably on drugs when he raped your wife - if he raped your wife - and when he came high-tailin' into town he smashed into this car...

(hands Nick a photo
of the dented blue
station wagon)

...and the only witness was Conrad.

NICK takes the photo. All color has drained from his face. His hand trembles, shaking the photo; he quickly sets it back on the desk.

KIRTCHKE (CONT.)

He got out and threatened Conrad and Conrad wasn't a boy to take threats lying down. So a fight started and ol' Billy Dee proceeded to introduce Conrad's head to that brick wall.

SHERIFF

We got us a prime suspect but no evidence. The rain washed his fingerprints clear into Colorado. So the only way we're gonna nail the bastard...

(but he stops short
as the door opens
and we...)

CUT TO

JESSE stepping into the room. BULGATI follows, stops just behind her.

CUT TO

NICK. He stares at her with a peculiar detachment, as though she were a total stranger. In some ways I guess she is...

CUT TO

DUKE watching JESSE intently from across the room, then past her to BULGATI and

CUT TO

BULGATI, still behind JESSE. He lifts his shoulders and spreads his hands in a gesture that says 'who knows?' and

CUT TO

JESSE. CLOSEUP. She is watching NICK with a silent questioning stare... then...

JESSE
You feeling o.k., Nick?

NICK
(he's not)
Yeah! I feel fine.
(he looks around,
forces a laugh)

HOLD FOR A SILENT BEAT... THEN...

KIRTCHKE
Let's go.

CUT TO

A LARGE ROOM WITH A LONG TABLE and along one side of the table are seven folding chairs. We can't see what the chairs are facing. Behind them a door opens and in come the seven people from KIRTCHKE'S office. They are all looking across the room, but we still haven't seen what's there.

BULGATI and SHOEMAN direct JESSE to the center chair and take the two seats to her right; NICK sits on her left; DUKE, KIRTCHKE and THE SHERIFF sit to NICK'S left.

NICK is white as a sheet.

JESSE takes his hand, clutches it tightly; her lips bite together.. a beat... then, the lights dim and we

CUT TO

A SMALL STAGE WITH A CLOSED CURTAIN. The curtain parts and behind it stand six men - one is our large toatooed friend. All of the men, including the accused, look out challengingly at the darkened room. They are a smug, indifferent lot...

CUT TO

JESSE. Frightened. We can see that her eyes are locked on one man. She cocks her head questioningly for a moment, then...

JESSE

I think...

(her eyes grow wide
as the memory returns)

I think... it's him!

NICK momentarily closes his eyes, swallows hard.

BULGATI

Which one, Jesse. Look again and make damn sure. Which one?

JESSE

(buries her head
in Nick's shoulder)

No...

DUKE looks urgently from the lineup to JESSE. He's trembling; a pencil snaps in his hands.

NICK

(to Bulgati)

She's not sure.

BULGATI

Look again, Jesse.

DUKE

(urgently)

Jesse, look at him!

(he stands, grabs
Nick by the arm)

Let her go, Nick.

(he pulls them apart,
leans in between)

Jesse, look at him! Which one!!?

JESSE

(finally looks up)

Second from the left... I've seen him.

(falters)

I think...

(beat)

It's him...

She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes wishing the memory would vanish forever.

CUT TO

DUKE, CLOSEUP, staring face to face with the man who 'killed' his son and even though there's no campfire his eyes burn with hate as

DUKE

(spitting the words)

Get him out.

(screams)

GET HIM OUT!!!

He's trembling, red with rage. The curtain is instantly drawn shut

CUT TO

NICK. CLOSEUP. He looks to DUKE, then to JESSE. He's unable to move, unable to speak... Then he shakes his head and...

NICK

(intense)

Jesse, you'd better be damn sure.

JESSE

(evenly with anger)

I've seen that man, Nick. I know I have!

NICK

Of course you have! So have I! At the gas station. But is he the one? Think, Jesse!! This is murder!

JESSE

What murder!?

DUKE

My son. That man killed my son.

NICK

Jesse, are you absolutely certain? Do you remember that night? Where did we camp? What was I wearing?

(faster)

Where did I go? Why did I leave? What time was it? What day was it?

JESSE

(shakes her head)

I don't believe this, Nick. You're my husband and you're helping that guy!!!?

NICK

Jesse, they're gonna kill that guy!
Understand? This is murder!! We can't
be sure!

DUKE

Yes we can, Nick. I'm sure.

BULGATI

That was a clear identification, Nick.
(tosses roach
clip on table)
She also I.D.'d this. We found it by
Conrad's body. Whoever killed him had
to get it from your campsite.

BULGATI leads JESSE out of the room. SHOEMAN, KIRTCHKE and
THE SHERIFF follow them out.

DUKE remains behind with NICK who still sits in his chair.

NICK

Maybe we could do it a second time.

DUKE considers him for a moment, then, without speaking, walks
out. We follow him through the door but stop when we hear

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)

(shaky)

Duke?

(Duke turns and we...)

CUT TO

NICK. He's standing now and just like at the cemetery his eyes
go immediately to the ground.

NICK (CONT.)

I'm sorry...

(beat, shakes
his head)

I'm sorry... it happened so fast...

I just...

(he's talking about
Conrad)

DUKE goes to him, puts a hand on his shoulder and

DUKE

It's over, Nick. Let's bury it.

CUT TO

INSIDE A BUSY AIRPORT TERMINAL. JESSE purchases her ticket,
checks her bags.

NICK is standing by a pillar. He looks pasty, pale, like a haunted, hunted man expecting at any moment for someone to leap out of thin air and point an accusing finger and shout "IT'S HIM!!"

JESSE approaches from behind and

JESSE
(tapping him on
the shoulder)

All set.

and NICK practically jumps out of his skin. He spins around, catches his breath, stares for a silent moment, then...

JESSE (CONT.)

Sorry.

Without speaking he picks up her bags and

JUMP CUT TO

A CROWDED CORRIDOR IN THE AIRPORT. NICK walks slightly ahead hoping to avoid discussion.

JESSE
I'm gonna worry about you, Nick. I
wish you were coming with me.
(beat)
I wish I thought you'd write.

NICK is walking faster now, as though he were trying to get ahead of the words, but JESSE is keeping up and

JESSE (CONT.)
You never were much with postcards.
(no response)
This is sure a shit way to say goodbye.
(still nothing)
If I were in the air right now it'd
be too soon for you, wouldn't it?

NICK
(over his shoulder)
Will you knock it off?

JESSE
(angry)
I might just leave here hating you.
Is that what you'd like?

NICK stops abruptly, throws the bags on the floor and

NICK
KNOCK IT OFF!!!!

JESSE

Why is it so important that I don't remember anything? Why do you want that tatoced gorilla set free? That is what you want, isn't it?

(Nick picks up the bags,
storms off with Jesse
right behind)

You know what I think? I think you didn't want him caught. Maybe now that Duke's got his revenge he won't need you so much.

(she's getting
out of breath)

Well I'm glad they've got him 'cause maybe now he'll dump you and you can go back to being Nick!

(she's panting now;

Nick is practically running)

He may have lost a son and I may have lost a husband but you've lost a wife and now you might lose him, too. That's it, isn't it? That's why you don't believe me!!!

NICK

(yelling back over
his shoulder)

IT WAS DARK OUT THERE FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!! YOU DON'T REMEMBER A GODDAMN THING!!!

JESSE

IT WAS DUSK!! FOR GOD'S SAKE, NICK!! IT'S HIM!!!!!!

NICK

(drops the bags, whirls
on her screaming)

IT'S HIM! IT'S HIM! IT'S HIM!!!
THAT'S THE THIRD FUCKING TIME YOU'VE
POINTED TO A MAN AND SAID "IT'S HIM!!"
YOU DON'T REMEMBER A GODDAMN THING
BECAUSE ONE OF THOSE (JYS YOU POINTED
TO WAS CONRAD WALLIS!!!!

NICK can't believe he said it... neither can JESSE... NICK stands there for a dazed moment, then, breathing heavily, nodding his head quickly up and down...

NICK (CONT.)

...and what do you think I did about it?

They stand there in a suspended moment of shock and disbelief, oblivious to the staring passersby, dumbstruck at the realization an

CUT TO

THE AX tearing off down the highway...

JESSE'S VOICE (OVER)

Why didn't you tell me, Nick.

NICK'S VOICE (OVER)

Because you pointed Conrad out. Christ, you'd been through enough. I couldn't lay that on you.

CUT TO

THE AX parked at an overlook. JESSE is seated behind the wheel; NICK is slouched in the passenger seat, his feet propped up on the dashboard. They are looking out over a gorgeous vista - open, clear, free...

NICK (CONT.)

Actually, that's not true. I was going to tell you. I tried. Hell, I needed to tell you.

(runs his hand through his hair)

God, you should have seen me those first few days. I needed you so badly, Jesse.

(beat)

Anyway, by the time you could talk it was too late. I'd already gone to see Duke.

(beat)

Y'know, I was going there to tell him about Conrad and the sonofabitch gave me a job. Can you believe that?

(laughs)

Anyway, how would you have felt if I'd told you all this back then? That you pointed Conrad out in the first place.

JESSE

Can you imagine what you put me through by not telling me?

NICK

Yeah. And myself and Duke, too.

JESSE

You didn't put Duke through anything. You helped him...

NICK

He may not see it that way.

JESSE
 (suddenly urgent)
 Let's just hit the road, Nick. Right now. We'll just erase all this. Everything...

NICK
 (studies her)
 You don't really remember who attacked you, do you? I mean really for sure.

JESSE
 (thinks, then slowly shakes her head)
 No...

NICK
 Then how can we leave?

JESSE
 Can't you write him a letter?

NICK
 I tried that once...
 (reaches into the glove compartment, takes out the 'cheat-sheet')
 I even had it memorized.
 (Jesse takes it and as she reads...)

JESSE
 Oh, Nick...
 (and as she read the memories unfold and tears come to her eyes and...)
 Oh, Nick, I could just die.

NICK
 (smiles to himself)
 Don't say that.

CUT TO

INSIDE DUKE'S HOUSE as the family finishes dinner. DUKE has never eaten more heartily...

DUKE
 (mouthful of food)
 ...we're gonna set up a meeting with the A.G. and canvas everyone in the...
 (doorbell)

DUKE stands and

CUT TO

FRONT DOOR OPENING on NICK and JESSE and before they can speak

DUKE (CONT.)

(expansively)

Well goddamn! I thought you were leaving, Jesse. C'mon in! C'mon in!

CUT TO

DINING ROOM as DUKE enters with NICK and JESSE.

DUKE (CONT.)

Jesse, my wife Melanie and this here's Jerry.

MELANIE

(smiles her tight smile)

I thought you two would be gone by now.

DUKE grabs the dinner bell and shakes it loudly over his head.

DUKE

(shouting toward the kitchen)

Two more for dinner!!

NICK starts to speak but DUKE steamrolls right on.

DUKE (CONT.)

We're just finishing up but there's plenty left over.

(slaps Nick on the back)

It's good to see both of you. Have a seat. You'll be pleased to know that guy's close to givin' us a confession. They almost always do under a little pressure.

(Nick and Jesse exchange a glance)

I said it before, Nick. I wish they'd let us be there to pull the lever. Hey, what are the chances of you two staying on for a while?

(Melanie shoots him a disapproving look)

JESSE

(quickly)

We just came to say goodbye and...

THE KITCHEN DOOR SWINGS OPEN and in comes the INDIAN WOMAN. She sets two plates of steak and potatoes in front of NICK and JESSE.

DUKE

Ever eat elk?

(MORE)

DUKE (CONT'D)

(he plunges his fork
into the meat)

Have a taste!

(Nick and Jesse
don't move)

What's the problem?

(silence for a
beat, then...)

JESSE

I think we should go, Nick.

NICK

(smiles at Jesse,
his mouth parched)

I wish I could write a decent letter.

DUKE

(chewing the elk)

Whatcha talking about?

NICK

He won't confess to the charges. Not
the murder charge, anyway...

DUKE

'Course he will! They almost always do.

JESSE

Nick. We've got to go. Let's go.

(she starts to stand
but Nick doesn't budge)

DUKE

What's the rush?

SUDDENLY IT'S SILENT. JESSE looks to NICK; he has that same
haunted, frightened look we saw at the airport...

MELANIE

(very cool, detached)

What is it, Nick?

(sips her coffee)

There is a pause. All eyes are on NICK as he makes a sincere
effort to speak. He glances up to DUKE... concern shows in the
old man's eyes and

DUKE

Nick...? What is it, son?

For a fleeting moment, NICK looks directly into his eyes, then
away again... JESSE bites her lip, looks around desperately...
all eyes are still on NICK as

NICK

I care so much for you, Duke. Like
a father... I love you...

(Melanie forces a
small cough)

DUKE

(embarrassed)

I like you, too, Nick. Hell, you
know how I feel about you.

NICK

I... I...

(but he can't speak)

JESSE

(tears running
down her cheeks)

Nick...

NICK

This... this is harder than I thought.
(a beat, then...)

DUKE MAKES THE MISTAKE OF STANDING AND NICK IS UP LIKE A SHOT,
BACKING AWAY... DUKE APPROACHES AND

NICK (CONT.)

(frightened)

No... stay away.

DUKE stops, cocks his head, then...

NICK (CONT.)

I did it, Duke... I killed him.

FROZEN MOMENT. BEAT... BEAT... BEAT... Disbelief... silence...

DUKE

(nervous laugh)

Who, Nick? You killed who?

NICK

Conrad. I did it.

MELANIE'S hand trembles spilling burning coffee; the cup drops
to the table, shatters... then silence again...

JERRY looks at NICK, nods slowly to himself...

DUKE suddenly breaks the tension, laughs nervously and

DUKE

Hey, Nick. It's o.k. I know Jesse
doesn't remember everything from that
(MORE)

DUKE (CONT'D)
 night but you don't have to do this...
 We've got him, Nick. We'll fry him...

NICK
 (screams)
 DON'T SAY THAT!!!

DUKE is silent, dead serious once again...

DUKE
 Son, you've been through a lot these
 past weeks...

NICK
 I KILLED HIM, GODDAMMIT!! I KILLED HIM!

He's shaking badly now, looking wildly at the faces around the room.

DUKE is a frozen, bewildered statue... He still doesn't understand
 He looks at JESSE who stares back with tears in her eyes, nodding
 to DUKE... yes, it's true...

MELANIE
 (small, shaky voice)
 Call the police, Duke. Please don't...

DUKE
 Shut up!!

DUKE'S FACE IS CHANGING COLOR... RED NOW, AND HE'S TREMBLING
 JUST LIKE NICK.

DUKE (CONT.)
 (raw)
 What the fuck are you doing this for?
 It's impossible!!!

He takes a trembling step towards NICK. NICK steps back, stops
 against the wall...

DUKE (CONT.)
 (bigger)
 I know how much you want Jesse to
 stay, but you've taken this about 47
 steps too far and I don't think it's
 very GODDAMN FUNNY!!!!!!

NICK
 I KILLED HIM, DUKE!!

DUKE
 STOP IT!! LIAR!!
 (slaps him hard)
 YOU COULD SAY THAT 500 TIMES AND I
 WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT!!

SILENCE... BEAT... NICK slowly nods his head...

NICK
 (evenly, with anger)
 O.K.

NICK reaches into his pocket and hands DUKE his tattered
 'cheat-sheet' and

NICK (CONT.)
 Here. You read this. I tried to give
 it to you a long time ago. It's all
 there. Not that it'll make any
 difference. It's like Jerry said.
 All you can see is what Duke wants to
 see. As long as somebody dies it's
 o.k. with you, isn't it? As long as
 somebody FRIES!!!!

And abruptly he pushes DUKE out of the way, walks out with JESSE.
 Hold on DUKE as he watches them go.

MELANIE, still at the table, sobs into her napkin.

JERRY has turned in his chair and is facing his father. There
 are no tears in JERRY'S eyes. He is watching DUKE with a
 calm, knowing look.

DUKE glances up at JERRY, then quickly away. But not for long.
 His eyes gravitate back to his son's and for a moment the two
 lock eyes.

Hold... hold... then DUKE'S lips quiver, his eyes well up and
 just at the very moment we expect a tear he snaps back to his
 defiant anger.

HIS EYES FLARE UP AND HE SPINS VIOLENTLY TOWARD THE WALL,
 SMASHES IT WITH HIS FOREARM SCREAMING "NO!!!!" AND IMMEDIATELY
 WE

CUT TO

A SNOWY DOWNTOWN STREET. VERY LATE AT NIGHT. NOTHING IN SIGHT
 BUT THE AX WHICH SLOWLY APPROACHES AND PARKS OUTSIDE THE POLICE
 STATION.

CUT TO

INSIDE THE AX. NICK removes the keys from the ignition, hands them to JESSE.

NICK

Guess you better take these, huh?

(beat...)

You know I have to do this. If I don't they'll kill that guy.

JESSE nods; her eyes are red. She puts her arms around NICK in a tight embrace and...

JESSE

The other day I said I didn't need you, remember?

(Nick nods. Tears on Jesse's cheeks as...)

I never stopped wanting you.

(Nick smiles, closes his eyes tight and we...)

CUT TO

DUKE'S DEN. He sits at his desk, alone in the large room.

CUT TO

CLOSER ANGLE. DUKE sits at his desk staring at NICK'S 'cheat-sheet'... he doesn't move... Then, he swallows hard... moisture grows in his eyes... he slowly nods his head, blinks and a tear rolls down his cheek.

A long beat, then... he sets the paper on top of the desk beside a 9mm LUGER PISTOL, reaches for a box of bullets, removes one and rolls it very slowly between his thumb and forefinger.

CUT TO

INTERROGATION ROOM. BULGATI is seated at a table opposite NICK and JESSE. No one else is in the room.

BULGATI

That's some story. Feel good to get it out?

(Nic nods)

Who else knows about this?

NICK

Just Duke an' his family.

JESSE

What's gonna happen to the other guy?

BULGATI

I don't really have much choice. I'll have to release him.

(MORE)

BULGATI (CONT'D)

(beat)

Is that the way you want it?

JESSE

(a long pause, then
reluctantly...)

I really don't remember...

BULGATI

Then that's the way it'll have to be.

(to Nick)

Anything else you wanna add to this?

(Nick shakes his head)

O.K. I'm gonna get some forms and
take an official written statement.
I'll be back in a minute.

He leaves. NICK turns to JESSE, gives her a reassuring smile and

NICK

It'll be o.k.

(now...)

CUT TO

DUKE. CLOSEUP. He gently places the single bullet into the
open chamber of the LUGER, calmly raises the gun to his head.
THE CAMERA MOVES IN CLOSER. HE CLOSSES HIS EYES, SQUEEZES THEM
TIGHT AND

RIIINN>NNNNGGGGG!!!!!!

DUKE FLINCHES AS THOUGH THE BULLET HAD JUST PASSED THROUGH HIS
HEAD, THEN

RIIINN>NNNNGGGGG!!!!!!

HE LOWERS THE GUN...

RIIINN>NNNNGGGGG!!!!!!

(beat...)

RIIINN>NNNNGGGGG!!!!!!

SLOWLY HE OPENS HIS EYES, PICKS UP THE PHONE...

DUKE

(calm, half whispered)

Nick...?

(pause, then softly)

You've got him?

(beat)

No, no trouble. Be right down.

As he speaks these last words he reaches for the box of bullets, removes several rounds and begins loading the gun...

CUT TO

OUTSIDE THE POLICE STATION as DUKE pulls up in his black limousine. He steps out into the snowy night and we

CUT TO

NICK'S CHEAT-SHEET. CLOSEUP.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

MELANIE, alone in Duke's study, quietly mouthing the words as she reads. We must sense in her expression both compassion and disbelief. When she gets to a particular spot she stops, closes her eyes and...

JERRY'S VOICE (OVER)

It's true, isn't it?

(Melanie nods)

I'm glad he got away.

(a long pause, then...)

MELANIE

(almost a whisper)

Me too.

(then, after a beat)

JERRY

I came down to see Dad. Where is he?

(and on that we...)

CUT TO

THE DOOR TO THE INTERROGATION ROOM WHICH OPENS TO FRAME DUKE WALLIS. His hair is matted from the snow which melts and runs down his face.

For a moment he and NICK just stare at each other. Then...

DUKE

I read it, Nick.

BULGATI

I don't know if any of this is true, Duke. We'll have to check it out.

DUKE

(without taking
his eyes off Nick)

It's true.

(beat)

I wish it hadn't happened this way, Nick.

NICK

You always said you hoped the police'd get me first. For my sake, remember?

DUKE

That was before.

NICK

You also said 'a man's gotta live with himself.'

DUKE

(closes the door,
steps closer)

If he lives.

(beat)

I thought you'd left town. Thought I'd never see you again. After what's happened I couldn't live with that.

(pulls out the gun)

NICK AND JESSE SIT BOLT UPRIGHT AS

BULGATI

Put it away, Duke.

DUKE

A man's gotta live with himself, right, Nick? Do you realize you've ruined my career? As a politician, that is. I've never had to see things any way but my own. This time I can't do that.

(beat)

But I've worked hard for the DA's office and I'd kinda like to keep it. You see if you go through with this I'll have to resign 'cause I'll want you to have the best damn lawyer there is... and that's me. So I've got no choice but to run you two outa town.

NICK and JESSE stare wide-eyed, not knowing what to make of this...

DUKE (CONT.)

Give me your gun, Vince.

(he does and Duke

motions to the door)

Care to lead the parade?

CUT TO

OUTSIDE THE POLICE STATION. It's still snowing. Chilly and quiet as the four figures make their way down the block toward the AX.

NICK

Duke, I...

DUKE

You don't have any choice, Nick.
Hop in before I change my mind.

JESSE

(looks up at Duke, smiles)
I really never thought I'd do this.

and immediately she throws her arms around him, gives him a big kiss and jumps into the AX.

NICK stares into DUKE'S eyes for a moment, then embraces him warmly.

DUKE folds his arms around NICK and they hold each other close. Snow gathers on their hair and clothing...

A beat... then, NICK hops into the AX and...

DUKE

It's not-gonna be the same around here.

NICK

(smiles)
Just as well!

NICK fires up the engine and DUKE watches as the red taillights of the AX bounce and flicker down the snow-covered street.

The large rear spotlight winks on and off twice saying 'goodbye.'

DUKE stands in the snow, his overcoat sagging, his hands hanging at his sides... he looks tired...

DUKE

-(peaceful smile)
I guess this is the end of politics
for me, Vince.

BULGATI reaches into his pocket, removes NICK'S confession, tears it in half. hands it to DUKE.

BULGATI

If this is true I'd have done the same thing. Nobody's gonna hear about this.

DUKE

(smiles)
That's not what I meant.

BULGATI

(shakes his head)
Politicians are all crazy, you know that?

DUKE

(shrugs)

I guess everyone's got a right to their
own point of view.

(smiles bigger)

Even you.

BULGATI

I'm freezin' my ass off!

DUKE PUTS AN ARM AROUND BULGATI'S SHOULDER AND LEADS HIM OFF,
AWAY FROM CAMERA. AS THE TWO MEN WALK INTO THE FALLING SNOW
WE SLOWLY...

PULL BACK TO

THE SKYLINE OF CHEYENNE, WYOMING. IT'S THAT QUIET MOMENT JUST
BEFORE DAWN WHEN EVERYTHING IS BATHED IN AN AMBIENT BLUE GLOW.

IN THE DISTANCE THE ALASKAN EXPRESS PULLS UP ONTO THE FREEWAY.
CREDITS ROLL AND SLOWLY, VERY SLOWLY, WE

FADE OUT