

PALMER

By

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EXT. SOUTHERN ROAD - LATE DAY

A BUS travels down a desolate stretch of land, passing farms, fields and a few small homes...

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

EDDIE PALMER, mid 30s, spent behind his years, stares vacantly out the grimy window...

EXT. TOWN - MAIN STREET - MINUTES LATER

The bus drives off, leaving Palmer behind, duffle bag in hand. Palmer looks around the town--not much to it--a BAR, POST OFFICE, BANK, MARKET, and a GAS STATION. Taped to the store front windows are posters of RIVERSIDE REBELS HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL. Palmer sparks a cigarette, starts walking...

EXT. ROAD / VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LATE DAY

Palmer walks down a dirt road and focuses on a small, neglected RANCH HOUSE. In the driveway is a beat up Chevy. Next door, is a run-down trailer house, in desperate need of repairs. A red pick-up truck in front.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - PORCH - EARLY EVENING

A loud KNOCK. Inside, a COUGH is heard. Relentless. Hacking.

VIVIAN (O.S.)
I heard, ya. I'm coming.

Palmer stands waiting, uncomfortable, until finally --

VIVIAN PALMER, late 70s, appears through the screen door, in worn slippers and black sweatpants. An old navy cardigan clings to her unhealthy frame. She stares at her grandson for what seems like forever.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
Well there you are...

She pushes open the screen door. Greets Palmer with a hug.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
Good Lord, look at you... Get in here.

PALMER
How you doin', gran?

VIVIAN
I'm livin'... Gettin' old ain't for the weary.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

They enter. The room is old. Tidy. The furniture, relics. A television plays to no one. Framed photographs collect dust. A much younger Vivian. A YOUNG BOY in her grasp. A MAN, looking strikingly similar to Palmer. Vivian crosses the room to the kitchen, checks on food.

VIVIAN
I thought you was gettin' in
earlier?

PALMER
The bus was late.

Palmer takes in the house. It's been a long time.

VIVIAN
I would'a picked you up in town,
but they won't let me drive no
more. Took out too many darn curbs,
or something or another. It's good
to see you.

PALMER
Good to see you, too, gran.

Vivian faces Palmer who watches her. Her arthritic fingers bring a nub of a cigarette to her angry lips--

VIVIAN
I straightened up your room. Put
some things in the closet. Why
don't you wash up. I made a
casserole. I'll fix you a plate.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - PALMER'S BEDROOM - EARLY EVENING

Palmer drops his bag on the bed. The room is lonely, stale looking. A faded RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL STATE CHAMPS POSTER is tacked to the wood paneling. In the corner is a banged up guitar. An old, worn baseball cap rests on a dresser, next to it is a small PINK PLASTIC SHOE and an empty candy wrapper. Palmer examines the room, football trophies, the guitar, exhales as--

Muffled voices are heard outside. Palmer looks out the open window and sees:

SHELLY, barely 30, long wet blond hair, rail thin, sitting on the front step of the trailer, in a bath towel. She takes a drag off her cigarette, points with her bare foot... Sitting next to her is a CHILD playing with BARBIE DOLLS.

SHELLY

That one right there, she's my
favorite, 'cause I like her pretty
hair...

Palmer sees the child: SAM, 7, a small boy, delicate
features. Sam hands Shelly one of the Barbie Dolls.

SAM

This one!

SHELLY

Yup, you also have pretty hair.

Seconds later the screen door bangs open, and her boyfriend,
JERRY, older, plows out, practically knocking Shelly over.

JERRY

You take my wallet?

SHELLY

Yeah. I stole it cause there's so
much money in it.

JERRY

Fuck off, bitch.

Jerry shoots her a hostile stare, then disappears back inside
the trailer, cursing loudly. Making a racket.

SHELLY

Real nice, Jerry... Asshole.

Palmer stares at Shelly and the boy closely, not sure what to
make of either, then exits.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Palmer walks in. A plate is on the table. Vivian is at the
stove. Through the open window we can hear Shelly and Jerry
yelling at one another. A moment later, Jerry's loud truck
drives off. Vivian shakes her head, angry.

VIVIAN

Better get used to that noise. I
swear, if it wasn't for that poor
boy, I'd kick her right out of that
trailer... You want some sweet tea?

PALMER

Yes, please.

Palmer sits down at the table. Vivian grabs a pitcher and
pours tea into a glass. Places it in front of Palmer.

PALMER (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Palmer takes a thirsty sip. Vivian fills his plate with casserole. Sits down across from Palmer.

VIVIAN

Go ahead and eat.

She shoves the plate at him. Palmer forces down a bite.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

I imagine it's gonna take some
gettin' used to.

PALMER

Yup. I was gonna stop by Lee's
tomorrow. See if maybe he had any
work.

VIVIAN

That's a good idea. He's doin' real
well, too. Opened up another
location in Hammond...

Beat. Palmer nods.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

You jus' gotta get yourself back
out there. Tha's all. Can't be
feelin' sorry for yourself.

PALMER

No, ma'am.

Vivian unsteadily pushes herself out of the chair.

VIVIAN

And I go to church every Sunday. If
you're living here, so will you.

CU on Palmer. His face tells us, "he's back."

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Palmer finishes brushing his teeth, cleans his toothbrush thoroughly, he grabs his toothpaste, about to carry both out (force of habit), then he stops, opens the medicine cabinet to store them. His eyes land on prescription bottles lining the bottom shelf. A beat, as-- Palmer places the toothbrush and toothpaste on the top shelf. Shuts the medicine cabinet.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - HALL / LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Palmer exits the bathroom and hears the loud TV. Vivian sits in her chair, cigarette in hand, laughing at the screen. Palmer disappears into his bedroom. Shuts the door. Vivian looks up, then returns her attention to the TV.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - PALMER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Palmer enters his room. He plucks at the strings on his banged up guitar. Too depressed to play. He sits on the bed. Scoops up a photograph on his bedside table. Eyes it closely. CU of photo. A teenage Palmer, 17/18, stands beside a young Daryl and Coles. His right leg in a cast. A can of beer in hand. Palmer tosses it aside. Lies in bed. Unable to sleep.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

The sun beats down. We hear movement inside the house...

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME

Palmer enters the kitchen. Vivian stares inside the open pantry closet--

VIVIAN

I swear I had a can of tomato soup
in here. You take it?

PALMER

No, ma'am.

Vivian moves to a cupboard, searches through it.

VIVIAN

You get some sleep?

PALMER

Some... That old Chevy work?

VIVIAN

It works. Not much gas in it.

PALMER

You mind if I use it?

VIVIAN

Nope. Just be careful drivin'.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Palmer scoops up the keys. The front door SLAMS. Vivian looks back and notices her wallet.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Palmer walks to the Chevy, sparks a cigarette. He gets behind the wheel of the car, drives off.

INT. PAROLE OFFICE - DAY

Palmer sits opposite a PAROLE OFFICER, who writes in a file. On the wall is a LOUISIANA State emblem.

PAROLE OFFICER
Where you livin'?

PALMER
One twenty-one Twin Road.

The Parole Officer writes it down. Picks up another paper--

PAROLE OFFICER
You know the conditions of your parole?
(reading--)
You're not to leave the state for any reason. No use or possession of any controlled substances of any kind. No use or possession of firearms, weapons of any kind. You'll obey all laws, municipal, county, state, and federal. You'll submit to drug testing and check in every two weeks. And you'll get a job. Any questions?

PALMER
No, sir.

PAROLE OFFICER
A'right. Good luck.

The Parole Officer makes another mark and closes the folder.

EXT. ROAD / LEE'S FARM EQUIPMENT, INC. - DAY

A warehouse building faces a long stretch of road. A sign reads: LEE'S FARM EQUIPMENT. Outside on the grass are TRACTORS, PULL MACHINES and various other EQUIPMENT. The Chevy parks along a line of pickup TRUCKS. Palmer, a bit nervous, steps out of the Chevy.

EXT. ROAD / LEE'S FARM EQUIPMENT, INC. - MOMENTS LATER

Palmer stands talking to a MAN, around his age. Whatever is being said to Palmer has him nodding his head. The Man finishes then shakes Palmer's hand.

Palmer walks back to the Chevy, disappointed.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

The Chevy pulls into town. Palmer exits the Chevy, steps onto the sidewalk, escaping the hot sun. Palmer walks past a few shops with little interest, then sees a PAWN SHOP. He stares at the window. Closely eyeing a TAYLOR GS MINI MAHOGANY GUITAR, in mint condition.

He moves on. Outside the POST OFFICE is a community board littered with flyers. CARS FOR SALE. BIBLE LESSONS. HORNETS BAKE SALE. Palmer sees a job listing: JANITOR NEEDED. He sighs, turns away. His eyes fall on a bar across the street--

INT. BAR - DAY

Air conditioning blows from a dirty window unit. Country music plays from a jukebox. Palmer takes a seat at the bar. A sign reads: THIS IS A SMOKING BAR. The BARTENDER, owner of the place, approaches.

BARTENDER

What can I get you?
(at closer inspection--)
Eddie?

Palmer nods. The Bartender stares at him. It's been a while and the last time he saw him...

BARTENDER (CONT'D)

Well...you're finally legal.

He puts a glass in front of Palmer and fills it with bourbon.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)

It's on the house.

INT. BAR - BATHROOM - HOURS LATER

Palmer, drunk, pees into the urinal. He catches his reflection in the mirror. A long reflective beat.

INT. BAR - EARLY EVENING

Palmer exits the bathroom. A MAN, Palmer's age, grease stained clothes, occupies his stool. Another MAN, hyper, sits next to him. Palmer watches them for a beat. Walks over.

PALMER

You mind, pal. I was sitting there.

The man, DARYL REED, turns, ready for a fight.

DARYL
What the fuck you say?

His friend, NED, sees Palmer and--

NED
Holy shit. Fuckin' Palmer.

DARYL
When the fuck you get out?! Why the hell didn't you call me?

Daryl gives Palmer a big hug. Nothing but love. Ned sits, smiling, excited.

DARYL (CONT'D)
Man, it's good to see you... Ned get the fuck up.

Ned moves. Palmer takes the seat.

DARYL (CONT'D)
Ya should'a let me know you was comin' home. I would'a thrown you a goddamn party.

PALMER
Yeah... who would've shown up?

DARYL
Fuck if I know. Dumbass Ned.

NED
Of course I would've.

DARYL
See? And the last few times I called you, bro, I never heard back.

PALMER
Yeah, sorry, man.

DARYL
A'right. No big deal. You're here now.

NED
It's like old times.

DARYL
Yeah, Ned still lives at home with his momma.

NED

I got no reason to leave. She does my laundry.

DARYL

See. Pathetic.

PALMER

(to Daryl)

You still on that second marriage?

NED

Barely.

DARYL

Hell. I don't know what the hell I was thinkin'. Got an eight-year-old, a three-year-old. And Darlene's still kickin' me in the nuts every chance she gets.

PALMER

How's Jake doin'?

DARYL

He's fifteen now. If you can believe that. Playin' football. You ought'a come to a game, man, see him play. My boy's a bad ass.

(pause)

You know your TD record was only broke a few years back by some freshman.

PALMER

No shit. How many he throw?

DARYL

Thirty-seven.

COLES, 30s, belly hanging over his regulation police uniform, walks in. He stops at the sight of Palmer. Happy and nervous.

COLES

Holy cow, look who it is. When'd you get out?

PALMER

A few days ago.

An uncomfortable hug. More so for Coles.

PALMER (CONT'D)
(off his uniform)
Looks good on you.

COLES
You know my daddy, not like I had a
choice... It's good to see you. You
staying at Vivian's?

PALMER
Yeah. For now.

COLES
If you need anything, you let me
know, alright? I mean that.
Anything?

He holds Palmer's stare--Palmer nods.

DARYL
I need somethin'. I need your old
man to stop giving me goddamn
speeding tickets!

COLES
I don't wanna hear it! C'mon, Ned.
Let's get a game in before the wife
calls. You're next, Palmer.

Ned follows Coles to a POOL TABLE. Daryl rises from his
stool, looks at Palmer, shakes his head, grinning--

DARYL
I gotta take a leak... Man, I'm
glad you're back.

Daryl walks off. Palmer finishes his beer. He sits there
alone and feels every bit of it.

The door opens, and Shelly enters. Her hair, make-up and
clothes looking pretty.

BARTENDER
What do you want?

SHELLY
I want my nails done and my ass
waxed, what do you think I want?
Gimme a Jim and coke.

The Bartender walks off, annoyed. Shelly notices Palmer.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
 You're Vivian's grandson, ain't ya?
 (off Palmer's silence)
 What's the matter, handsome, you
 don't talk?

PALMER
 No, I don't.

INT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - LATER - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shelly and Palmer are ripping each other's clothes off as they stumble towards Shelly's bedroom. They fall onto her bed and Palmer hungrily tries to remove her bra and panties.

SHELLY
 Hey, slow down, honey... Jesus, you
 really did jus' get out'a prison.

INT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - BEDROOM - DAY

Sun streams through dirty plastic blinds. Palmer wakes. Hungover. No idea where he is. He sees Shelly's naked body next to him. He grabs his smokes off a cluttered dresser and pops one into his mouth. Palmer lights it, steps out of bed, naked. He slips into his jeans. Shelly stirs, rolling over, as... Palmer leaves the room.

INT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Palmer walks past a couch and coffee table. His eyes land on a can of CAMPBELL'S TOMATO SOUP, spoon in it, on the floor.

EXT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

The screen door slams behind Palmer. He stares at the Chevy, parked haphazardly in Vivian's front yard. He stops to zip up his fly. The cigarette dangling from his lips.

He looks up and sees... Vivian and Sam staring right at him. They hang clothes on a backyard line. Palmer locks eyes with Vivian. She watches him disappear inside the house--

VIVIAN
 Sam, hand me that shirt.

Sam grabs a shirt from a basket. They continue hanging clothes.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - PALMER'S ROOM - MORNING

Vivian, dressed in church clothes, barges into Palmer's darkened bedroom. Palmer is passed out under the sheets. Vivian roughly pulls open the shades--

VIVIAN
We're leaving in fifteen minutes.

INT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - MORNING

Sam emerges. He wears a dress shirt, tiny tan shorts and red cowboy boots. He goes to his mother who sits slumped on the couch, smoking. He hands her a Barbie Doll with a missing foot.

SAM
Why can't I take her to church?

SHELLY
'Cause she needs to keep me company. I'm all by myself.

Shelly takes a drag off her cigarette. Examines the doll.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
You know who this dolly looks like?

Shelly sits up, straightens the doll's bright pink dress, fixes its blond hair.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
Hello, Miss Teen Honey Bee?

SAM
You!

Sam smiles, wide.

SHELLY
That's right... And I wore a dress just as pretty and pink as this. And my hair was done up jus' as gorgeous as hers. And I was wearing the most beautiful pair of shoes. Although, I had both my feet.

Sam giggles. He loves this story.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
And I walked onto that stage, lookin' so smart and special. And whose name did them judges call?

SAM
Yours!

SHELLY
Tha's right.

Shelly smiles. Sam stares at his mother, proud. Shelly puts the doll down, fixes Sam's collar. A car HORN is heard--

SHELLY (CONT'D)

A'right. Miss future Teen Honey
Bee's gonna stay here with me. And
you go get your church on...

Sam gives his mother a big hug and runs out the door, happy.

INT. CHEVY - CONTINUOUS

Palmer is behind the wheel. Engine running. Vivian is in the passenger seat. THRU the windshield we see Sam run towards the car, as--

VIVIAN

Hurry up Sam, don't make us late!
You're in the backseat, today.

Sam hops in the backseat. Shuts the door. Palmer drives off--

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

Sam, this is my grandson, Eddie.
He'd prefer you call him Palmer,
even though Eddie's a much nicer
name.

SAM

I like the name Palmer.
(to Palmer)
You had a sleep over with my momma
and you didn't wear no pajamas.

Vivian looks at Palmer.

VIVIAN

A last name should be used as a
last name, not a first.

SAM

Maybe he doesn't like his first
name.

PALMER

Not really.

SAM

See! I told you, Miss Vivian.

VIVIAN

I ain't into arguing, Sam. Now roll
that window up. It took me two
hours to do my hair.

Sam giggles and rolls it up.

SAM
You got your hair up high today.

VIVIAN
What hair I got left.

Sam leans forward, looks down at her hair.

SAM
Don't worry - I can't hardly see
the bald spot. It looks real
pretty.

He sits back down. Vivian looks pleased.

VIVIAN
Thank you, Sam.

Sam smiles up at Palmer in the rear view mirror. Palmer turns back to the road.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Sam leads Vivian and Palmer to their usual pew. A few whispers and curious eyes follow Palmer. Vivian proudly says her hellos. She reintroduces Palmer, who clearly is uncomfortable.

We see Daryl with his YOUNGER WIFE, another YOUNG CHILD, and 8 year-old boy TOBY, who kicks at the back of the pew. Daryl smacks Toby in the head. He stops. Coles sits next to his pretty wife, LUCILLE, and daughter EMILY, 7, in a pink dress, who exchanges a smile and wave with Sam.

Palmer, grateful to be seated, catches a glimpse of Ned, looking miserable, alongside his older MOTHER.

EXT. CHURCH - YARD - AFTERNOON

The congregation is enjoying a picnic. Vivian is among those doling out the food. Sam, happy, runs off with Emily. Toby runs around with other BOYS, throwing a football.

Palmer stands off by himself. Smoking. Coles walks over--

COLES
How you doin'?

PALMER
A'right.

COLES
It must feel weird being back.

PALMER
Sure does.

COLES
Not much has changed, it's still
all about church and football. They
did put in a fancy new coffee shop.
No one seems to visit it though.

COLES SENIOR, an intimidating older gentleman, approaches,
unfriendly.

COLES SENIOR
Hello, Eddie. Heard they let you
out...

PALMER
Yes, sir. Good behavior.

COLES SENIOR
(scoffs, sarcastic--)
Good behavior. Well, if you're
smart, you'll keep it that way.

He shoots Palmer another unfriendly look, then turns to his
son, equally unhappy--

COLES SENIOR (CONT'D)
You take care of fixing that sign?

COLES
Yeah, Pop, did it yesterday.

Coles Senior, still unhappy, walks off.

COLES (CONT'D)
Sorry 'bout that. He hasn't
changed.

PALMER
I would've been surprised if he
hadn't come over.

Coles smiles, then it fades as he grows serious--

COLES
Look, I jus' wanted to say I
should'a visited, or at least sent
you a letter... I should'a been a
better friend.

PALMER

Forget it. You did what you had to do... What's done is over.

Daryl wanders over. Ned along with him.

DARYL

What's going on?
(stops, off Sam)
Christ. There is something seriously wrong with that kid.

Palmer turns and sees Sam twirl, very dramatically. Emily claps. Palmer clocks Sam, as Sam keeps at it--

NED

(to Coles)
He could be your kid. You had a piece of his momma, didn't ya?

Ned cackles. Coles shoves Ned. Looks to see where his wife is.

COLES

Why you gotta be so stupid?!
Besides, that was before I was married.

NED

No, it wasn't.

Daryl's son, JAKE, 15, walks past without acknowledging Daryl.

DARYL

What, too big a football star these days to say hello to your old man?

JAKE

No, sir.

Daryl's EX-WIFE, DARLEEN, 30s, is right behind Jake.

DARLEEN

Leave him be, Daryl.
(to Jake--)
C'mon, let's go...

They move past Daryl. The guys stand, uncomfortable, as--

DARYL

What, a guy can't talk to his son?!

DARLEEN
(while leaving)
You're four months behind, Daryl.
Four months!

Daryl notices people staring. Embarrassed, he stalks off.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LATE DAY

Palmer opens Vivian's car door and helps her out. She hands Sam a plastic container of food.

VIVIAN
You give this to your momma. Make
sure she eats some. It'll keep a
week.

SAM
Yes, ma'am.

He takes the container and hugs Vivian.

VIVIAN
Sweet boy.

Sam turns to Palmer and hugs him. Palmer stands frozen in his grip, uncomfortable.

SAM
See ya, Palmer.

Sam runs off into his trailer.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - DUSK

Palmer sits on the porch, drinking a beer, in his lap is the local newspaper. He circles a HELP WANTED listing. He hears laughter. He looks up and sees Shelly exit her house with Jerry. They hop in his red truck and drive away.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Palmer exits his room, moves to the kitchen, fills a glass with orange juice. Drinks it down. Vivian sits on the couch, using a magnifying glass to read the newspaper. Palmer enters. He grabs the car keys, about to head out the door.

VIVIAN
I need some things from the market.

She holds out a grocery list. Palmer is about to walk away.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

Hold on. Let me give you some money.

Palmer waits, embarrassed. Vivian hands Palmer money. He exits.

INT. GROCERY MART - LATER

Palmer waits as the FEMALE CLERK rings up his groceries. His eyes glance to a sign: COUNTER MAN NEEDED. He looks interested.

FEMALE CLERK

You want an application?

PALMER

Yes, ma'am. Sure.

She pulls an application out from under her stand when the MANAGER interrupts them.

MANAGER

That position was filled this morning.

OFF Palmer's look. These two know each other.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Hi, Eddie. How you doing?
(noticing the sign)
I forgot to take this down.

The Manager removes the sign and walks off, leaving the Female Clerk awkwardly holding the application.

FEMALE CLERK

Sorry, I thought they was still hiring.

Palmer nods, remains quiet, as she hands him the groceries.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Palmer enters, carrying two brown bags. Vivian sits facing the TV. Sam stands behind her, brushing her hair. Beside the couch is a small, pink, beat-up SUITCASE.

VIVIAN

His momma run out again. He'll be staying with us 'til she's back.

Sam holds up a mirror to Vivian's face.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
I think I need a 'lil color.

Palmer watches Sam grab Vivian's makeup bag off the floor and hand it to her. Sam once again holds up the mirror as Vivian applies bright red lipstick to her lips. Palmer heads to the kitchen to put the groceries away, as--

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
You're gonna have to sleep out on the couch while Sam's here. He gets your bed at night.

SAM
I don't mind the couch, Miss Vivian. I sleep on it at home.

VIVIAN
A boy your age should sleep in a bed.

SAM
I don't mind. I can watch TV.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - PALMER'S BEDROOM - EVENING

The closet door is open. A large box is filled with items from Palmer's past. BOOKS. CLOTHES. DVDs. GUITAR PICKS. A LSU TIGERS FOOTBALL JERSEY. OLD PHOTOS. Palmer sorts through it.

There's a knock. The door opens. Sam stands in the doorway, holding two Barbie dolls. He looks at Palmer. Tentative. Then enters. Sam noses through Palmer's belongings, irritating Palmer. Then Sam hops the Barbie dolls along the dresser.

SAM
My friend Emily gave these to me. Every time she gets a new doll, I get her old ones. Her dog chewed this one.

He holds up the doll with the missing foot.

SAM (CONT'D)
It's still good, though. She jus' has to hop a lil'.

He hops the doll across the bed. A cute laugh escapes him.

PALMER
You know you're a boy, right?

Sam nods.

PALMER (CONT'D)
Boys don't play with dolls.

SAM
Well, I'm a boy. And I do. So,
you're wrong.

Sam shoots him a look. He fusses with the guitar--

SAM (CONT'D)
This guitar is broke--

PALMER
Don't touch that.

Sam keeps at it, and the guitar falls over--

PALMER (CONT'D)
Get out'a here!

Sam runs out of the room. Palmer SLAMS the door.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Palmer barely touches his food as he drinks a beer. Sam watches him curiously, then--

SAM
Miss Vivian?

Vivian looks at Sam. He motions to his Barbie doll, with the one missing foot that is propped on the seat next to him. Vivian places a saucer down.

VIVIAN
There you go.

Sam places a piece of food on it. Palmer kills his beer.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
So when you gonna give me the rest
of the change from the mart? I was
short.

Palmer holds her look. Anger visible. She says nothing. Waits for her change. Palmer rises and grabs change and a receipt off the counter. He SMACKS both down in front of her.

PALMER
Count it.

VIVIAN
I don't need to count it. It's
short!

Palmer separates the dollar bills.

PALMER

Twelve dollars. And thirteen cents.

Vivian looks down at the cash. Crisp bills. It's possible she miscounted. She looks across the table and sees Sam watching.

VIVIAN

Sam, eat your supper.

Vivian returns to her meal without an apology. Palmer just stares at her -- then exits.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A FOOTBALL GAME plays on the TV. The Bartender collects a tip. SIBS, early 60s, Black, sits on a stool, finishing a drink, watching the game. Palmer enters, takes a seat at the bar. Sibs gives Palmer a nod. The Bartender walks over to Palmer. Sets a small glass on the bar. Starts to fill it with bourbon.

PALMER

You kiddin' me with that glass?
C'mon... Pour up.

The Bartender, against his better judgment, does as he's told. Sibs catches the exchange as he rises and exits...

BARTENDER

Night, Sibs.

SIBS

Night.

EXT. TOWN - NIGHT

Palmer relieves himself against the alley. Finished, he walks towards the Post Office. He stares drunkenly at the community board. One notecard in particular: JANITOR NEEDED.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Sam, dressed in a clean shirt, shorts and red cowboy boots, stands besides Vivian. Vivian puts a sandwich inside a FLYING PRINCESS lunch box, then hands the lunch box off to Sam.

VIVIAN

Now don't eat jus' the desert.

SAM

I won't!

Sam heads for the door, passing Palmer who exits his bedroom.

SAM (CONT'D)
Bye, Palmer!

Palmer eyes Sam's lunch box, red cowboy boots... contempt visible. Sam hurries out the door. We see him run to the end of the driveway, as a school bus arrives...

EXT./INT. PARKING LOT/CHEVY - DAY

The Chevy crawls to a stop. The engine shuts off. Palmer, nicely dressed, stares out the window. THRU the windshield we see an ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. It takes Palmer a moment, then he exits.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALL - DAY

Palmer makes his way down the empty hallway. He arrives at a door marked "JANITOR" and knocks.

SIBS (O.S.)
Door's open.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - JANITOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Palmer enters. Sibs, the man from the bar, sits behind a desk, laboring over paperwork.

PALMER
I'm Eddie Palmer. I'm here for my interview.

Sibs faces him. There's a moment of recognition. Sibs hands Palmer an application and a pen.

SIBS
Fill this out, and we'll take a walk over to see Principal Forbes.

INT. PRINCIPAL FORBES OFFICE - DAY

PRINCIPAL FORBES sits behind a desk, concerned as he reviews Palmer's application. Palmer and Sibs sit across from him.

PRINCIPAL FORBES
Mr. Palmer, I'm afraid I can't hire you, due to the fact that you're a convicted felon.

PALMER
I understand sir, but I did my time and I did it without getting in any trouble. I was young, stupid...
(MORE)

PALMER (CONT'D)

Now I'm jus' tryin' to get an honest job, live an honest life.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

That may be, but I've got the safety of the children to consider.

PALMER

I never did nothin' to no kids...If I can't get a job sweeping floors, then you tell me, what am I supposed to do?

He holds Principal Forbes' stare, causing him to feel guilty.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

Mr. Sibs? Your thoughts?

SIBS

He's got the experience. Ten years of laundry, kitchen and yard... But it's your call.

A long beat. Principal Forbes, uncertain, glances down at the application and suddenly notices--

PRINCIPAL FORBES

You were All-State MVP two years in a row over at Riverside? Hmm... Football scholarship to LSU?

Palmer nods. This surprises Forbes. Maybe even impresses him.

PRINCIPAL FORBES (CONT'D)

Palmer. You related to Vivian Palmer?

PALMER

Yes, sir. She's my grandmother.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

Vivian's a respectable member of our congregation.

PALMER

Yes, sir. I attended with her last Sunday...Beautiful sermon.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

A'right, I'll have to run all this by the school board. They owe me one, so... I'll see what I can do.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sam and Palmer are seated for dinner. Vivian serves food and sits down. Vivian takes Sam's hand and Sam grabs Palmer's. Palmer, uncomfortable with Sam holding his hand, as well as Vivian saying grace. As soon as it finishes--Palmer eats--

VIVIAN

It'll be good when you get a job.
Then you can pitch in for some
bills. Be self supportin'.

SAM

Miss Vivian, you never said you
were sorry.

Vivian looks at Sam.

SAM (CONT'D)

From yesterday. When you said he
shorted you. But he didn't... I
don't think you see too good, Miss
Vivian.

VIVIAN

Drink your milk, Sam.

Awkward silence.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

I miscounted. I apologize.

PALMER

S'ok.

The PHONE on the wall rings. Vivian looks to Palmer to answer it. He rises from the table. Collects the receiver, as--

VIVIAN

(to Sam--)
And you--eat your broccoli.

SAM

Yuck.

VIVIAN

No greens, no TV.

PALMER

(into phone--)
Yes, sir. Okay... Thank you.

Palmer hangs up. Returns to the table. Vivian looks at him--

PALMER (CONT'D)

I got the job.

EXT./INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE/CHEVY - MORNING

The sun burns. Palmer walks to the Chevy. Sam stands at the end of the driveway, swinging his lunch box, waiting for the bus. Palmer drives past Sam and turns onto the empty road.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALLWAYS - MORNING

Sibs shows Palmer around the halls. Sibs unlocks a door, inside it's filled with cleaning supplies and a sink.

SIBS

This is where all our supplies are.

They walk down an empty hall, past the bathrooms.

SIBS (CONT'D)

Bathrooms and floors get done every day...

Sibs unlocks an ENTRANCE DOOR.

SIBS (CONT'D)

We're the first to unlock the doors. Kids come in soon after. Make sure you get here on time.

Sibs hooks his keys on his belt.

PALMER

(off the keys)

Okay. Should I get a set?

SIBS

Let's see how it goes first.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALLWAY - MORNING

Palmer mops up puke. Part of the job.

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - WALKWAY - DAY

Palmer, sweating in the heat, fixes the walkway.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - JANITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Palmer enters the janitor's office, dirty, tool belt in hand.

SIBS

The air conditioner in room twelve is busted. Need ya to fix it.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - MAGGIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

MAGGIE HAYES, attractive, 30s, well dressed, walks amongst the hot, hyper CHILDREN, trying to get them to concentrate on the task at hand -- painting. Sam sits in one of the rows. Behind him is Toby, Daryl's 8-year-old boy.

MAGGIE

Good job, Emily... Very nice...

Maggie looks up and sees Palmer standing in the hallway.

PALMER

Ma'am, I was told your air conditioner is broken?

MAGGIE

Thank, God. It's right back here.
I'm Maggie, by the way.

Maggie walks to the back of the classroom. Palmer nervously eyes the rows of children he'll have to walk past to get to it. Finally, averting the kids' stares, he moves towards the air conditioner. On one girl's desk is a huge SNOW GLOBE.

SAM

(whispers)

Palmer.

Palmer looks up -- Sam gives him a little wave. And a smile. Palmer looks away, keeps walking...

SAM (CONT'D)

(to a girl, proud)

That's Palmer.

ANOTHER BOY

(mocking)

That's Palmer...

They reach the air conditioner. Palmer examines it--

MAGGIE

Please tell me you can fix it?
'Cause the last guy they hired,
couldn't fix a set of blinds. I've
been asking for a new air
conditioner for ages, they keep
telling me it's not in the budget.

Palmer ignores her, starts working on the unit.

SAM (O.S.)

Stop!

Maggie turns to see: Toby dumps paint on Sam's picture.

MAGGIE

Toby!

TOBY

I didn't do nothin'!

MAGGIE

Principal's office.

TOBY

But...

MAGGIE

Now! Go on!

Toby rises from his chair. Maggie, angry, follows him out the door. Palmer looks up, sees Sam's picture: a splotch of black covers TINY PEOPLE and a CHURCH.

EXT. CHURCH - YARD - DAY

The congregation eats and talks. Vivian sits with a group of gossipy SENIOR WOMEN. Palmer fills a plate with food. Coles steps in line, his wife Lucille next to him--

COLES

Eddie, you meet my wife, Lucille?

Palmer turns--

LUCILLE

Nice to meet you. Now don't be shy with that squash. Made it myself.

Lucille reaches in, adds some to his plate--

PALMER

Looks good.

Lucille smiles. Pleased. Palmer walks the plate over to Vivian, passing through a group of BOYS who are playing football. Emily and Sam run by, as the thrown football lands by Sam. One of the boys waits for Sam to toss it back to him. Sam picks it up, throws it, poorly...

TOBY

Nice throw, Samantha!

The boys run off, laughing, as--Palmer walks past, reaches Vivian and hands her the plate of food.

VIVIAN
Thank you, Eddie.

The two share a kind look.

ELDERLY WOMAN ONE
(off Sam playing)
Vivian, you can't keep that boy.

ELDERLY WOMAN TWO
It's jus' shameful how his momma
behaves.

ELDERLY WOMAN ONE
I can't believe the state hasn't
already taken him away from her.

VIVIAN
He ain't no trouble. Now shush.

EXT. CHURCH - PARKING LOT - DAY

Palmer waits for Vivian to finish up a conversation with Principal Forbes. Sam stands near, fussing with something. A moment later, Vivian joins them, walks to the Chevy, her eyes fixed on Principal Forbes, as he helps his very pregnant and unhappy looking wife into their car.

VIVIAN
(to Palmer)
People have too much to say.

SAM
Who has too much to say?

VIVIAN
Sam, stop listening to our adult
conversations.

SAM
But...Miss Vivian. I'm right here.

VIVIAN
Don't mean you have to listen.

Sam gives her a confused look.

VIVIAN (CONT'D)
(to Palmer)
Principal Forbes can't stop patting
himself on the back for givin' you
a job.

(MORE)

VIVIAN (CONT'D)

We'll see how high and mighty he is when he finds out that bun in his wife's oven belongs to some other baker.

SAM

What bun?

VIVIAN

Sam, I told ya stop listening!

SAM

I can't stop listening, Miss Vivian, if you keep talking!

Sam climbs into the Chevy. Palmer helps Vivian into the car. They share a look, one that tells us Vivian loves him.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

The FLYING PRINCESS CLUB plays on TV. Sam watches. Drinking soda. Eating cookies. ON SCREEN: Half a dozen BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS GIRLS, with wings, tiaras and wands, fly down from the GREAT NORTHERN sky... An explosion of colors and sounds as they sing their signature "Flying Princess Club" song. Sam quietly sings along. PENNY THE PRINCESS smiles at us--

PENNY THE PRINCESS

"We had so much fun, today! Don't forget to go to our Flying Princess Club website, enter the secret word for the day and win your very own Flying Princess Doll!"

Palmer exits his bedroom, annoyed at the loud TV. Sam hides the cookies. Palmer walks to the kitchen. No sign of Vivian.

SAM

Miss Vivian's still sleeping.

Palmer looks at Sam, strange. He walks past. Sam follows him. Palmer approaches Vivian's bedroom door...he pushes it open.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - VIVIAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Vivian lies motionless in bed. Palmer enters. He stares at her lifeless body, frozen.

SAM

Miss Vivian?

Sam approaches her body. Afraid.

SAM (CONT'D)
Miss Vivian?!

He puts his hand on her. Gently shakes her.

SAM (CONT'D)
Please, wake up!

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A small gathering of PEOPLE including Principal Forbes. Daryl is there with his wife and baby. Palmer stands with Sam at his side. The MINISTER reads a passage from the bible.

Palmer feels something. Sam is holding his hand. Beat. Palmer allows it and returns his gaze to the coffin.

TIME CUT -- MOMENTS LATER

The elderly women from church offer their condolences to Palmer. Then they walk off, leaving Palmer standing alone. Sam next to him. Principal Forbes approaches Palmer--

PRINCIPAL FORBES
Vivian will certainly be missed.
Take the time you need, Mr. Palmer.
(to Sam--)
But you, you need to get to school.

SAM
Yes, sir.

Principal Forbes smiles, walks off.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is quiet. Empty. Palmer exits the kitchen, sees Vivian's blue cardigan on her chair. A tray table next to it. He moves past it, toward Vivian's bedroom, as--

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - HALL / VIVIAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam lies on Vivian's bed, holding Vivian's makeup bag. He unzips the bag and pulls out her red lipstick.

Palmer, in the hall, watches as Sam applies it to his lips...

INT. CHEVY - DAY

Palmer drives. Sam sits in the passenger seat. His suitcase is wedged in the back.

SAM
Where we goin'?

Palmer keeps his eyes on the road. Wherever they are going, it's not good.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

The Chevy pulls up in front of the Sheriff's station. Palmer opens the door, turns to Sam as he exits--

PALMER
C'mon. Get out.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - OFFICE - DAY

Coles looks down at Sam who sits outside his closed office door. His suitcase right next to him.

COLES
How long she been gone?

PALMER
A couple weeks.

COLES
Vivian had him all this time?

PALMER
Yeah.

COLES
Of course she did. I swear this woman...

Coles picks up his phone. Finds Shelly in his contacts. Hits CALL. It goes straight to voicemail.

COLES (CONT'D)
Well, I can't take him home. Emily alone's a handful... And Lucille has these moods. You sure you can't hold onto him a bit longer? You got the room.

PALMER
He ain't my problem.

Coles sighs, plays with papers on his desk.

COLES
Alright, leave him... I'll call over to child services. He'll have to go into the system.

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - HALL - DAY

The door opens, and Palmer steps out. He briefly acknowledges Sam who stares after him as he exits. Suddenly it becomes clear to Sam that Palmer is leaving him behind.

SAM

Palmer?

Palmer keeps walking...

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Palmer walks to the Chevy, opens the door-- But he doesn't get in. Palmer lights a cigarette, takes a few angry puffs, annoyed, torn, then he looks back at the Sheriff's station.

EXT./INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Palmer steps out of the car and yanks Sam's suitcase from the backseat. Sam runs inside the house...

Palmer enters and sees Sam standing in the doorway to Vivian's bedroom. Sam locks eyes with Palmer--then he closes the door, leaving Palmer standing alone. Palmer, uncertain what the hell to do. He spots Vivian's cardigan. Right where she left it.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Quick cuts of Palmer at the bar getting drunk. He plays pinball as he finishes off a longneck.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Palmer, drunk, staggers out of the Chevy...

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Palmer enters. The TV is on. Palmer sees Sam fast asleep on the couch with Vivian's makeup bag right beside him. His suitcase and Barbie dolls are scattered around the floor. Reminders of Vivian. Palmer staggers into the kitchen...

When he returns -- he is holding a large trash bag.

Palmer walks right past the couch... He throws open the drawers and closets. Dumps all of Vivian's belongings into the bag. Framed photographs, a crocheted shawl, magazines, books, anything and everything that is in his eyesight...

Sam sleeps, undisturbed. Palmer glances down, and something steals his attention. Sticking out of Sam's suitcase -- is a SNOW GLOBE. The one that was on the little girl's desk.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - PALMER'S BEDROOM/LIVING ROOM - MORNING

The morning sun shines into the room. Palmer wakes. Feeling every bit hung over. He exits his room and walks into the living room. It's in shambles. In the kitchen, he sees Sam putting cookies in his Flying Princess lunch box...

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Sam runs to the bus... Palmer exits the house, watches the bus disappear. Then he notices the garbage can. It's filled with Vivian's belongings. This stops him. He walks over to it, collects the items, carries them back inside the house.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - JANITOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Sibs looks up from his desk, surprised to see Palmer enter. Palmer retrieves some tools.

SIBS

I'm sorry about your grandmother.

Palmer nods. He's about to exit when...

SIBS (CONT'D)

Hold on.

Palmer stops. Sibbs opens his desk -- pulls out an envelope.

SIBS (CONT'D)

Here. It's your paycheck.

Palmer takes it awkwardly, puts it in his pocket. He exits.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Palmer sits at the table, depressed, drinking a beer. Sam carefully pours the contents of a pan into two bowls. Palmer doesn't touch his food. Sam examines his bowl, then Palmer's. His has all the tiny meatballs. Sam scoops out a few meatballs from his bowl and drops them into Palmer's.

PALMER

How long does your momma usually stay gone for?

SAM

She likes to go on adventures. It depends on how long her adventure is.

Palmer is quiet. Not the answer he was hoping for. Sam dumps another meatball into Palmer's bowl. Then another--

PALMER
You don't like the meatballs?

SAM
They're my favorite. And I hate
that they only put a few in here.

He smiles up at Palmer. Eats a meatball.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALLWAY - NEXT DAY

Palmer empties trash cans. He sees Maggie's class coming
down the hall Sam, right beside Emily...

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mail is piled up by the door. Palmer grabs a beer from the
refrigerator. Drinks some down. A car door SLAMS, then a
second door SLAMS... Palmer steps into the living room, Sam
enters, excited--

SAM
Miss Maggie came to visit!

Maggie enters the house.

MAGGIE
Hi. I gave Sam a ride. Thought I'd
say hello.

PALMER
Yeah... Uh, come in... Can I get
you something to drink?

Maggie enters.

MAGGIE
Water would be great, thanks.

Palmer moves to the kitchen. Sam puts on THE FLYING PRINCESS
CLUB, plops down right in front of the TV, happy. Maggie
looks around the house, she eyes everything closely,
searching for anything that may cause concern--

Palmer appears. He hands Maggie a glass of water.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Thank you...So, how's it going?

PALMER
A'right.

MAGGIE

I'm sorry about Vivian. I didn't know her well, but I liked her.

PALMER

Yeah... she was a good woman.

MAGGIE

She had been watching Sam quite a bit lately. Shelly has a pattern of disappearing. Goes on a run, then suddenly reappears.

SAM

(off the TV--)

Miss Maggie, look, all the princesses are flying to the moon! Can you imagine?! The moon!

Maggie smiles at Sam, then faces Palmer--

PALMER

You wouldn't know where Shelly is, would ya?

MAGGIE

Your guess is as good as mine. But She never stays gone for long. I did ask Sam if he wanted to stay with me, but he said he wanted to stay here with you... I think it was the spaghetti and meatball dinner that did you in. He was very excited.

Maggie smiles. Palmer, not looking too thrilled. Maggie glances around once more. It seems safe, Sam looks happy.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Look, how 'bout this, I give you my number, if you need anything, call me?

PALMER

Yeah, I guess.

MAGGIE

You have a phone?

PALMER

No...Well, there's one on the wall.

MAGGIE

On the wall? Okay. Um.

Maggie spots an AARP magazine. She tears off a piece. Finds a pen. Scribbles her number on it. Hands it to Palmer. Smiles.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Old school.

(pause)

This is kind of you. Most people would've left him.

PALMER

Yeah, well, what was I gonna do? A kid like Sam. Around here. The way he is, he's gonna have problems.

MAGGIE

Sam knows exactly who he is. It's everyone else that has the problem.

Palmer considers this.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I guess we're good, then?

Maggie walks towards the door. She passes Sam whose eyes never leave the TV--

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Bye, Sam.

SAM

Bye, Miss Maggie!

Maggie looks back at Palmer who stares after her.

MAGGIE

Oh, you might wanna make sure he bathes. Don't let him lie to you, 'cause he will.

She exits.

EXT./INT. HOUSE/CHEVY - MORNING

Palmer slides behind the wheel. He heads towards the end of the driveway and sees Sam standing by the mailbox, waiting for his school bus. The Chevy slows to a halt...

PALMER

Get in.

Sam jumps in the Chevy. They drive off.

INT. CHEVY - MOMENTS LATER

Palmer, feeling he is being watched---looks over at Sam. And he's right. Sam smiles at him. Swinging his feet. Holding his "Flying Princess" lunch box.

SAM

(off his lunch box)

My momma bought me this. She got it at a garage sale. She said it was a bargain, because she got it for fifty cents. And she said there was this woman, and her name was Heifer -- because 'that old Heifer tried to steal it out from my momma, but my momma wouldn't let her, because she knew princesses were my favorite thing in the whole world.

Sam smiles. Proud of his story.

SAM (CONT'D)

Miss Vivian told me your favorite thing was some old guitar your daddy gave you and a ratty, old football. She said when you were little like me, you carried that ball 'round like I carry around my dolls. And one day you lost it and Miss Vivian felt bad, because you cried.

Palmer looks at Sam -- emotional for a beat.

SAM (CONT'D)

I would'a cried, too, if I lost my doll.

Palmer's eyes hold on the road.

PALMER

I didn't lose it. It got stolen.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - CLASSROOM - DAY

Palmer rolls a garbage can into a room. He empties trash into the can and sees MUSIC NOTES painted on the wall. In the back, there's an old PIANO, a few ACOUSTIC GUITARS, and several CASED INSTRUMENTS. All in good shape.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALL - CONTINUOUS

Palmer steps into the hall with the garbage can, wipes sweat onto his dirty shirt.

Up ahead he sees Maggie, nicely dressed, talking to two FEMALE TEACHERS and Principal Forbes. Maggie glances up, catches Palmer wheeling the garbage can down the hall.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Palmer grabs a beer from the refrigerator and takes a thirsty sip. He glances back at Sam, watching TV, playing with his dolls, and wonders what he has gotten himself into. He looks out the window - no sign of Shelly's return. He collects the phone. Reads a number off a paper, dials--

SHELLY (V.O.)

Hey. I ain't here. Leave a message.
Or don't. I don't give a shit.

Bothered, Palmer hangs up the phone, sits down at the table. Not sure what to do with himself, he lights a cigarette, grabs a deck of cards and starts playing solitaire.

Sam looks up from the TV, sees Palmer flipping the cards and walks over. He hovers - Palmer tries to ignore him.

SAM

What are you playing?

PALMER

Solitaire.

SAM

Can I play?

PALMER

Nope. It's for one player.

Palmer continues. Concentrating on the cards. Sam stands there, watching. Palmer, annoyed, flips another card, takes a sip of beer... Sam studies the cards. One in particular.

SAM

Is this a boy or a girl?

He holds up a JACK OF HEARTS.

PALMER

It's a boy.

SAM

He's wearing a dress?

Palmer stares at Sam's expression. A long beat...

PALMER

Yeah.

Sam smiles. Palmer notices Sam's hands. They are filthy.

PALMER (CONT'D)
You wash today?

SAM
(lying)
Yeah...I washed earlier.

PALMER
You stink.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - EVENING

Sam sits in the tub. Alone. Playing with his Barbie Dolls.

SAM
Palmer!

Palmer appears in the doorway. Beer in hand. Concerned. He looks at Sam -- who smiles.

SAM (CONT'D)
I just wanted to make sure you were
still here.

PALMER
I'm watching TV.

Sam looks at him, innocent.

SAM
Okay.

Palmer steps away. Sam waits a moment, then...

SAM (CONT'D)
Palmer!

Palmer returns and he does not look friendly.

SAM (CONT'D)
You're not going anywhere are you?

PALMER
No.

Sam gives this thought. He eyes the bottle in Palmer's hand.

SAM
I'm ready to get out.

Beat. Palmer looks at him. Then he realizes Sam wants help out of the tub.

PALMER
Jus' get out. Here.

Palmer hands Sam a towel, then leaves. Sam climbs out of the tub, wraps the towel around his body. He shivers, happy.

SAM
It's cold!

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sam slides under a blanket on the couch. Palmer clicks on the TV.

PALMER
A'right. Go to sleep.

Sam stares up at him. Eyes wide awake.

PALMER (CONT'D)
Close your eyes.

Sam closes his eyes. Then quickly opens them.

SAM
Palmer?

Palmer stops.

SAM (CONT'D)
I sometimes get mad at my momma for leaving.

The comment catches Palmer off guard. He says nothing.

SAM (CONT'D)
Do you ever get mad at your momma?

PALMER
I barely knew the woman.

SAM
But you knew your daddy.

Palmer nods.

SAM (CONT'D)
Do you miss him?

PALMER
Yeah, sometimes I do.

SAM

Miss Vivian missed him, too... But now she gets to see him.

PALMER

Go to sleep, Sam.

Palmer leaves.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - VIVIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Palmer steps into the bedroom. A fresh beer in hand. Within a pile of strewn items, he finds a photo album and sits down on the bed. He flips through the pages. Most of the photographs are of Palmer as a young boy. Many with Vivian. One with his FATHER. Many of Palmer in football gear. There's one of a PRETTY YOUNG FEMALE (his mother). This gives Palmer pause. He flips the page and a yellowed piece of paper falls out. Palmer picks it up.

It's a newspaper article. With his IMAGE, his MUGSHOT. See: LOCAL FOOTBALL HERO CHARGED WITH ARMED ROBBERY AND ATTEMPTED MANSLAUGHTER. Eddie Palmer, of Riverside, Louisiana, was arrested earlier this morning. The victim, Dr. Robert Wessler Sr., remains hospitalized and in critical condition...

Palmer stares at the article.

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - DAY

Palmer carries several bags of trash towards the metal bins. A mother hurries up to him. It's Coles' wife - Lucille.

LUCILLE

Hello, Eddie. How you doing? Billy mentioned you were workin' at the school.

Palmer nods, uncomfortable.

LUCILLE (CONT'D)

Well, you know Emily just adores Sam. And I was wondering if it'd be okay to have a play date? Sam said to ask you. Said you were his daddy.

She laughs. Amused. Palmer follows her stare to where Sam stands waiting with Emily.

PALMER

Play date?

LUCILLE

Yes, we'd like Sam to come over to our house, so they can play. You can pick him up at around five?

PALMER

Yeah, sure.

LUCILLE

Great. We'll see you then.

Palmer watches Lucille, Sam and Emily walk off to a car--

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Palmer opens the refrigerator. He stares at a six-pack. He checks the time: 4PM. He eyes the beer, knowing if he has one, it won't be his last. Finally, he pulls out a Cola.

EXT. COLES HOUSE - DAY

A lovely house. The Chevy pulls up to the curb.

INT. CHEVY - DAY

Palmer stares at the house, not sure what to do. It's 4:45PM. He kills the engine and sits there.

INT. COLES HOUSE - DAY

Sam and Emily play among a wonderland of dolls and accessories. Lucille enters the room. She looks out the window and sees Palmer parked out front. Lucille opens the front door and waves for Palmer to come inside.

INT. CHEVY - DAY

Palmer stares at her, not about to move. She waves again.

LUCILLE

Come on in.

INT. COLES HOUSE - DAY

Palmer reluctantly follows Lucille into the house. There's a wedding photo of Coles and Lucille. Many others of Emily.

LUCILLE

Let me get you something cold to drink. Iced tea?

PALMER

I'm fine, ma'am.

LUCILLE
It's Lucille, and it's no trouble.
Just make yourself comfortable.

Sam looks up from the floor.

SAM
Hi, Palmer.

Palmer, uncomfortable, sits on a fluffy floral couch. A small, white dog rushes into the room and sniffs him.

SAM (CONT'D)
Watch your feet! Remember what he
did to Barbie.

Sam holds up a doll by its foot. He giggles. Lucille enters.

LUCILLE
Popsicle, get! He just loves to eat
Emily's dolls.

PALMER
So uh, is Coles, at work?

LUCILLE
That's what he tells me.

Lucille laughs, hands Palmer a glass of iced tea. Palmer wishes he was anywhere but there. Even more so when--

LUCILLE (CONT'D)
You're in luck. It's tea time.

Emily and Sam come at him with a tea set. Emily places a saucer and tea cup on Palmer's lap. Sam grabs the pot and pretends to pour tea into it. Palmer sits trapped.

EMILY
How many lumps do you want?

Palmer looks at her, blankly.

LUCILLE
She means sugar.

PALMER
Ah...two.

Emily drops two cubes of sugar into his cup. Lucille brings her saucer to her lips.

LUCILLE
Mmmmmmm. This is delicious.

She motions for Palmer to do the same. After a beat, Palmer awkwardly brings the cup to his lips. Sam smiles.

INT./EXT. CHEVY / COLES HOUSE - EVENING

Palmer and Sam climb into the car. Emily and Lucille wave from the porch.

EMILY

Bye, Sam!

Palmer drives off, relieved. He glances at Sam who smiles.

SAM

That was fun.

Palmer nods, focuses on the road.

PALMER

So, uh...is Emily your girlfriend?

SAM

She says she wants to marry me when we get older.

PALMER

That's a good offer.

Sam makes a sour face.

SAM

I'm not gonna marry her.

PALMER

Maybe you will.

SAM

No...She's too bossy.

A smile escapes Palmer.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sam sits at the table, scribbling letters in a book. His dolls spread out nearby. Palmer walks in with the stack of mail that was collected at the door.

SAM

Is that your homework?

PALMER

Kinda.

SAM
You got a lot of homework.

Palmer nods. Overwhelmed. Sam returns to his book. Palmer flips through the mail with various return addresses: POWER AND WATER. ATTORNEY AT LAW. Too much for Palmer to handle, he stuffs the mail under a basket of towels.

SAM (CONT'D)
Since you're done with yours. Will you help me with mine?

PALMER
(uncomfortable--)
I ain't too good with school work.

SAM
Pleeease... I don't how to spell this one.

Palmer glances at the book. It's simple enough. He sits down.

PALMER
You know what it is, right?

SAM
It's a suitcase.

PALMER
Yeah, but, what's another word for it? Like, when you lug something?

SAM
Oh yeah!
(scribbling--)
L...U...G...A...

PALMER
Wait a second, you might be missing another letter.

Sam studies it, then---

SAM
Two g's?

PALMER
Actually, there's three.
(off Sam's scribbling--)
There you go, you got it.

SAM
You're smart.

Sam smiles up at Palmer, happy, then continues with his homework. Palmer watches Sam, something else on his mind, as--

PALMER

Sam, earlier today, did you tell Miss Lucille I was your daddy?

SAM

Are you mad?

PALMER

No, I ain't mad. You and me are friends and all, but when your momma comes back, you gotta go home.

SAM

When is she coming back?

PALMER

I don't know.

Sam considers this. Then continues on with his homework.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - PARKING LOT - MORNING

Palmer pulls up and exits the car with Sam, as another car pulls in. Principal Forbes steps out of the car and gives a nod at Palmer and Sam as they enter the school.

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - PLAYGROUND - DAY

Sam stands in line with his classmates. Principal Forbes approaches.

TOBY

I didn't do nothing.

Principal Forbes passes and stops at Sam.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

Sam, come walk with me for a moment.

A GIRL screams, "you're in trouble..." Principal Forbes shoots the girl a sharp look, she falls silent.

Sam walks alongside Principal Forbes.

PRINCIPAL FORBES (CONT'D)

I saw that Mr. Palmer gave you a ride to school this morning. Does he always do that?

SAM

Uh huh.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

He lives next door to you, is that right?

SAM

His house is right beside my
momma's house.

Principal Forbes smiles. Then he bends down. Eye to eye with Sam. Like a friend.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

And he's nice to you?

SAM

Yeah.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

And everything is okay?

Sam studies Principal Forbes' face. He hesitates, then nods. This gives Principal Forbes concern.

PRINCIPAL FORBES (CONT'D)

Sam, if something weren't okay, you could tell me. No matter what it is.

Sam rolls back on his heels. Afraid to answer.

PRINCIPAL FORBES (CONT'D)

It's okay, son. Go ahead...

Sam hesitates...

SAM

Your breath...smells kind of funny.

Principal Forbes stands. He glares down at Sam, embarrassed. He walks off. Sam, happy, runs back to his classmates.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Palmer stands in the kitchen, phone to his ear. He mumbles something, as Sam lies in front of the TV, coloring.

PALMER

(into the phone)

A'right... Daryl, I said, a'right.

He slams down the phone, thinking. He walks into the living room. Sam stares up at him--

PALMER (CONT'D)
You ever been to a football game?

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Riverside Rebels HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PLAYERS, full of testosterone, warm-up. Their COACHES bark orders.

EXT. HOME SECTION - NIGHT

Excited FANS fill the bleachers, electricity in the air. Palmer leads Sam through the crowd. Palmer stops and points at one of the players.

PALMER
See that guy. He's the quarterback.
That's what I used to play.

They watch the QUARTERBACK throw a few practice passes. Then they head to the concession stand--

SAM
Look - Miss Maggie is here!

Palmer turns and sees Maggie working behind the concession stand, talking with Coles, in uniform--

EXT. CONCESSION STAND - MOMENTS LATER

Sam steps up to the counter, excited.

SAM
Hi, Mr. Coles!

COLES
Hey, Sammy...
(to Palmer)
I heard you'all had some fun at a
tea party?

Palmer gives him a look. Coles smiles, then something grabs his attention. We see two BOYS climbing a fence---

COLES (CONT'D)
Hey! Get off that fence! Damnit.

Coles chases after them... Maggie turns to Sam--

MAGGIE
Look at you at the Friday night
lights... You having a good time?

SAM

Yup! That's the quarterback out there. Palmer used to be him when he played.

MAGGIE

Quarterback, huh?

(to Sam)

So what can I get you? It's on me. Wait, I know...

She hands Sam cookies.

SAM

Thank you.

MAGGIE

(to Palmer--)

How 'bout you, Mr. Quarterback?

PALMER

Nah, I'm good.

MAGGIE

So Sam, I'm going to a bowling fundraiser tomorrow, you want to join me?

SAM

Sure! Can Palmer come too?

PALMER

No. Miss Maggie invited you.

SAM

She don't care, right Miss Maggie?

Maggie is put on the spot. It turns awkward.

MAGGIE

Sure... You're welcome to join.

PALMER

I can't. I got things to do.

SAM

You're lying! You got nothin' to do! Please! Please! You have to come! Please, Palmer! Please!

Sam keeps at it, relentless, tugging at Palmer.

MAGGIE

I think someone wants you to go.

PALMER
 (finally--)
 A'right... Fine, fine. I'll go.

Sam smiles, excited.

MAGGIE
 It's at Tangi Lanes. You know where
 that is?

PALMER
 I sure do.

MAGGIE
 I'll meet you inside, ten am?

PALMER
 Sure.

MAGGIE
 I'll see you boys there.

Palmer walks off with Sam. Maggie turns to help another
 CUSTOMER--

EXT. HOME SECTION BLEACHERS - MOMENTS LATER

Palmer walks Sam into the stands. The home team kicks off. He
 sees Daryl and Ned. Daryl waves Palmer up.

NED
 (to Sam, off the cookies)
 Hey there, 'lil fella. Can I have
 one of those?

Sam looks at Ned, reluctantly. He hands Ned a cookie.

NED (CONT'D)
 Thank you.

Palmer sits down, separating Sam from the two. Daryl cracks a
 beer and hands it to Palmer.

DARYL
 How the fuck you get stuck baby-
 sitting?

Palmer doesn't answer. Takes a swig of beer.

DARYL (CONT'D)
 Don't get messed up with Shelly.
 Trust me on that. Keep your dick
 far away from that one. It'll catch
 fire.

Daryl looks at Palmer and realizes--too late.

DARYL (CONT'D)
Man, it's good to have you home.

Sam drops a cookie. Bends to collect it--

PALMER
Don't eat that, it's dirty.

Sam debates, then leaves it. Palmer turns to Daryl--

PALMER (CONT'D)
Hey, you ever see that Wessler kid
around here anymore?

DARYL
Fuck. No. That prick moved. Why?

PALMER
I tried looking up him and his old
man. Couldn't find them.

Daryl shakes his head, mad.

DARYL
Come on, man, you gotta let that
shit go. What you should'a done is
beat his kid's ass, too. Bragging
about all the money his old man
had. Hardly any in there. And you
go away for what? The old man
lived, didn't he? He's lucky you
used an aluminum bat. Wood, he'd be
dead. You did your time, you don't
owe 'em shit. Unlike someone else
we know--

Palmer looks at him, quiet.

NED
What'cha talkin' about?

DARYL
How fuckin' dumb you are.

NED
Oh.

Palmer sees Sam watching him. Maybe having heard some of it.
Or maybe not. Palmer forces a smile. Sam smiles back.

On the field: we see a PLAYER going in for a tackle, as--

DARYL
C'mon, Jake!! Hit 'em hard!

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - LATER

An incredible catch is made by a HOME PLAYER.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The BAND plays. The FEMALE DRILL TEAM, wearing plastered smiles, skirts, break into a fantastic routine. The BATON TWIRLERS and FLAG CORPS join them in synchronized fashion...

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE
Please give a warm welcome for the
Honey Bees!

EXT. HOME SECTION BLEACHERS - SAME

SAM
The Honey Bees!

Daryl stands--

DARYL
C'mon, Ned...let's go feed your
double chin.
(to Palmer--)
You want anything?

Palmer shakes his head. Daryl and Ned disappear into the crowd. Sam rises from his seat and stares at the BATON TWIRLERS. His eyes glued to their every motion, he starts to mimic their movements.

Palmer looks on, considers pulling Sam into his seat. Then he leaves Sam be.

INT. CHEVY - NIGHT

Palmer parks in front of Vivian's house. Engine running. Sam steps out and realizes Palmer isn't coming. He stops.

PALMER
Go on. Get inside.

Sam doesn't move.

SAM
Where you going?

PALMER
Don't worry 'bout it.

SAM

My favorite part was the Honey
Bees. My momma was a Honey Bee.

PALMER

I'm sure she was. Now, go on. Get
inside the house and lock the door.

Finally, Sam shuts the door. He goes inside the house and
watches Palmer drive off.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Loud MEN. Noisy bar. Palmer, drunk, slams the eight ball into
the corner pocket. Ned, holding a stick--

NED

Dang.

PALMER

Keep practicin', Ned.

Palmer pats Ned on the back, as Daryl joins--

Sibs enters with a FRIEND. They take a seat at the bar. Three
FOOTBALL PLAYERS barrel in. Jake (Daryl's oldest son) is one
of them. They head to the TAKE OUT counter... PATRONS
congratulate them, clapping, patting the boys on the back.

DARYL

(proud)

Jake! Jake!

Jake sees his father waving him over and looks away. Daryl
watches Jake give Sibbs a friendly hello and stop to talk.
Jake clearly fond of Sibbs. The Bartender hands off two large
take-out bags to his buddies--

BARTENDER

It's on the house, boys! Good win.

Palmer moves beside Daryl--

PALMER

Your turn.

Jake and his buddies exit. Daryl stares after his son, angry,
feelings hurt. Then he turns his hating stare on Sibbs--

DARYL

You wanna beer?

Palmer shakes his head, concerned, as Daryl walks up to the
bar. Sibbs is enjoying his conversation with his friend.

DARYL (CONT'D)
Gimme a beer.

The Bartender fetches the drink. Daryl sees Palmer watching him, he smirks--

DARYL (CONT'D)
Palmer, look who it is. Your boss,
Sibs.

Daryl aggressively leans into Sibs's conversation.

DARYL (CONT'D)
How's my boy Palmer workin' out? He
hasn't stole nothin' yet, has he?

SIBS
He's doing just fine, Daryl.

DARYL
He being a good boy for you? No
missing bleach or screwdrivers?

SIBS
I said he's fine.

DARYL
I'm sorry... am I bothering you?

SIBS
I'm just trying to have a drink
here - in peace.

DARYL
If you want peace go the fuck to
another bar, I'll stand here all
fuckin' night... Where's my beer?!

He BANGS loudly on the bar, in front of Sibs.

SIBS
Daryl, you know what your problem
is? You just never grew up... It's
not too late, son.

DARYL
Say that to me again, old man, and
see if I don't bust every one of
your shiny goddamn teeth.

Palmer, by the pool table, interrupts --

PALMER

Daryl, we got a fuckin' game goin',
let's finish, man.

Daryl glances at Palmer then turns to Sibs as if he's not worth his time and walks back to the pool table.

DARYL

A'right, man. Gimme the stick...

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - PALMER'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Palmer is passed out in his bed. Sam's small voice is heard from the doorway.

SAM

Palmer?

Sam waits, then slowly enters the room.

SAM (CONT'D)

Palmer, you awake?

Palmer rolls over and sees Sam holding something.

PALMER

What's that?

Sam shrugs, innocent, his small hands holding a beer for Palmer, who slowly sits up, clearly bothered by this. He takes the beer from Sam and puts it aside. Sees the time--

PALMER (CONT'D)

Go get dressed.

INT. TANGI BOWLING LANES - DAY

The sound of balls knocking over pins. PEOPLE fill the place. A BANNER reads: BOWLING FUNDRAISER FOR HURRICANE MORGAN. Maggie, Palmer and Sam stand at a SHOE COUNTER occupied by a LAGE WOMAN. Three pairs of SHOES are placed down. Maggie signs the three in, is about to hand the Large Woman money--

PALMER

I got it.

MAGGIE

You sure? Thank you.

Maggie hands Sam his pair of shoes.

SAM

Can I keep them?

MAGGIE

No, you don't want them, Sam, trust me.

Maggie leads the way to a lane--

LANE

Sam holds the ball between his two little hands, legs. Gives it a push--the BUMPER keeps it in the lane. The ball slowly rolls into the gutter. Sam jumps up and down--

SAM

I won!

PALMER

Yup.

MAGGIE

You should know... I was my high school team's top scorer. Three years in a row.

Maggie, with perfect form, tosses the ball--and knocks down several pins. She finishes her turn: grabs a spare.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Not bad. High-five, Sam!

Sam high-fives Maggie.

PALMER

A'right. My turn.

Palmer stands, moves to the line...launches the ball and knocks down all the pins.

PALMER (CONT'D)

Beginner's luck.

QUICK CUTS OF: Balls being tossed. Strikes. Gutter balls. Sam walks the bowl down the lane, then drops it. A crack of pins! Maggie, arms in the air, lands a strike. Palmer launches the ball...strike! All three having a good time.

TABLE--

Palmer, Maggie and Sam eat french fries, burgers and sip from soda cups.

SAM

I'm done--can I have money to play some games?

Palmer hands Sam a twenty. Sam runs off to the Arcade.

Palmer and Maggie sit in silence. A phone beeps. It's Maggie's Samsung. She checks it, then tucks her phone away.

MAGGIE

You get yourself a cell phone, yet?

PALMER

Nope. The one on the wall still works.

Palmer smiles. Maggie smiles back.

MAGGIE

So, where'd you play quarterback?

PALMER

LSU... But, I was only there for about a year or so, then got sort'a different education.

MAGGIE

I did hear a little bit about that... People like to talk.

PALMER

Oh, don't I know.

MAGGIE

That must've been tough.

PALMER

Sometimes I think it's tougher out here.

MAGGIE

I know what you mean.

(pause--)

What was it like in there?

PALMER

It was hard, at first. You're scared. Feel alone. Then you're in there long enough, one day it jus' changes. And things that used to bother you, don't. You get used to someone tellin' you when to eat, when to shower, when to go to bed... That's your life. And it becomes easy.

(pause)

So how'd you end up here?

MAGGIE

I was married and living in Atlanta. Things didn't work out the way I thought they would. After my divorce was final, I wanted a change, needed to get out of the city. I saw they had an opening down here, wanted to experience country life...

(adding sweetly)

And this place sure is country.

PALMER

Sure is.

EXT. BOWLING ALLEY - PARKING LOT - LATER

Sam, carrying a brown pelican stuffed animal, walks Maggie to her car with Palmer.

SAM

Miss Maggie, do you know I have a birthday coming up?

MAGGIE

Yes, I do, October twenty-first.

SAM

Can I have a cake?

PALMER

You gotta have a cake.

SAM

(to Palmer)

Can I invite Emily?

PALMER

Of course. Her feelings would be hurt if you didn't.

MAGGIE

Maybe we'll throw you a lil' birthday party...

SAM

(to Palmer)

Please!

Maggie gives Sam a quick kiss.

MAGGIE
 See ya tomorrow, Sam.
 (to Palmer--)
 This turned out to be a fun day.

PALMER
 Yeah, it was.

They share smile. Palmer helps shut Maggie's door, watches her drive off.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

A small hand fills a lunch box with cookies. Palmer enters, watches Sam reach for another cookie--

PALMER
 Maybe we ought'a put somethin' else
 in there today.

Palmer opens the refrigerator and pulls out bologna.

PALMER (CONT'D)
 Grab me that loaf of bread.

Sam hands the bread to Palmer, watches him build a sandwich.

PALMER (CONT'D)
 You know, when I was your age, I
 won the state sandwich making
 contest.

SAM
 There's no sandwich contest.

PALMER
 There's not? Then how'd I win? See,
 the secret is, you gotta spread the
 mustard equally. The judges like
 that.

SAM
 No. I don't believe you.

PALMER
 ...then there's the pickle police.
 They walk around and check your
 sandwich. If you used too many
 pickles, they give you a ticket.

SAM
 You're fibbing?

Palmer looks at him, serious.

PALMER

Yep, I am.

Sam playfully grabs onto him, causing Palmer to laugh.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - JANITOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Palmer, in a good mood, enters, sees Sibs sitting at his desk, his memory suddenly refreshed about the bar incident. He grabs some supplies and tries to make a silent escape.

SIBS (O.S.)

Trash bins need to be washed out.

Palmer looks at him.

SIBS (CONT'D)

Take 'em around back. There's a hose. Wipe 'em down.

PALMER

Yes, sir.

SIBS

And Principal Forbes needs his file cabinet fixed. Why don't you start there?

Palmer grabs his tools. He stares at Sibs. Doesn't leave.

PALMER

Daryl was a jerk in high school, and he hasn't changed.

SIBS

Personally, I don't spend my time with jerks.

PALMER

Yes, sir.

SIBS

Junior doesn't like to wait. You ought'a go.

Sibs turns away. Palmer exits.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - PRINCIPAL FORBES OFFICE - DAY

Palmer knocks on the door, tools in hand.

PRINCIPAL FORBES

Come in.

(motions to the cabinet)

The hinge is broken.

Palmer enters. Moves to fix it. After a moment...

PRINCIPAL FORBES (CONT'D)

I noticed you were at the game on Friday night. Thank goodness we won. Even my wife enjoyed it... I saw Sam was with you?

This is not a friendly question. Palmer, aware, keeps working.

PRINCIPAL FORBES (CONT'D)

His mother's not around much, is she?

PALMER

She's around. Jus' not all there.

Palmer finishes and stands. Wipes the grease from his hands.

PALMER (CONT'D)

You need anything else fixed? Or you got other questions for me?

He holds Principal Forbes's stare--

PRINCIPAL FORBES

No. None. Thank you, Palmer.

Principal Forbes watches Palmer exit.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

Palmer brushes his teeth, spits. Sam, right beside him, does the same. They finish.

PALMER

C'mon. I can't be late.

INT. PAROLE OFFICE - DAY

Sam sits on a chair in a long hallway, swinging his feet, clicking his red cowboy boots, curiously observing a few tattooed MEN (parolees) who walk past. THRU THE GLASS window across the hall, he sees Palmer in a nearby office, sitting with the Parole Officer (from earlier).

The Parole Officer marks a note in a book. Palmer rises to leave, exits the office and steps into the hall --

PALMER
You like root beer floats?

SAM
I don't know. I've never had one.

PALMER
What? You never had one? C'mon.

The two head down the hall, toward the exit.

PALMER (CONT'D)
I know a place right up this road.
Best root beer floats in the world.

SAM
In the world?

PALMER
In the world.

INT. DINER - DAY

Sam slurps up a root beer float with a straw. Palmer sits across from Sam, enjoying his own float.

SAM
Why did you have to go see that man?

PALMER
Because I did something bad. And he needs to check on me to see that I'm doing good now.

SAM
What'd you do?

PALMER
Well, I wasn't a very nice person... I hurt someone... And I stole money and a whole lot'a other things that didn't belong to me.

SAM
My momma stole money once, but she never had to see that man.

PALMER
Some people get caught. Some don't. I got caught.

SAM
My momma said she had to steal,
'cause we're poor.

PALMER
Lots of people are poor, they don't
steal.

SAM
You did?

PALMER
Yeah. I did. And I wish I hadn't.

Sam stops slurping his float. He looks worried.

SAM
I stole, too.

PALMER
You did, huh? You think that person
misses what you took?

SAM
I know she does...She cried in
class.

Sam looks at Palmer -- feeling worse about it.

SAM (CONT'D)
Miss Maggie asked if anyone seen
it, and I said no.

PALMER
So, you lied, too?

Another nod.

PALMER (CONT'D)
You think that little girl would
feel better if she got back what
you stole?

SAM
Yeah... I think I'd feel better
too.

PALMER
I bet she'd appreciate it.

Sam nods, but still looks upset.

SAM
I stole from Miss Vivian too. But I
can't give it back.

PALMER
You did, huh?

SAM
I'm sorry... I was hungry.

PALMER
Alright, but I bet if you would'a
asked Miss Vivian for anything, she
woulda helped you out. Whaddya
think?

SAM
I think she would've.

PALMER
Me, too.

Palmer winks at him. Sam, feeling better, slurps up the
float.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Palmer tucks Sam into bed. He turns to leave.

SAM
Palmer.

Palmer stops at the doorway.

PALMER
Yeah?

Sam stares at Palmer. Hugging the purple bear. He is happy.

PALMER (CONT'D)
Night, Sam.

He clicks off the light and exits.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Palmer enters. He picks up the SNOW GLOBE. He shakes it and
watches the white particles flutter.

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - EARLY MORNING

Palmer and Sam wait to be let into the school. Sibbs arrives
and unlocks the doors. They enter.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALL - MORNING

Halloween decorations fill the hall. Palmer stands outside Maggie's classroom, keeping watch. Sam looks at the SNOW GLOBE, not wanting to return it. Finally, he places it on the rightful owner's desk. Palmer gives Sam a passing smile as he exits.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Palmer fixes a set of blinds in the music room. Finished, he snaps his toolbox closed and turns to leave. His eyes land on the instruments in the back. He looks to the door, sees the empty hallway. He walks over to the instruments. Sets the toolbox down, and picks up one of the guitars.

Palmer checks the cords. It's tuned pretty good. Then slowly, his fingers work the strings...

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALL - SAME

Principal Forbes and Maggie talk in the empty hallway. They both hear a guitar being beautifully played, riffed on. Principal Forbes stops talking and heads in the direction of the guitar playing... Then suddenly, the music stops. A moment later, Palmer exits the music room, carrying the tool box. He spots Maggie and Principal Forbes staring at him.

PALMER
Blinds are fixed.

Palmer walks past, leaving Principal Forbes and Maggie still staring after him. Maggie smiles.

EXT. STORE - DAY

The Chevy pulls up to the local store.

INT. STORE - LATER

Palmer walks towards the toy section. He looks around--sees a selection of guns, footballs, dolls, etc. He exhales. No idea what to get. Until something grabs his attention...

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maggie, wearing a "Happy Birthday" hat, exits the kitchen holding a cake with eight burning candles. She, Palmer and Emily (who also wear hats) sing to Sam. An excited Sam blows out the candles.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Sam is unwrapping gifts. Palmer hands Sam the last one.

PALMER
This one's from me.

Sam unwraps the box...and pulls out a UKULELE.

SAM
A guitar! But I don't know how to play it.

PALMER
Actually, it's called a ukulele. Here, I'll show you. Hold it like this--

Palmer positions the ukulele in Sam's small hands, teaching him. Maggie watching, smiling, as--

PALMER (CONT'D)
You gotta tune it first. These four strings...
(strums each string--)
G-C-E-A.

They make a beautiful sound.

SAM
Neat!

PALMER
And what they call it is...
(with each string--)
"My dog has fleas..."

Sam and Emily giggle. Palmer guides Sam's tiny fingers on the strings--

PALMER (CONT'D)
"My Dog has fleas..."

EMILY
My dog does have fleas!

PALMER
Go ahead, do it on your own.

Palmer leaves Sam to pluck the strings on his own.

SAM
"My dog has fleas!"

Emily claps for Sam. He plucks the strings again--

EMILY
Sam, you're soooo good!!

SAM

I love it!

Sam drops the ukulele and wraps his arms tight around Palmer's neck. Palmer, still awkward with the affection, gives Sam a pat on the back. Maggie watching as--

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LATER

Palmer cleans up the room alongside Maggie. THRU the window, we see Emily and Sam screaming, "*My dog has fleas!*" The ukulele strung non-stop, like a dog with a squeaky toy--

PALMER

(off the ukulele)

That was a mistake, wasn't it?

MAGGIE

Oh yeah. Big one.

They share a smile. A framed photo grabs Maggie's attention.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Is this you?

In it, Vivian (in her youth) stands with her arms wrapped around a smiling boy (Palmer). Maggie picks up the photo.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Look how cute you were.

Maggie examines the photograph. Then puts it down, looks at others--

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Vivian raised you alone?

PALMER

My old man passed away when I was in high school. She looked after me.

MAGGIE

And your mother?

Palmer is clearly uncomfortable.

PALMER

She wasn't around... left when I was about five. Vivian was more like a mother.

Maggie nods, understanding. She follows Palmer into the kitchen.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

They place the dishes in the sink. Maggie grabs a towel out of a basket. A stack of unopened mail spills onto the floor. We see POWER & WATER, GAS... MEDICAL BILLS addressed to Vivian. Maggie and Palmer collect the mail off the floor--

MAGGIE

You know, you're supposed to open them?

PALMER

Why, they can't be good.

MAGGIE

Yeah, but you might wanna take a peek. Gas... Electric... Before you really are living in the dark ages.

PALMER

I got candles.

They share a smile. Then Palmer spots the envelope that reads: ATTORNEY AT LAW. His smile fades. He sticks all the envelopes back under the basket. They start to wash the dishes, as--

MAGGIE

If you want, I can help you sort through it? I'm pretty good at tossing away junk mail.

PALMER

It's a'right. I'll get to it.

MAGGIE

Mm, you sure? I don't mind. Could also be some coupons in there. Don't wanna miss out on those.

PALMER

(pause, smiles--)
A'right... Sure.

TIME CUT: The dishes are washed and stacked. Maggie and Palmer sit at the table. There's a small pile of cash in front of them, along with a small pile of return envelopes.

Maggie tears open an envelope, pulls out the gas bill.

MAGGIE

Twelve dollars and sixty-one cents.

Palmer places thirteen dollars into the pile of cash. Maggie writes out a check, slips it inside the return envelope and sets it aside with the others.

PALMER

Thanks.

MAGGIE

You're welcome. I needed the cash anyway. It might be time for you to open your own checking account. You know, Ponchatoula Savings Bank will give you a free mug.

PALMER

Whoa, a free mug? I'm gonna open one right away, then.

Maggie smiles, grabs the next piece -- the ATTORNEY AT LAW envelope.

MAGGIE

Wanna do the lawyer?

PALMER

No.

MAGGIE

Could be good news.

PALMER

Not with my history.

He holds her look. She gets it. Then finally...

PALMER (CONT'D)

Alright. Let's do it.

Palmer nervously watches as Maggie tears open the envelope, pulls out the letter and reads it.

MAGGIE

It's about Vivian's will. Her attorney just wants you to call him. That's it.

PALMER

That's it?

MAGGIE

Yup... You wanna keep going?

PALMER
 Sure, why not?
 (pause)
 Thank you.

MAGGIE
 You're welcome.

Maggie smiles, tears open a new envelope. Pulls out coupons.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
 Piggly Wiggly! See, I told ya.

PALMER
 You can have 'em.

MAGGIE
 I can have your Piggly Wiggly coupons? No, I couldn't possibly take these from you.

PALMER
 A'right. Give 'em back.

Palmer snatches the coupons from her hand.

MAGGIE
 Hey! Gimme those coupons!

PALMER
 Nope, mine.

Maggie reaches for the coupons. Palmer holds them away. They playfully fight for the coupons. Liking one another.

EXT. BANK - MOMENTS LATER

Palmer exits the bank. He has a starter check book in his hand, and a mug. An amused smile crosses his lips.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The lawyer letter is on the table. Sam is in the other room, watching TV. Palmer, ill at ease, stands with the phone to his ear listening to it ring... until--

PALMER
 This is Eddie Palmer. I got a letter to call... Yes, ma'am.

Palmer waits. Then--

MALE ATTORNEY (O.S.)
Hello, Eddie, how are you? I'll get right to it. Were you aware of Vivian's will?

PALMER
No, sir.

MALE ATTORNEY (O.S.)
Well, according to your grandmother's will, her house and land are to be put up for sale and the money donated to the Saints of Christ Church. She also left instructions that you're to receive five thousand dollars.

Palmer turns quiet. Possibly hurt.

PALMER
You're sure this is what she wanted? With the house?

MALE ATTORNEY (O.S.)
I'm afraid so... Do you have any questions?

PALMER
When do I have to move out?

MALE ATTORNEY (O.S.)
Once the house sells you'll have thirty days to vacate the premises.

Palmer hangs up. Upset.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam sits in front of the TV, giggling, watching the Flying Princess Club, as--

PENNY THE PRINCESS
"...don't go anywhere, Princess fans! We'll be right back!"

Palmer enters.

SAM
Penny the Princess said if you write a letter to their show, you can join their club. They even give you a certificate.

Palmer ignores Sam. Lights a cigarette.

SAM (CONT'D)

Will you write one for me?

PALMER

There's things you can be, and things you can't. You don't see other boys on that show, do you?

SAM

No.

PALMER

Then what does that tell you?

SAM

I can be the first.

Palmer just looks at him.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - BATHROOM - DAY

Palmer unclogs a toilet in a stall. He flushes. Exits.

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - DAY

Sam plays with Emily. TWO BOYS wander over to him. Toby trails behind them. The First Boy approaches Sam.

BOY

Sam, we were just wondering...why do you act like a girl?

Sam looks at them. Innocent. Maybe confused.

SAM

I don't know.

TOBY

I know why...he's a faggot.

Toby smirks -- aware it's a bad word.

He shoves Sam...when a HAND grabs hold of him. Toby looks up and sees Palmer glaring down at him.

PALMER

Go on, Sam. Wait in the car.
(to the other boys)
You two get outta here.

They run off. Palmer, still holding onto Toby, kneels down and looks the kid dead in the eyes.

PALMER (CONT'D)
You touch that boy again, I'll
break your arm. You got me?

Toby, petrified, nods his head. Palmer lets him free. Toby runs off. Palmer looks around, makes sure no one was watching, and strolls off.

INT. STORE - DAY

Palmer and Sam enter. Halloween costumes fill the shelves. Sam carefully eyes his choices.

SAM
Look - they have it!

Excited -- he pulls a "FLYING PRINCESS" costume off the shelf. Palmer stares at the box. On it: a GIRL wears a dress and tiara -- she smiles at us.

SAM (CONT'D)
Can I get it?

Palmer scans the other costumes. He sees a "PETER THE PRINCE" costume.

PALMER
Here, what about being Peter the
Prince?

Sam looks at the Boy on the box -- he wears a uniform and holds a sword. Sam's face tells Palmer he doesn't want it.

PALMER (CONT'D)
Or this Pirate?

Palmer picks up a Pirate costume box. Sam stands defiantly.

PALMER (CONT'D)
You can't be a princess. So pick
something else.

Sam looks at all his options -- the one that he truly wants is the "Flying Princess."

SAM
Emily's going as a Princess.

PALMER
Emily's a girl.

SAM
So?!

Sam suddenly looks hurt. Palmer, feeling bad, softens...

PALMER

Sam, the thing about this costume...

(pause--)

It's jus', well, some costumes are made for girls, and some are made for boys. Now it don't mean you can't wear it--you can. It's jus'... kids can be real mean sometimes. Especially when they see something they ain't used to seeing. They don't understand that you can be the first at something. They jus' expect to see a girl wearing this costume. Like your friend Emily.

SAM

They should make one for boys.

PALMER

They do. It's Peter The Prince.

Palmer nods to Peter The Prince costume. Indicating the boy. Sam looks at the box. He considers it and grows depressed. His eyes travel back to The Flying Princess costume.

INT. STORE - CHECK OUT COUNTER - DAY

Palmer and Sam walk to the check-out counter. The YOUNG FEMALE CLERK grabs the costume box and rings it up.

YOUNG FEMALE CLERK

(to Sam)

You ready for Halloween?

Sam nods with a smile. Happy. The Female Clerk looks at the costume box -- it's The Flying Princess. She smiles and hands it to him.

YOUNG FEMALE CLERK (CONT'D)

You have yourself a good time.

(to Palmer)

It's twenty-one dollars and eighty cents.

Palmer hands her money. Waits for change. An Elderly Woman walks up behind him.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Eddie Palmer?

Palmer recognizes the woman from church.

ELDERLY WOMAN (CONT'D)
Hello, Sam.

SAM
Hello.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Are you still lookin' after this boy? What on earth do you think you're doing, Eddie? You got no business lookin' after this child... You ain't nothin' but a criminal.

PALMER
C'mon, Sam.

Palmer grabs his change, turns to leave, but Sam's not going anywhere --

SAM
Palmer's been seeing that man and he's doin' good! So you need to mind your business!

The Elderly Woman, further angered --

PALMER
(hurrying)
Sam, let's go.

The Young Female Clerk watches Palmer and Sam walk out of the store. The Elderly Woman yells after Palmer, angry --

ELDERLY WOMAN
I'm gonna call child services!

She turns to the Young Female Clerk--

ELDERLY WOMAN (CONT'D)
You have a phone?

YOUNG FEMALE CLERK
Mrs. Gibson, I think that little boy is right... You need to mind your business.

EXT. STORE/PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Palmer walks Sam to the Chevy. He glances back at the store, concerned, then he sees Sam watching him.

PALMER
I'm doin' good, huh?

Sam nods his head, full of love for Palmer. Palmer manages a smile. Opens the door to the Chevy. They head home.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALL/CLASSROOM - MORNING

The hall is empty. Inside a classroom are rows of computers. Palmer checks to make sure no one is coming... Steps inside.

Palmer sits down in front of a computer. He hen pecks at the keyboard. Searching for something. Finally, we see the screen: "**Foster Care Department of Children and Family Guidelines.**" Palmer reads, then something causes him to stop... See: "**HAS AN ADULT IN YOUR HOME EVER BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME?**"

INT. MAGGIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Maggie stands by the door as the children leave for the day--

MAGGIE
I'll see you all tomorrow. Don't forget to wear your costumes.

Sam arrives at the door, ready to walk out--

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Sam, what are you gonna be for Halloween?

SAM
A Flying Princess. Palmer bought it for me!

MAGGIE
(pause)
Really? A Princess?! That's great.

Sam walks out. Maggie's face shows concern.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALLWAY - DAY

Maggie finds Principal Forbes in the hall, talking to a FEMALE TEACHER. The Female Teacher walks off.

PRINCIPAL FORBES
Hello, Maggie... How are you?

MAGGIE
(smiles...)
I need a favor.

Principal Forbes looks at Maggie, curious--

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Palmer stands outside the bathroom door, waiting. Sam exits-- he wears the Penny The Princess costume. Holds the tiara.

SAM

I can't get it to stay on my head.

Palmer tries to get the tiara to stay on Sam's head.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - MAGGIE'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

We hear snickers. And laughter. Sam sits with the tiara on his head. All eyes are on him. Toby wears a football uniform. A few others -- pirates, convicts, a ghost. The girls -- witches, a bunny. Emily and a few others -- Princesses.

TOBY

Samantha's wearing a girl's costume! She's probably wearing panties!

More laughter as Sam starts to look uncomfortable.

The door opens, and Maggie enters. She's dressed in a man's suit and shoes -- wears a mustache and man's wig. In fact -- she looks like Principal Forbes. (NOTE: Maggie will wear the exact type of clothes we've seen Principal Forbes wear.)

MAGGIE

(in fake man's voice)

Does anyone know where Miss Maggie is?

BOY

You're right there!

A boy in a pirate's costume points to her.

MAGGIE

(in a man's voice)

I'm Principal Forbes!

They laugh.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

(in a man's voice)

I guess Miss Maggie isn't here today. She must be playin' hooky.

More laughter. Maggie sits on the edge of her desk, legs man-spread. Toby raises his hand as if to ask a question.

TOBY
Principal Forbes, look--Sam dressed
as a Princess.

He points to Sam. Again -- laughter at Sam's expense.

MAGGIE
(in a man's voice)
Sam is that you under there?

Maggie rises off her desk. Sam just looks at her.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
(in a man's voice)
That doesn't look like Sam to me.
Looks like a Flying Princess--

Emily is also dressed as a Flying Princess--

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
And look, we have two Flying
Princesses! How lucky are we?!

Maggie moves to a LITTLE GIRL who is dressed as a WITCH.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
(in a man's voice)
And a witch! Excuse me, Miss Witch,
do you know where Elizabeth is?

The Little Girl shakes her head no. Maggie moves on to Toby.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Toby must be playin' hooky too,
'cause I see a football player, a
police officer, and is that a lion
in our class! Oh my--

A boy dressed as a lion, roars--

There's a knock on the door -- Maggie opens it, and in walks
Principal Forbes -- looking like Maggie, in a long wig, fancy
dress and heels.

PRINCIPAL FORBES
(in mock Female Voice)
Principal Forbes, what are you
doin' in my classroom?

Principal Forbes walks awkwardly and almost trips. The kids
hysterically laugh. He sits behind the desk.

PRINCIPAL FORBES (CONT'D)
 (in mock Female Voice)
 Where are all my students? And what
 are all these pirates and
 princesses doing in my classroom?

More laughter.

EXT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - DUSK

Sam, in his Flying Princess costume and carrying a stuffed candy bag, runs up to Maggie's house. Maggie, still in the man's suit, opens the door.

SAM
 Trick or treat!

Maggie smiles, then looks past Sam and sees Palmer standing on the lawn. She is happy to see him.

INT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - DAY

Sam, still in his costume minus the tiara, sits on the floor, going through his stash of candy. Palmer, watching--

SAM
 Oh, my, God! These are my favorite!

Maggie enters. She takes off the jacket, tosses it on a chair.

MAGGIE
 You made Sam's year. We had a lot
 of fun at school, today.

Maggie undoes the tie, removes it from her neck.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
 Can you guess who I was?

PALMER
 Mmmm... not sure.

Maggie takes out the mustache and places it under her nose.

MAGGIE
 Principal Forbes.

Maggie smiles. Palmer smiles back.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
 And you?

PALMER
Me...I was a janitor.

MAGGIE
A Janitor? Oh, no, Mr. Palmer...
You need a Halloween costume. Sam
come over here and help me.

PALMER
No, I'm good.

Maggie grabs a throw blanket off the couch, guides Palmer
into a chair--

MAGGIE
Now, it's Halloween--you can't be
walking around without a costume.

Sam, excited, as Maggie puts the blanket over Palmer's head--

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
What does he look like?

SAM
A ghost!

Sam, loving this. Palmer sits there, a good sport, looking
like a ghost. He throws his arms out--

PALMER
Boo!

Sam jumps, laughs. Maggie takes the blanket off Palmer--

MAGGIE
Or maybe a super hero?

Maggie drapes the blanket around Palmer, like a cape.

SAM
I know!!!

Sam places the tiara on Palmer's head--

SAM (CONT'D)
He's a King!!

Palmer shrugs, he's okay with being a King. Sam giggles,
happy. Maggie smiles at Palmer--

MAGGIE
(pause--)
You wanna stay for dinner?

PALMER

Yeah.

Sam, happy, runs back into the living room. Maggie starts to take out items to barbecue. Palmer helps.

EXT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT

The remains of a cook-out rest on a table. Palmer sits on the stoop. Inside the house: Sam watches TV. Maggie exits the house. Two bottled beers in hand. She hands one to Palmer.

PALMER

Thank you.

MAGGIE

Cheers, to Halloween.

They clink. Drink. Enjoying the night air. Then Maggie examines Palmer, curious about something--

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I gotta ask you something,
partially because I'm nosy, and
partially because of what I heard.
But how did you end up in prison?

Palmer thinks about it. Exhales.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

You don't have talk about it. I'm
sorry-- I was jus' curious.

PALMER

No, it's okay... It's a fair
question.

(pause)

Things were goin' pretty good at
LSU, until I was hit so bad I
didn't even know my name. Had a
couple surgeries and that put an
end to football. Went back home and
started takin' pills. Oxy. Codeine.
You name it. I couldn't stop. And
that's when the trouble started
piling up. I was drinkin' more,
doin' other things. I'd end up in
jail for a night, swear I wouldn't
do it again, but then I did. I jus'
didn't care... There was this rich
kid, he liked to hang out with me,
Daryl and Coles, always bragged
'bout how much money his old man
kept in his safe...

(MORE)

PALMER (CONT'D)

One night, I got him to tell us the combination of the safe and we broke into the house. No one was supposed to be home. But his old man showed up... Things got out of control, and it wasn't anything I could take back. Next thing I know, I'm in prison.

MAGGIE

We? You weren't by yourself?

PALMER

It doesn't matter. I did what I did.

INT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Palmer and Maggie put the dishes in the sink. Sam is asleep on the couch. TV playing to no one.

PALMER

He's fast asleep in there.

MAGGIE

I wish I could fall asleep that fast.

Palmer places the empty beer bottles in the trash.

PALMER

Thank you, this was nice.

MAGGIE

I'm glad you stopped by.

They lock eyes. An attraction felt by both. Palmer steps close to Maggie... They kiss. Then--

INT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM / BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Palmer and Maggie disappear into her bedroom... Slowly, they make love.

EXT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE / CHEVY - NIGHT

Palmer carries a sleeping Sam to the car. Maggie opens the back door, and Palmer is careful to place Sam down, then he closes the door. Maggie faces Palmer. A beat, then--

MAGGIE

Eddie, this was fun, and I like you. But I also like my job.

(pause, kind--)

(MORE)

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

And I'm not looking for anything serious.

(pause)

So I'll see you at school then.

This causes Palmer to smile. They both laugh.

PALMER

Yeah, I think you will.

Palmer climbs behind the wheel. Maggie watches him drive off. She walks back to her house, happy.

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - DAY

Palmer walks Sam and Emily to Lucille Coles's car. Sam and Emily hop in the back, laughing, already having fun.

LUCILLE

Thank you again for the play date. Now don't rush yourself. Jus' come over whenever you're ready.

PALMER

Tell Coles and Daryl I said hi.

LUCILLE

I will.

Palmer waves to Sam and Emily as the car drives off. He spots Maggie, looking pretty, walking back into the school. She catches him staring at her, holds his look, as--

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - MAGGIE'S CLASSROOM - LATER

Maggie packs up to leave. About to exit when Palmer appears in the doorway. A TEACHER walks by. Stares at the two--

MAGGIE

Yes, thank you, Mr. Palmer. The air conditioner's working jus' fine.

The Teacher disappears from sight. Maggie shakes her head.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

You're gonna get me in trouble.

PALMER

I'm sorry. I'll let you be.

MAGGIE

Where's Sam?

PALMER
Sam has a play date with Emily.

MAGGIE
(pause)
You wanna have a play date with me?

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - DAY

A FOR SALE sign is on the lawn. Maggie's car is parked next to the Chevy.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - PALMER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Palmer and Maggie, a bit disheveled, start getting dressed.

PALMER
You thirsty? You want something to drink?

MAGGIE
No. I'm good.

They share a smile. Kiss. Then--

PALMER
I need your help with something.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Palmer opens a box filled with Vivian's clothing, shoes--

PALMER
You know any ladies who could use 'em? Vivian would like that.

MAGGIE
I'm sure I do.

Palmer closes the box. They kiss. Outside, a car door slams. Palmer looks out the window.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - SAME

Sam runs towards the house, crying. He wears a pink skirt and is barefoot. Palmer stops him.

PALMER
What's wrong?

Sam's face is covered heavily in makeup (as if applied in a mocking manner) and streaked with tears. He breaks free and runs into the house. A frazzled Lucille Coles approaches Palmer from her car.

LUCILLE

I jus' left them for a bit. I'm
sorry. I really am... I didn't know
what was going on. He wanted me to
take him home...

Palmer, without waiting for an explanation, disappears into
the house after Sam. Lucille stares after him, upset.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - VIVIAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Palmer finds Sam crying on Vivian's bed. Maggie is next to
Sam, gently rubbing his back.

MAGGIE

It's okay, Sam.

PALMER

You wanna tell us what happened?

Sam doesn't answer. Palmer sits down on the bed. Sam's
breathing slows--

PALMER (CONT'D)

It's a'right... Was it the same
ones who always pick on you? Were
they over there?

Sam nods.

PALMER (CONT'D)

I know you don't want to hear this,
Sam. But sometimes you gotta hit
'em back.

SAM

They're bigger than me.

PALMER

(getting mad)

I know. But you gotta stand up for
yourself, or these kids'll never
leave ya alone.

SAM

They weren't kids.

PALMER

What do you mean?

Sam doesn't say anything.

MAGGIE

Sam? Who did this to you, honey?

Sam looks at Palmer, afraid to say, then finally--

SAM

Toby's dad... Your friend Daryl.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Palmer grabs his keys, heads for the door. Maggie following--

MAGGIE

Eddie, where are you going? Don't do this! Eddie!!

Palmer is already out the door--

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Palmer drives off in the Chevy.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Palmer enters. A few PATRONS sit at the bar. He sees Daryl, Coles and Ned playing pool. Palmer approaches Daryl. Daryl turns to meet him, very aware of why Palmer is there.

DARYL

He already had the skirt on. I jus' gave the 'lil faggot some accessories...

BOOM! Palmer punches Daryl right in his sarcastic grin. He hits him again and again and again, full of rage. Daryl gets a few good shots in, before Palmer beats this asshole until he can't move. The patrons pull Palmer off Daryl. Palmer catches his breath, sees Ned and Coles staring at him.

He walks up to Coles, pins Coles against the wall--

PALMER

Was it funny to you, Coles, huh? Seeing a grown man hold down a little boy? Make him cry while he put make-up on him?

COLES

I... I wasn't there.

PALMER

The fuck you weren't! This happened in *your* house! So let's get one thing straight, friend--your old man pays me a visit, you ain't walking away from this one, like the last one. Trust me on that.

He holds Coles's scared stare, then leaves. Coles exhales. He sees the patrons and Bartender staring at him--

COLES
What'cha lookin' at? Show's over.

Daryl stumbles to his feet.

COLES (CONT'D)
Ned, help him up.

Ned and another MAN lift Daryl to his feet. CU of Daryl's face. A bloody mess, his nose busted wide open.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Maggie sits on the porch, waiting. Palmer pulls up in the Chevy, steps out, quiet. Maggie approaches Palmer. Notices a cut above his eye.

MAGGIE
You okay?

Palmer nods. He's not.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
So what are you going to do, beat up everyone who picks on him?

PALMER
Nope, just the ones over thirty.

MAGGIE
You know, there are other ways to handle this.

Beat. Palmer is silent.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
I'll have a chat with Daryl's wife. She's a actually a decent person.
(beat)
Will you get in trouble?

He shrugs. He's uncertain. Then--

PALMER
Daryl won't press charges.

MAGGIE
Lucky you.

Maggie takes this in. Then sees his bruised knuckles.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Well, Sam's asleep inside... I
better get home.

Maggie gets in her car and drives off. Palmer stands there,
feeling bad.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - MORNING

Palmer, showered, examines his face in the mirror. There's a
gash above his eye. He applies shaving cream to his face. Sam
enters. He watches Palmer shave, then grabs a Band-Aid from
the cabinet. He places it over the gash.

PALMER
Sam, what Daryl did to you was
wrong. You know that, right?

Sam just looks at him. Quiet.

PALMER (CONT'D)
You didn't do anything bad. You
understand, me? Not a thing.

Palmer looks Sam straight in the eye. Sam nods. Palmer gives
him a gentle pat.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sam sits at the table, excited, drinking juice out of a
Ponchatoula Savings Bank mug, watching Palmer write a letter.

PALMER
(reading off the letter)
Dear Flying Princess club. My name
is Sam, and I would very much like
to be a member...

SAM
Make sure you tell 'em, how much I
love their show, and I watch it
every day.

PALMER
(writing)
I watch your show every day. And I
love it, more than anything in the
world.

SAM
In the whole wide world.

Palmer finishes.

PALMER

A'right. Now all you have to do is
sign your name.

Sam grabs the pen and proudly signs. Palmer sticks it in an envelope.

PALMER (CONT'D)

It's good to go.

Sam smiles. Happy. We hear the front door open and close. Moments later, Shelly appears in the doorway. She stares at her son, guiltily.

SHELLY

Hey there, Sam.

Sam looks at his mother, hesitant for a moment, then the hugest smile appears--

SAM

Momma!!

Sam runs to Shelly, wraps his arms around her, tight. Shelly hugs him.

SHELLY

I missed you, baby.

They stay like that for a while, then Shelly looks up and catches Palmer's judgmental stare.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

I heard 'bout Vivian, I'm sorry. I
liked her, she was a good woman...
C'mon, Sam. We better get home.

Shelly pulls away from Sam, leaving him to stare back at Palmer. Suddenly, Sam looks sad. Torn. Not wanting to leave. Palmer picks up Sam's lunch box and moves to him.

PALMER

You and I had a good time. And you
can come visit me whenever you
like. Okay?

Sam nods. He takes his lunch box, then hugs Palmer for the longest moment. Palmer forces a smile, gives him a pat.

PALMER (CONT'D)

A'right. Let's get the rest of your
things.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Palmer leads Sam into the room. He watches with difficulty as Sam collects his dolls. Shelly places everything in his suitcase. Notices the brand new ukulele.

SHELLY
Where'd you get this?

SAM
Palmer... For my birthday.

It hits her -- she wasn't there for it. Beat.

SHELLY
Well, I got ya somethin' at home.
Had to travel for it. C'mon.

She walks Sam towards the door. Stops, looks back at Palmer.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
Thanks for watching him.

Shelly leaves with Sam. Palmer stands alone. In silence. The pain visible.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Palmer exits the house. He sees Jerry's red truck parked in front of Shelly's house. No sign of Sam or the school bus. Palmer climbs in the Chevy and drives off.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - HALLWAY - LATER

Palmer pushes an empty cart down the hall, stops at Maggie's classroom, looks in and sees her teaching. Sam's seat is empty. Maggie sees Palmer and steps into the hall--

PALMER
Shelly came back.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
She did...?

PALMER
Didn't look too good, kinda sickly.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
Well, hopefully he'll be back tomorrow.

PALMER
 Yeah...I hope so...
 (off the silence, then--)
 Well, I'll let you go.

Maggie watches Palmer walk off.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Palmer sits at the bar. The Bartender places a longneck in front of Palmer. Palmer stares at the beer... Debating.

Cut to: Palmer exits. The beer still on the bar. Untouched.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING HOUSE\PORCH

Palmer grabs his keys, steps outside... He sees Sam waiting on the porch. Sees he has no lunchbox.

PALMER
 Where's your lunch box?

SAM
 Jerry threw it away.

PALMER
 Did he?

Sam nods. He looks sad.

SAM
 He said my momma was raising me to be a queer. And he ain't living with no queer kid.

Beat. Palmer looks at him, silent.

SAM (CONT'D)
 What does queer mean?

PALMER
 Some people think it means you're different.

SAM
 Are you queer?

PALMER
 I'm different, that's for sure.

Sam still looks upset.

PALMER (CONT'D)

You know what else we are? We're both good lookin'. We are. Good lookin' and smart. It intimidates people. Makes 'em feel afraid.

Palmer smiles at Sam. Sam smiles back. They get in the car, drive off.

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - MORNING

Palmer and Sam step out of the Chevy.

PALMER

How 'bout after school, I take you to get a root beer float?

SAM

I can't. I gotta help my momma. We're moving to Jerry's. Momma said he wants to marry her. And I'm gonna have to go to another school.

Palmer looks like he's been hit in the stomach.

PALMER

I guess I'll just have to visit you then.

SAM

You promise?

PALMER

You got my word.

The two walk to the school together and slowly it registers for Palmer -- Sam will be gone.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - MAGGIE'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

The children draw with colored pencils on sheets of paper.

MAGGIE

Who else needs an eraser?

A few hands go up. Sam is noticeably quiet. Toby grabs at something on Sam's desk. Sam jumps out of his chair... hits Toby. Toby hits him back. A fight about to erupt--

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Hey! We don't hit other people.

SAM

He took my eraser!

Palmer pulls into Vivian's driveway. He sees Shelly, upset, standing on her front lawn, screaming at Jerry.

EXT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

SHELLY
Get the fuck away from me!

JERRY
Jus' calm the fuck down! Jesus, it
ain't my goddamn fault!

Palmer arrives. Eyes the house -- the door wide open. Dark inside. No sign of Sam.

PALMER
Where's Sam?

Shelly doesn't say anything. Palmer gets in her face--

SHELLY
He's gone! The fuckin' police! CPS
took him!

INT. CHEVY - DAY

Palmer slides behind the wheel and speeds off.

EXT. DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES - LATE DAY

A dark, imposing building. Not in the nicest part of town.

INT. DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES - LATER

Palmer sits across from a FEMALE CASE MANAGER who flips through a very large stack of files.

FEMALE CASE MANAGER
Normally we try to find relatives
for temporary custody. I'll need
you to fill out this paperwork.

She places several forms in front of Palmer. Hands him a pen.

PALMER
I have a felony record.

FEMALE CASE MANAGER
Are you currently on parole?

Palmer nods.

FEMALE CASE MANAGER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, the agency won't approve a foster care license if you're on parole.

PALMER

Can I see him?

FEMALE CASE MANAGER

Not unless you're a parent, legal guardian, or family member.

They're both quiet. Until --

FEMALE CASE MANAGER (CONT'D)

There's a case hearing in Family Court on Monday. The judge'll decide then if Sam will be placed into a home or returned to his mother. It's possible he could make an exception... It's unlikely, but why don't you fill out the application, and we'll see what the judge says?

Palmer, not looking too confident, nods.

INT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - NIGHT

A knock on the door. Shelly, unkempt, moves to see who it is... The room is in shambles. The electricity off.

SHELLY

What do you want?

Palmer follows Shelly's skeleton of a body into the kitchen. Shelly searches for a cigarette, can't find one. We see paperwork from CPS on the table.

PALMER

Where's Jerry?

SHELLY

At church, where else... You got a cigarette?

Palmer retrieves one from a pack and lights it for her.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

Why you here?

Palmer, without wasting any more time, places several crisp hundred dollar bills on the table. Alongside the money, he places a document.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
What's this?

Palmer stares at her, silent. Shelly reads the first line.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
Legal guardian?

PALMER
You'd be signing Sam over to my care.

SHELLY
And why would I do that?

PALMER
'Cause unless you get yourself clean, I don't see the court givin' him back to you...

Shelly's eyes narrow.

SHELLY
Get outta my house.

Palmer doesn't budge. Shelly springs from the chair and rips the document up in his face.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
You think you can buy my son?! You think you're better than me?! Jus 'cause you spent time with my boy, you think you're his daddy? You ain't his daddy, and you ain't better than me!

PALMER
No, I don't think I'm better than you. Maybe a bit luckier this time 'round. But if something were to happen to you, well, they'll put Sam wherever they like. And Sam's not like other kids.

These words sink in. Shelly knows it's true.

SHELLY
(desperate)
They'll give him back. And Sammy and me we'll be just fine! We're gonna leave this shit town behind. I'll get clean. Buy us a nice home... Start taking good care of Sammy... You'll see!

She stares hard at Palmer, wanting so bad to believe it. Then her fantasy gives way to tears.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

Get out.

Palmer doesn't move. Shelly scoops up his money and shoves it into his hand.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

GET OUT!

EXT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Palmer exits the Chevy. The front door opens. Maggie appears.

PALMER

I need a favor.

INT. FAMILY COURT - LOBBY - DAYS LATER

PEOPLE wait to have their turn in front of the judge. Palmer, in dress pants, cleanly shaven, a nice shirt and tie, sits next to Maggie. He looks handsome and nervous.

A moment later, the Female Case Manager appears.

FEMALE CASE MANAGER

Mr. Palmer... Come with me...

INT. FAMILY COURT - COURTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A FEMALE JUDGE, older, glances down at Palmer's application. Palmer sits before her with Maggie and the Female Case Manager at his side.

JUDGE

Has the mother shown up yet?

FEMALE CASE MANAGER

No, your honor.

The Judge focuses on Palmer.

JUDGE

Mr. Palmer, I understand you're on parole, yet requesting the court permit temporary custody of the boy due to special circumstances, is that correct?

PALMER

Yes, sir...

JUDGE

And what exactly are those special circumstances?

Palmer stands, incredibly nervous.

PALMER

You see, awhile back Sam's mother took off and left him with me and my grandmother, then she died, and Sam jus' stayed with me. I was already taking care of him. I drove him to school every morning. I made him sandwiches for lunch. He'd only eat cookies if you let him. And Sam, he don't like to bathe much, but I still made him. We even went trick or treatin' together and...

Maggie quietly watches. Palmer pauses, emotional.

PALMER (CONT'D)

You see, I hadn't felt like I was good at anything in a long time, until Sam. I had no purpose. Nothing. Now I ain't blaming no one, your honor. I did what I did when I was younger, and I got what I got. And I accept that. But the thing is -- I don't want one more regret in my life. I got too damn many. And it's a hard way to live. Waking up every morning wishing you done something different, or said something you never said. When my grandmother died, all I wanted was five more minutes. Jus' to be able to say sorry for the things I done. Let her know how much she meant to me. I never got to say that... That woman took me in. Twice. When no one else would. I don't want another regret to wake up to.

(pauses, upset)

I can't abandon that boy. I jus' won't... And I promise you, you wouldn't have to worry about him, I'd take good care of Sam.

The Judge looks evenly at Palmer, weighing her decision, then finally she picks up Palmer's application and reviews it.

JUDGE

I see you're currently employed at Pineville Elementary?

PALMER

Yes, sir, I'm a custodial engineer.

The Judge sees that on the application, then flips to the attached reference letters.

JUDGE

Your supervisor John Sibs speaks well of you.... as does Sam's school teacher, Ms. Maggie Hayes. I assume that's you?

MAGGIE

Yes, your honor.

JUDGE

The address you listed as your home residence. Does anyone else live there with you?

PALMER

No, sir. It's my grandmother's house. It's up for sale. But I'll have plenty of money to rent a new place. Even closer to the school.

JUDGE

I see.

The Judge examines Palmer.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Mr. Palmer, you seem like you're heading in the right direction, doing well, and perhaps once you have your living situation squared away and are no longer on parole, you can apply for a license at that time. But for now, I'm sorry, I'm going to have to deny your request for temporary custody... My decision is that the boy will remain under the care of the state and be placed into a registered foster home, until the mother is well enough to regain custody.

PALMER

Your honor, please. His mother is a drug addict, that ain't happening.

JUDGE

I'm sorry, that's my decision.

She places Palmer's application aside. Palmer stares at her, dumbfounded. He looks to Maggie, who is also stunned. We hear yelling from the hall... The BAILIFF steps into the hall to see what's going on--

THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN

Shelly hurries into the room. She's pulled herself together with clean washed hair and she wears a skirt, long sleeved blouse and nice shoes. She is followed in by the Bailiff.

SHELLY

I'm here. I'm here! Sorry I'm late.

She sees Palmer and Maggie, standing beside the Case Manager.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

Your honor, they said to show up on Monday. Today's Monday. So here I am.

JUDGE

And who are you?

SHELLY

I'm Sam's mother, that's who I am.

She stands, dignified. Shooting a narrowed glance at Palmer and Maggie, who remain silent. Shelly sees her name on the Case Manager's paperwork, points to it--

SHELLY (CONT'D)

Right there! Your honor, please... I don't know what them notes say, or anyone else... But them sheriffs didn't even talk to Sam. They jus' came into my home and took him away. They didn't even say why...

JUDGE

Ms. Browne, a complaint of abuse and neglect was made to Child Protective Services. Upon inspection, your home was without electricity, deemed dangerous, and you were described as being violent and agitated.

SHELLY

That ain't true... No, sir! But agitated, yeah, I was agitated...

(MORE)

SHELLY (CONT'D)

Now I've had some health problems, I'll admit to that... And hell, I know I'm poor. I ain't in denial 'bout that. But I ain't never once put a hand on my son! I never even raised my voice to Sammy. You go ask Sammy, and he'll tell you the truth. He ain't an unhappy boy, your honor.

The Judge looks at her--

SHELLY (CONT'D)

I'll do whatever you want me to do. You wanna piss test me, test me. Jus' please... don't send my son to go live with no strangers.

Off Palmer's look--

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Palmer walks out of his room and enters the kitchen. He glances at Shelly's trailer through the window, which is quiet. He starts making coffee...hears a small knock and his front door opens, standing alone in the doorway is Sam.

Sam sees Palmer and runs to him. Palmer meets Sam with a big hug. Sam holds him tightly... Palmer pulls back with a smile. His eyes are wet.

SAM

You're crying?

PALMER

Am I? I must be happy to see you.

(beat)

You a'right?

Sam nods, then off the room --

SAM

What happened to Vivian's things?

PALMER

I gave 'em away, I'm gonna have to move.

SAM

You are - where ya goin'?

PALMER

Don't know yet.

SAM
Maybe you can move to wherever me
and momma are going?

Palmer forces a smile, then sees Sam is holding something.

PALMER
Whaddya got there?

SAM
I found it outside.

Sam holds a small grammar school photo of a young boy.

PALMER
That's me. When I was your age.

SAM
Can I keep it?

PALMER
Sure.

Sam sticks the photo in his pocket, like a treasure.

SHELLY (O.S.)
Sam! Sammy! C'mon now!

The two fall silent...

SHELLY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Sammy!!

Finally--

SAM
I gotta go.

Beat.

PALMER
You better get then.

Sam looks at Palmer, not wanting to leave him, then he gives Palmer one last hug, before running out of the house.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Palmer steps onto the porch and watches Sam run back to his trailer.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE / SHELLY'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

SHELLY

C'mon now! Get your things.

Sam runs past her and disappears inside the trailer. Shelly, not looking healthy, and white knuckling it to stay clean, catches Palmer staring at her -- she locks eyes with him, then turns and walks inside the house.

Palmer stares after Shelly, then heads back into the house.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Palmer, carrying a box under one arm, folds up Vivian's tray table and heads out the door...

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Palmer loads the box and tray table into the trunk of the Chevy. He slams the trunk closed, about to head back into the house, when he hears yelling coming from Shelly's trailer...

INT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - DAY

The room is trashed. Jerry holds a wasted Shelly down on the couch. He yanks her hair.

JERRY

Say that to me again! You fuckin' lying whore!

SHELLY

Get off me, you son of a bitch!

Shelly tries to kick him. Sam grabs onto Jerry's back.

SAM

Leave her alone!

Jerry pushes Sam off him, hard. Sam SLAMS into the wall.

The door swings open, and Palmer grabs Jerry and throws him against the side of the house, ready to strike with his fist, when he sees Sam watching from the floor--

Palmer releases Jerry, takes a step back, surveying Shelly, the damage... a PIPE, bags of CRYSTAL METH. The whole place a mess.

Palmer picks up Sam and carries him out of the house.

SHELLY

Hey! Where the hell you goin'?!
Come back here! That's my son! You
motherfucker!!

INT. CHEVY - DAY

Palmer speeds down the road, unsure where he is going. Sam sits in the passenger seat. He begins to cry. This is all too much for him. Palmer pulls over, hits the brakes.

PALMER

It's a'right, Sam. It's okay.

Palmer takes hold of Sam, comforting him, trying to decide what to do.

EXT. TRUCK STOP/DINER - LATER

A big rig pulls off a highway to fuel for gas. A lonely diner sits adjacent to it. A few beat up cars are parked in front. We see the Chevy among them, as...

INT. DINER - EVENING

Palmer approaches a MANAGER who wears a name tag pinned to his shirt.

PALMER

You got a phone I can borrow?

The Manager places an iPhone down on the counter.

PALMER (CONT'D)

Thanks.

Palmer dials, keeping his eye on Sam in the Chevy--

INT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME

A phone rings. Maggie walks in from the living room and collects the ringing Samsung off the table.

MAGGIE

Hello?

INTERCUT: DINER/MAGGIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

PALMER

It's me... I took Sam.

Maggie, both relieved and concerned --

MAGGIE

I know... Shelly called the police.
They're looking for you.

Beat.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

You gotta bring Sam back.

PALMER

I can't. Not to that.

MAGGIE

It's kidnapping.

PALMER

She ain't fit.

MAGGIE

Maybe so. But where you gonna go
with him? You'll end up back in
prison. Is that what you want?

Palmer is silent.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

She's his mother, Eddie. Good or
bad, right or wrong - she's Sam's
mother.

Palmer stares out the window at Sam who watches him from
inside the car. A small boy. Confused. Lost. Equally scared.
Finally, after what seems like forever, and fighting every
instinct inside him --

PALMER

Call Coles.

INT. CHEVY - CONTINUOUS

Palmer slides behind the wheel, doesn't look at Sam.

SAM

Palmer... Where we going?

Palmer, thinking, eyes the highway -- he could just take off,
keep going.

SAM (CONT'D)

Palmer?

Palmer looks over at Sam. Sam knows they have to go back.

EXT./INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE/CHEVY - HOURS LATER

The Chevy pulls into Vivian's driveway. THRU the windshield, Palmer sees the two Sheriff vehicles parked in front of Shelly's house, waiting for him. Coles Senior steps out of one, locking eyes with Palmer.

PALMER
 (to Sam)
 You wait here, okay?

Sam, growing afraid, nods. Palmer exits the Chevy.

EXT. SHELLY'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

Coles exits the house with Shelly, who looks unwell. She stares angrily at Palmer.

SHELLY
 Lock that son of a bitch, up!

COLES
 Stay here!

Coles leaves Shelly behind as he meets Palmer.

COLES (CONT'D)
 Look... she ain't in any shape.
 High out of her mind. I'm gonna
 take Sam over to Maggie's. He'll
 stay there for now.

PALMER
 Thank you.

Coles sees his father heading their way.

COLES
 I'm so sorry. Truly.

Palmer's eyes hold on Coles, whose pain for him is genuine, as--Coles Senior approaches Palmer.

COLES SENIOR
 Turn around, Eddie, place your
 hands behind your back... You're
 under arrest for abduction of a
 child.

Palmer does as he's told. Coles Senior promptly cuffs him. Starts to read Palmer his rights when suddenly the car door of the Chevy busts open, and Sam runs to Palmer.

SAM

NOOO! Leave him alone!!

Sam races across the lawn and attacks Coles Senior. Punching him. Trying as hard as he can to push him away from Palmer.

SAM (CONT'D)

NOOOOO! Let him go!! Let him go!!!

Coles grabs Sam, pulling him off Coles Senior, restraining Sam--

SAM (CONT'D)

PALMER!! PALMER! Let him go!!

COLES

Come on, now, Sam, stop!

Sam hysterically cries, screams, as he is held back by Coles. Shelly hurries off the porch, moves to Sam, shoves Coles--

SHELLY

Stop grabbing him! You're hurtin' him!

(tries to calm Sam)

It's okay, Sammy. I got you. I'm gonna take care of you, baby.

SAM

No you're not! You never do! You NEVER do!

Shelly stares at Sam, affected, as--Coles Senior shoves Palmer into the back of his vehicle. Shuts the door. Sam grows more upset, as Coles Senior gets behind the wheel and drives off. Finally, Sam breaks free from Coles and runs after the sheriff's vehicle... Palmer, visible in the rear window--

SAM (CONT'D)

PALMER!! PALMER!!

INT. SHERIFF'S STATION - CELL/HALL - NIGHT

Palmer sits on a cot, behind the bars of a cell. He stands. Paces. Exhales. A long beat. Footsteps are heard. Palmer looks up. Coles appears, unlocks the cell.

COLES

You're free to go... Shelly said you were jus' taking Sam to get somethin' to eat. Too high to remember, I guess. So, we gotta drop the charges.

Coles holds open the door, off Palmer's look--

COLES (CONT'D)
I owed you.

PALMER
Yeah, you did.

Palmer walks past. Coles watches Palmer exit the station.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

A lazy Saturday. A crisp, cool day. People wander about. New items are tacked on the community board.

INT./EXT. JERRY'S TRUCK/MAGGIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Jerry's red truck pulls up. Shelly is in the passenger seat. She looks at herself in the rear view. Applies some more red lip stick, she looks shaky, but determined. Exits the truck.

INT./EXT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Shelly approaches. Palmer is at the door. It takes Shelly a moment before she is able to speak.

SHELLY
You, uh, you think I'm a bad mother?

Palmer simply looks at her. He walks Shelly into the house. Shelly passes Maggie without a word and follows Palmer to the kitchen... Sitting at the table is Sam. Shelly enters and sits down next to him, as Palmer disappears from the room...

SHELLY (CONT'D)
Hey, Sammy.

Sam doesn't say a word.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
I know you're mad at me, and tha's all right...

Sam stares at his red cowboy boots, ignores her.

SHELLY (CONT'D)
Well, look, Sammy, I uh, I need to talk to you about something important. You think we could do that?

Sam is quiet, then nods--

SAM

Yes, momma.

Shelly watches Sam, uncertain how she is going to do this, then finally...

SHELLY

Well, you see, Sam, I've been thinkin' 'bout some things, and I think it might be best if you live with Palmer.

Sam is quiet.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

He's a real good man. He cares for you. And, well, I'm struggling, Sam. I'm struggling. It ain't that I don't love you.

Sam begins to cry. Shelly tries to force back her own tears. But she can't.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

I love you with all my heart.

Sam moves off his chair and hugs Shelly. This only makes it more difficult.

SHELLY (CONT'D)

You wanna live with Palmer? You want him to be your daddy?

Sam looks at his mother for the longest moment, then he nods.

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - EARLY MORNING

A blue sky. Quiet morning. The Chevy pulls into the school's parking lot and parks next to the only other car.

INT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - JANITOR'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Palmer enters. Sibs is already behind his desk. A large box takes up the middle of the room. It rests on a cart.

SIBS

Junior's new air conditioner.

Palmer nods, takes off his jacket, and that's when he sees...

A set of KEYS on his desk. Nothing more.

Palmer looks at Sibs, whose back is to him.

PALMER

Sibs--
 (pause)
 Thank you.

Sibs looks up from his paperwork.

SIBS

You better hurry up. Junior doesn't
 like to wait.

Palmer smiles. Sibs smiles back. Palmer grabs the keys, cart,
 and rolls out with both...

EXT. PINEVILLE ELEMENTARY - PARKING LOT - DAY

Buses, cars, kids everywhere. Principal Forbes stands talking
 with a RANDOM FEMALE PARENT and Lucille Coles.

Palmer and Sam exit the school. Lucille quickly stops Palmer,
 they talk for a moment, most likely to arrange a play date.
 Then Palmer and Sam head to the Chevy. A beep is heard.
 Palmer pulls a used iPhone from his pocket. Reads a message.
 Smiles. Looks up as--

Maggie, Samsung in hand, stands with a few other teachers.
 She smiles after Palmer and Sam, tucks her phone away as she
 continues with her conversation with the teachers.

EXT. TOWN - AFTERNOON

A TAYLOR GS MINI MAHOGANY GUITAR, mint condition, is in the
 window of the PAWN SHOP (from the very beginning). A MAN
 removes it from the window.

INT. CHEVY - MOMENTS LATER

Sam watches Palmer exit the pawn shop, carrying the guitar.
 Palmer opens the back door of the Chevy, places the guitar
 down, then gets behind the wheel. Drives off.

PALMER

Got one more stop.

EXT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - DAY

The "For Sale" sign has the word "Sold" above it. The Chevy
 is parked out front.

INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Palmer packs a few last items into a box. Sam runs out of the
 bedroom, holding a football trophy. He drops it in the box.

PALMER

Good to go.

EXT./INT. VIVIAN'S HOUSE/CHEVY - EVENING

Palmer loads the box into the trunk of the Chevy. Sam hops in the passenger seat. Palmer slams the trunk closed, walks to the mailbox, collects what's inside. One piece grabs his attention, causes him to look at Sam, perhaps worried...

INT. CHEVY - EVENING

Palmer slides behind the wheel. He watches Sam stare at his former house. It looks vacant.

PALMER

You ready?

Sam nods.

PALMER (CONT'D)

This came in the mail for you.

Palmer holds out an envelope addressed to Sam.

SAM

I never got mail before.

PALMER

Well it's yours. Go ahead, take it.

After a moment, Sam takes the envelope... Palmer watches Sam as he opens it and pulls out a fancy pink certificate... Sam stops... looks at Palmer who smiles at him.

PALMER (CONT'D)

Congratulations.

We see that it is from THE FLYING PRINCESS CLUB.

Sam studies the certificate as if it were made of gold, eyeing his name printed in bold scripted letters.

THE END.