

SLING BLADE

Screenplay

by

Billy Bob Thornton

FADE IN:

INT. A MENTAL HOSPITAL - DAY

A few patients sit around fumbling with themselves. One man sits at a table scratching back and forth on a piece of paper with a crayon. Another stands in a corner smoking a cigarette and staring at the crayon guy. This is CHARLES. Another man, KARL, sits in a chair staring at the floor and rubbing his hands together. We cut back and forth between Charles staring and Crayon Man scratching. After a moment, an attendant approaches Charles.

ATTENDANT

You can't smoke in here.

Charles stares at him blankly for a moment and continues smoking. He looks back to Crayon Man again for a moment then looks over at Karl and then goes and sits down beside him.

CHARLES

A Mercury is a good car and that's what I was driving that day. I've owned a lot of cars. Different kinds. Lots of different kinds of cars. She was standing, this girl, on the side of the street where there was a chicken stand, not the Colonel, mind you, but never the less a chicken stand, and I pulled the Mercury over and rolled down the window by electric power. She was wearing a leather skirt and she had a lot of hair on her arms. I like that. I like it a lot. It means a big bush. I like a big bush. She said, "Are you dating?" I said, "yes," and she got in the car. We pulled to a remote location, one that she and I both felt comfortable with and she said, "How much can you spend?" I said, "What it takes to see your bush. I know it's a big one." She said "twenty- five dollars," which to a working man is not chicken feed. I produced the money and she put it in her shoe and pulled up her skirt. There before me lay a thin, crooked, uncircumcised penis. You can imagine how badly I wanted my twenty-five dollars back.

INT. A HALLWAY - DAY

Two young women, MARSHA DWIGGINS, carrying a briefcase, and THERESA EVANS, carrying two camera bags are being led down the hallway by a GUARD.

THERESA

I don't know why you're so weirded out, this is not San Quentin, it's just a nut-house. Most of these people don't even know where they are, they're not gonna hurt you.

MARSHA

In a few minutes we're gonna be in a room with a killer. That doesn't bother you?

THERESA

Hey, you're the one that wanted to major in journalism. Anyhow, wasn't the guy something like twelve or thirteen when he did it, it was twenty-five years ago, he probably doesn't even remember it.

MARSHA

(wrinkling her nose)
Do you smell shit?

THERESA

Yeah.

They reach a door and the guard ushers them through.

INT. AN OFFICE - DAY

JERRY WOOLRIDGE stands up from behind the desk as they enter. He's in his fifties and looks like a school teacher, shop class or perhaps eighth-grade science.

GUARD

These are the people from that newspaper deal.

WOOLRIDGE

Oh yeah, from the college?

MARSHA

Yes sir.

Woolridge shakes hands with them.

WOOLRIDGE

My name's Jerry Woolridge.

MARSHA

Nice to meet you. I'm Marsha Dwiggins and this is Theresa Evans. She's here to take the pictures.

WOOLRIDGE

Y'all have a seat. Is this all of you?

MARSHA

Yes sir.

WOOLRIDGE

I think there must have been a little mix up. I told your sponsor or teacher or whatever he is, there couldn't be any pictures. It's s'posed to be just a little story or article or something, isn't that right?

MARSHA

Well, yeah, it's for the school newspaper. But it has pictures. I mean it's a regular paper, you know.

WOOLRIDGE

Karl's real sensitive about having his picture made. He wouldn't even be on the bulletin board for the Easter Collage.

(to guard)

Melvin, would you get me a good hot cup with two sugar substitutes? You girls want some coffee?

MARSHA

No thank you.

WOOLRIDGE

The other thing is I told your boss on the phone to send a man. Karl won't talk to women.

INT. REC ROOM - DAY

CLOSEUP on Karl's face. Charles has started another monologue.

CHARLES

There was a young man named John Liggitt Hunter who was in the filling station business and a good filling station business. He was one of those young men that we run across so often in life. I'm sure you've run across them, that didn't deserve the things he had. One of those things was his beautiful bride, Sarah. She was a Georgia Peach. As a matter fact she looked more like the picture I've had in my head than any woman I've ever seen. I took it upon myself to take her away from John Liggitt Hunter, who didn't deserve her. I'm not sure if I mentioned that he was a Frenchman who claimed to be an Englishman. It took some very strong nylon cord to take her away from him. She was a fighter as well as a Georgia Peach.

INT. WOOLRIDGE'S OFFICE

The girls look confused.

WOOLRIDGE

I don't know what to tell you. I'm sorry. I made my self pretty clear I thought. He probably got busy and wasn't thinking. I know how that is. I used to teach shop and eighth grade science.

MARSHA

Well, what do we do? We drove all the way out here.

THERESA

Let's just go, Marsha.

MARSHA

No, we have to get this story.

THERESA

I thought you'd be happy to leave.

MARSHA

Why won't he talk to women?

WOOLRIDGE

He has problems. You know. With all that. He won't hardly talk to anybody really. Just certain people. He's very troubled.

INT. REC ROOM

CHARLES

(leaning in to Karl)
A shovel just makes too goddamn much racket.

INT. WOOLRIDGE'S OFFICE

WOOLRIDGE

(takes a drink of coffee)
I don't think he's talked to a woman in twenty-five or 50 years. That I know of anyway. That's why I said to send a man. At least maybe he'd answer a question or two for a man. I'm all for helping the college out, believe me. It might be a real good article or story.

MARSHA

Can't you talk to him? Maybe talk him into it. I'm a real good interviewer. Just get me in the room with him.

WOOLRIDGE

(to guard)
Melvin, go get Karl and take him down to the old classroom.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Woolridge and the two women walk down the hallway.

WOOLRIDGE

I'll talk to him and see what we can do.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Woolridge is opening a door. He enters and the women follow him in. He flips on a light switch and very bright florescent lights illuminate the room.

WOOLRIDGE

You see, Karl, growing up, only knew that sex was wrong and that people who did it should be killed for it. He couldn't really read but, well, neither could his mother. But, his father made sure that his mother knew what the Bible said. And she made sure Karl knew. You know he slept in a hole in the ground under a tool shed, right?

MARSHA

I knew he slept in a tool shed.

WOOLRIDGE

His mother told him that he was their punishment. Hers and his father's, from God, for having sex -

MARSHA

Before they were married?

WOOLRIDGE

I don't think so. Just period, I think. She told him God gave them the ugliest creation he could think of. Karl has an entire book - a notebook. On every page it says "Franklin Chapter 1 Verse number 1." He wrote that a few years ago after he'd learned to write. His father's name was Franklin.

MARSHA

That's really strange. What does it mean?

WOOLRIDGE

One of his Daddy's Bible lessons I imagine. Y'all pull up a chair. I'll go out and talk to him.

INT. REC ROOM

CLOSEUP on Charles' face.

CHARLES

You have to make something explode to truly understand it. You have to examine the tiny particles while they're on fire.

Off screen we hear FOOTSTEPS approaching. We pull back and see MELVIN the guard.

MELVIN

Karl, I gotta take you down to the old classroom. Mr. Woolridge has some people for you to see down there. Come on. Let's go.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Melvin and Karl walk down the hallway. Woolridge stands outside the door of the classroom. They reach him and Woolridge talks quietly to Karl.

WOOLRIDGE

Karl, you know, do you remember when I told you about those people from that newspaper?

(pause)

They want to ask you some questions about your release. They think it would make an interesting story. Will you talk to 'em? Get interviewed.

(pause)

Now, they're women. I think it might be good for you to. You're gonna be seein' all kinds of people when you go on the outside. This'll help you I believe.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

It's just Woolridge and the two women in the room.

WOOLRIDGE

Well, it surprised the dickens out of me. He said he'll talk to you.

Marsha smiles and looks at Theresa.

WOOLRIDGE

But, here's the thing. He'll only talk to you. He doesn't want you to ask him anything. And you shouldn't stare at him.

MARSHA

How am I going to conduct an interview if I can't ask him any questions?

WOOLRIDGE

It's the best you're gonna get. I'm sorry.

MARSHA

Can I ask you a question? If he's so troubled, why are you letting him out? What if he does it again? It happens all the time.

WOOLRIDGE

He's free. His time's up. That's the rules. He's been treated and reevaluated. He doesn't show any signs any more.

MARSHA

Signs?

WOOLRIDGE

Homicidal signs. Oh, we're gonna change the light in here for Karl. I hope you can see to write.

Woolridge turns on a lamp on a desk and turns off the overhead lights. He opens the door and Melvin brings Karl in. In the semi-darkness Woolridge pushes a chair up and motions for Marsha to sit. Karl stands beside Melvin motionless. Woolridge whispers to Theresa.

WOOLRIDGE

You'll have to step outside.

Theresa starts to protest.

WOOLRIDGE

Please.

Karl sits down in a folding chair near a lamp as Melvin ushers Theresa outside into the hallway. Karl sits staring at the floor. Rubbing his palms together and breathing strangely, as usual. He sits silent for what seems like forever.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Theresa stands on one side of the door, Melvin on the other.

THERESA

Can I just sneak in there? I won't take any pictures, I promise. I just want to listen.

MELVIN

No ma'am. I'm sorry you can't.

Theresa takes a cigarette from her purse and starts to light it.

MELVIN

You can't smoke in here. I'm sorry.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Marsha is staring at Karl. Karl, still breathing and rubbing his palms, starts to speak. His voice is low and raspy, but not just low and raspy; strange.

KARL

Well, I reckon what you're a wanting to know is what I'm doing in here. I reckon the reason I'm in here is cause I killed somebody. But I reckon what you was a wanting to know is how come me to kill somebody. Well, I reckon I'll start at the front and tell you.

(pause; heavy breathing)

I lived most of my life out behind my mother and father's house in a little old shed that my daddy'd built for me. They didn't too much want me up there in the house with the rest of 'em. I mostly just set around out there in the shed all the time a lookin' at the ground. It didn't have no floor but I had me a hole dug out to lay down in and a quilt or two that I put down there.

(pause; more breathing)

My daddy was a hard workin' man most of his life, not that I can say the same fer myself. I most just set around the shed and tinkered around with a lawnmower or two and went to school off and on from time to time but the children there made quite a bit of sport of me, made fun of me quite a bit. Some of 'em roughed me up sometimes so mostly I stayed out back there in the shed. My daddy worked down at the sawmill there, down there at the planer mill for an old man named Dixon.

(MORE)

KARL (CONT'D)

Old man Dixon was a very cruel feller, he didn't treat his employees very well, didn't pay 'em much of a wage, didn't pay my daddy much of a wage, just barely enough to get by on. But I reckon he got by all right, they come out one or the other of 'em, usually my mother, and fed me pretty regular. At least I know he made enough for me to have mustard and biscuits three or four times a week. Old man Dixon had a boy named Jesse Dixon. Jesse was really more cruel than his daddy. He made quite a bit of sport of me and takened advantage of the little girls around the neighborhood quite a bit.

(pause)

He used to say my mother was a very pretty woman. He said it quite a bit from time to time, when I was at the school house. Well, I reckon you want me to get on and tell you what happened so I reckon I'll tell you. I was settin' out in the shed one evenin' not doin' too much, just kindly starin' at the wall and a waitin' fer my mother to come out and give me my Bible lesson and I heard a commotion up in the house there so I got up and run up on the screened-in porch there to see what was a goin' on, and I looked in the kitchen window and I seen my mother a layin' there on the floor without any clothes on.

(pause; breathing)

And seen Jesse Dixon a layin' on top of her having his way with her.

(pause)

Well, I just seen red. I picked up a kaiser blade that was a layin' there by the screen door, some folks calls it a sling blade, I call it a kaiser blade. It's just a long handle like a axe handle with a long blade on it that's shaped kind of like a banana. Sharp on one edge and dull on the other. It's what the highway boys use to cut down weeds and whatnot.

(MORE)

KARL (CONT'D)

I went in the kitchen there and I hit Jesse Dixon up side the head with it and knocked him off my mother. I reckon that didn't quite satisfy me so I hit him again in the neck with the sharp edge and just plumb near cut his head off. Killed him. Well, my mother, she jumped up from there and started yellin', "What did you kill Jesse for? What did you kill Jesse for?"

(pause; intense breathing)

Well, come to find out my mother didn't really mind what Jesse was a doin' to her. I reckon that made me madder than what Jesse had made me. I takened the kaiser blade, some folks calls it a sling blade, I call it a kaiser blade and hit my mother up side the head with it an' killed her.

(long pause; breathing)

Some folks has asked me if I had it to do over again would I do the same thing. I don't know, I reckon I would. Anyhow, they seen fit to put me in here and here I've been for a great long while. I've learned to read some; took me four years to read the Bible. I reckon I understand a good deal of it. It wasn't what I expected in a lot of places. I've slept in a good bed for a great long while. They've seen fit to put me out now. They tell me they're a settin' me free today. Anyhow, I reckon that's all you need to know. If you want any more details I reckon I can tell 'em to you. I don't know if that's enough for your newspaper or not.

Suddenly Marsha speaks from the darkness.

MARSHA

Will you ever kill anybody again, Karl?

This seems to startle the very room itself Woolridge motions for Marsha to shut up and Karl stops still. Very still. He breathes hard for a moment then starts to calm down. He seems almost at ease. He slowly looks up. From Karl's point of view we barely see Marsha's face in the dim light. Karl is looking straight at Marsha.

KARL
(slowly)
I don't reckon I got no reason to
kill nobody.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Woolridge stands just outside the classroom door with Marsha and Theresa. Karl stands down the way a few feet with Melvin.

MARSHA
Is he leaving right this minute?

WOOLRIDGE
We've got some paperwork to take
care of. Pretty soon. Don't worry,
you won't run into him in the
parking lot.

MARSHA
I didn't mean that.

WOOLRIDGE
I hope the best for you, Miss
Dwiggins, with your school and your
paper and all.

MARSHA
Where will he go?

WOOLRIDGE
Wherever he wants to. I think he's
going back to Millsburg where he's
from. It's just about twenty miles
from here.

MARSHA
Will he be supervised?

WOOLRIDGE
As much as anybody else is, I
guess. Y'all have a good rest of
the day now.

Marsha and Theresa walk toward the exit. As they pass Karl he speaks to Marsha.

KARL
(looking down)
Thank you.

MARSHA
(immediately extends her
hand)
Thank you.

Karl doesn't take her hand. Karl continues to stare at the floor until the women exit.

KARL
I reckon I'm gonna have to get used
to looking at pretty people.

WOOLRIDGE
Yes, I guess you are.

KARL
I reckon I'm gonna have to get used
to them lookin' at me, too.

WOOLRIDGE
You better go get your things.

KARL
I ain't got nothing but them books.

WOOLRIDGE
You better go get em.

KARL
All right then.

Karl walks slowly down the hallway.

EXT. BUS STATION - MILLSBURG - DAY

Karl steps off the bus carrying a few books by a strap. He stands there for a moment staring at the bus station as the few people around stare at him, then he starts walking.

SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY

Karl standing in front of a barbershop looking through the window at a man having his hair cut. In front of the police station.

Staring at an empty school yard.

EXT. DAIRY QUEEN - DAY

Karl stands and stares at the building for a moment. He sees a woman take a tray of food from the window. When she's gone, he walks up to the window. A pimply faced TEENAGED BOY comes to wait on him.

BOY
Can I help you?

KARL
I was kindly wantin' somethin' or
'nother d'eat.

BOY
Well, what did you want?

KARL
You have any biscuits for sale?

BOY
Naw, we don't have biscuits.

Karl stands in silence for a moment.

BOY
Did you decide, sir?

KARL
What you got that's good to eat?

BOY
Well, I guess it's all good.

KARL
What do you like to eat here?

BOY
French fries. I like to eat them
pretty good.

KARL
French-fried potatoes.

BOY
Yeah.

KARL
How much you want fer 'em? I'll get
some of them I reckon.

BOY
Sixty for small and seventy-five
for large.

KARL
Give me the big'uns.

Karl digs in his pocket for money.

EXT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

Karl sits on a bench eating French fries. After a moment, a twelve or thirteen-year-old BOY comes out of the laundromat wrestling three or four big bags of laundry. He can't seem to get a plan together for carrying them all. Karl gets up and goes over to him. The boy looks up at Karl, a little startled by Karl's strange figure looming over him.

BOY

These dang things are heavy. Hard to carry, too.

KARL

What you got in there, warshing?

BOY

Yeah.

KARL

Ain't you got no mama and daddy to tend to it?

BOY

I got a mama, but she's at work over at Ben's Dollar Store. My daddy's dead.

(pause)

He got hit by a train.

KARL

How far you going with them sacks full of warsh?

BOY

About a half a mile I think it is.

KARL

I'll help you tote 'em if I don't give out first.

BOY

Okay. You don't have to though.

Karl picks up two sacks and they walk away.

EXT. STREET - DAY

They walk in silence for a while before the boy finally speaks.

BOY

My name is Frank Wheatley. What's your name?

KARL
Karl's my name.

FRANK (BOY)
What's you last name?

KARL
Childers.

FRANK
What are all them books?

KARL
Different ones. One's the Bible.
One of 'ems a book on Christmas.
One of 'ems how to be a carpenter.

FRANK
How come you're carryin' them
around with you?

KARL
Ain't got nowhere to set 'em down.

FRANK
Don't you live somewhere?

KARL
I did live there in the state
hospital.

FRANK
Why'd you live there?

KARL
I killed some folks quite awhile
back. They said I wasn't right in
the head and they put me in there
in the nervous hospital instead of
puttin' me in jail.

FRANK
They let you out?

KARL
Yeah.

FRANK
How come?

KARL
They told me I was well. They had
to turn me loose.

FRANK
Are you well?

KARL
I reckon I feel all right.

FRANK
You don't seem like you'd kill
nobody.

They reach a little white frame house and the boy turns up
the sidewalk.

FRANK
This is my house. You can just set
those bags on the porch.

Karl sets the bags down and he and the boy stare at each
other in silence for a moment.

FRANK
Do you like to play football?

KARL
I never was much count at it. I
never did get picked out for it.

FRANK
Me and the Burnett twins and some
boys plays down at the junior high
practice field all the time. If you
ever want to come by and play. We
ain't no good either. Well, I'll
see you later.

He goes inside leaving Karl staring at the front door.

INT. BUS STATION - DAY

Karl stands at the counter. A middle-aged man is selling
tickets.

KARL
How does a feller go about gettin'
up to the state hospital?

MAN
You buy a ticket for fourteen
dollars and then set and wait for
the four- fifteen bus to Kelton.

KARL
All right then.

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - DAY

Karl walks down the hallway carrying his books. A couple of staffers give him 'Why are you still here' looks. He reaches a door and goes in.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

There is no one at the desk in the outer office, so Karl goes into Woolridge's office.

INT. WOOLRIDGE'S OFFICE - DAY

Karl finds Woolridge doing paper work. Woolridge looks up startled.

WOOLRIDGE

Karl, what in the world are you doing here?

KARL

I want to come back and stay here.

WOOLRIDGE

Well, you can't do that. You're a free man. You've been let out to do as you please.

KARL

I reckon I don't care nothin' about bein' a free man. I don't know how to go about it.

WOOLRIDGE

Well, you have to learn. It'll take some time. Don't you know anybody down there to help you out?

KARL

Naw.

WOOLRIDGE

Your daddy's still livin' down there from what you told me.

(pause)

I guess he wouldn't help you any, would he? I wasn't thinking. You don't know anybody?

KARL

Naw. Never did know too much of nobody. Not to he'p me out anyway.

WOOLRIDGE

(sighs)

Listen, Karl, the truth is I don't know where they expect you to go or what they expect you to do. If it was up to me, I'd let you stay here if that's what you wanted. I'm just doin' my job.

They sit in silence for a moment.

WOOLRIDGE

You follow me?

(no answer)

Listen, I know an old boy that runs a fix-it shop deal down in Millsburg. He used to go to church with me. You're good workin' on small engines and things. If I put my neck out for you with him, will you work at it if he'll hire you?

KARL

I'm pretty handy I reckon on lawnmowers and whatnot.

WOOLRIDGE

I know, I've seen it myself. Would you give that a try?

KARL

I reckon.

WOOLRIDGE

I can't promise he'll hire you. I'll have to tell him about your history.

KARL

I never was no good with history.

WOOLRIDGE

No, I mean your past. About why you were in here.

(pause)

I'll take you first thing in the mornin'. You have anyplace you can stay tonight at all? I just can't let you stay here. It's the rules. If something happened well, I'd be liable.

KARL

I reckon I can just walk around
till the mornin'. Or set and read
me a book somewhere.

They sit and stare at each other for a moment.

INT. WOOLRIDGE DEN - NIGHT

Woolridge, his WIFE, his teenage SON, BUBBA, and teenage
DAUGHTER sit in various comfortable chairs looking extremely
uncomfortable and staring at Karl, who is sitting on the edge
of a chair looking at the floor. After a long creepy moment,
Mom speaks.

MRS. WOOLRIDGE

Karl, would you like a muffin?

KARL

No thank you.

MRS. WOOLRIDGE

I understand Jerry is going to take
you somewhere else tomorrow.

KARL

I don't reckon I know nobody name
Jerry.

WOOLRIDGE

She's talkin' about me, Karl.
That's my first name.

KARL

He's a-carryin' me to look fer work
in Millsburg where I was borned.

MRS. WOOLRIDGE

Would you like some coffee?

KARL

Coffee makes me a might nervous
when I drink it.

DAUGHTER

Daddy, can I be excused to go to
bed?

WOOLRIDGE

Sure, honey. You sleep with Mama
tonight. I'll sleep with your
brother and Karl can take your
room.

DAUGHTER

Why?

WOOLRIDGE

We have company. Now you go on.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's an all-American girls room. Everything is pink. There are stuffed animals everywhere and posters of pop idols.

WOOLRIDGE

Well, Karl, there's plenty of blankets and things there. Bathroom's right there in the hall. We'll leave first thing tomorrow.

Karl stands in the middle of the room holding his books.

Woolridge closes the door.

INT. WOOLRIDGE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Woolridge walks into the kitchen where Mom and Son sit at the table.

MRS. WOOLRIDGE

Jerry, why didn't you give him Bubba's room? Sister's is kind of girly, isn't it?

WOOLRIDGE

Yeah, I thought about that. No sense in moving him now I guess.

BUBBA

Daddy, don't you think one of us ought to stay up all night and kind of guard or somethin'?

WOOLRIDGE

Why, hell no, son. What's wrong with you?

BUBBA

Well, he's crazy. He's a nut ain't he?

MRS. WOOLRIDGE

'Isn't' he, Bubba. Don't say ain't.

INT. WOOLRIDGE DEN AND HALLWAY - MORNING

Woolridge, already dressed, walks through the den and down the hallway. He knocks on the bedroom door.

WOOLRIDGE
Karl, you up?

KARL (O.S.)
Yes sir.

Woolridge opens the bedroom door and sees Karl sitting on the edge of the bed beside his books. The light is on, the bed still as it was the night before.

WOOLRIDGE
Didn't you go to sleep at all,
Karl? You been sittin' there like
that all night?

KARL
Yes sir.

WOOLRIDGE
Well, I guess we better hit the
road.

INT. EXT. FIXIT SHOP - DAY

Woolridge's car pulls into the parking lot. He and Karl get out and walk toward the shop.

INT. FIXIT SHOP - DAY

Two men, BILL COX, a large man in his forties, and SCOOTER HODGES, a really country-looking guy in his thirties, look up from behind the counter as Woolridge and Karl enter. Woolridge goes to the counter, Karl stands by the door looking at the floor.

BILL
Hey Jerry, how it's goin'. Good to
see you. Been a long time.

WOOLRIDGE
Good to see you, Bill. How's
everybody doin'?

BILL
Aw, pretty good. Kids are drivin'
me crazy and Phyllis is gonna put
me in the poorhouse. Can't complain
other than that. Wouldn't do any
good if I did.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

(laughs)

Do you know Scooter, Jerry?

WOOLRIDGE

No, don't guess I do.

He shakes hands with Scooter who sort of smiles.

WOOLRIDGE

Scooter, good to meet you.

Woolridge leans in and gets confidential.

WOOLRIDGE

This is him, the one I talked to you about on the phone. Now like I said, I'll understand if you get nervous about it. I'm not gonna lie to you now, he did get in that trouble but then he was real young.

BILL

I remember it real well. Cut them folks to pieces. His mama one of 'em.

SCOOTER

And that ol' Dixon boy. Hell, I always wanted to kill him myself. Asshole's what he was. I remember that ol' boy too.

(points to Karl)

Kind of retarded or somethin' back in school.

WOOLRIDGE

Well, he seems pretty well-adjusted these days. I don't think he'd ever hurt anybody.

BILL

Don't look much like he could. You say he can fix a small engine like nobody's bidness.

WOOLRIDGE

He's a regular whiz at it. That's all he did when he was a kid.

BILL

Well, I ain't scared of him workin' here. You know me. I'm a church goin' man. Forgivin' man.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

When your time's up the Lord's gonna come git you. You scared of him, Scooter?

SCOOTER

I don't guess. Can he talk?

WOOLRIDGE

Oh yeah. Listen I really appreciate it. He needs the job. I don't know what to do with him. He don't have anybody really.

BILL

That old man of his still livin' over there on Clark Street I believe.

WOOLRIDGE

He won't have anything to do with him. Now you say it's all right for him to stay out here in the back?

BILL

Fine with me. If he steals anything, I'll take it out of your pocket anyway.

Bill slaps Woolridge on the shoulders and wheezes with laughter.

WOOLRIDGE

He won't steal. I'm tellin' you he's a pretty good ol' boy. Keeps to himself.

BILL

Well, I've got a roomful of work for him to do. Can't get Scooter to do any of it.

WOOLRIDGE

Karl, come over here. I want you to meet your new boss.

Karl obediently shuffles over.

WOOLRIDGE

This is Bill Cox, runs this place. Says you can work here and stay in the back.

BILL

Good to know you, Karl.

KARL

Thank you.

BILL

Now it's minimal wage and there ain't nothin' but a army cot and a toilet back there.

Karl doesn't say anything.

WOOLRIDGE

That'll be fine. Karl, I'll go to the car and get your books.

Woolridge exits. Bill and Scooter just stare at Karl and Karl stares at the floor.

BILL

They say you're a whiz on fixin' lawn mowers and things.

KARL

I've tinkered around on 'em a little bit.

BILL

We order from Dairy Queen at noontime usually. We can buy your lunch till you get on your feet a little.

KARL

I like them French-fried potatoes.

BILL

(long pause)
Yeah, me too.

SCOOTER

They make a good double meat burger.

INT. SHOP WORKROOM - NIGHT

The place is cluttered with mowers, edgers, weedeaters, and other equipment, most of it in pieces. A small cot is in a little clearing in the corner by the bathroom. Karl is sweeping up oil with sawdust and a push broom while Scooter puts some tools away. Bill comes to the door.

BILL

All right then, I'll see y'all later. Karl you done a good day's work. They right about you.

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)

Scooter, he's gonna knock you out of a job if you're not careful. I'll see you tomorrow.

SCOOTER

Wait up, I'll leave with you and lock up.

BILL

Karl, they's a blanket up in under that cot and soap in the bathroom to clean up with.

(pause)

Now there's one more thing. The way we lock these doors at night, you can't get out. You didn't want to go anywhere, did you?

KARL

I don't reckon.

BILL

If it works out and all, maybe we'll get you a key so you can get out at night if you need to. See you later.

They leave Karl standing in the midst of the lawnmowers. He sets the broom down and goes and sits on the cot. After a moment, he gets back up and starts sweeping again.

INT. SHOP - DAY

It's lunch time and Bill, Scooter, and Karl are sitting in folding chairs behind the counter eating from their Dairy Queen to-go bags. Karl has French fries.

BILL

Scooter, did I tell about the two old boys pissin' off the bridge?

SCOOTER

I can't remember.

BILL

There was these two old boys hung their peckers off of a bridge to piss, one old boy from California and one old boy from Arkansas. Old boy from California says, "Boy this water's cold." Old boy from Arkansas says "Yeah, and it's deep too."

(MORE)

BILL (CONT'D)
(starts wheezing)
Get it? That's a goodun.

SCOOTER
(laughing)
Yeah, that's a goodun. I believe
you did tell me that one before.
I've heard that a bunch. Long time
ago.

BILL
Well, yeah it's a classic. You
know, Karl, I got to thinkin' about
it last night and it's just not
Christian of me to not let you have
a key. I mean you been in lockup so
long, you don't need me keepin' you
locked up. You need to come and go
as you please. Here, take this key,
it'll get you in and out that back
door.

Karl takes the key and keeps eating French fries.

BILL
Them French fries good?

KARL
Yeah, they's good all right.

BILL
You got any money?

KARL
They give me fifty dollars when
they turned me loose. I spent up
some of it on ridin' the bus and
eatin' French-fried potaters.

BILL
Well, I'm gonna pay you today for
this comin' week, so you'll have
some walkin' around money. When you
get off this evenin' you better go
buy some toothpaste and cleanin' up
supplies to have back there. Some
hard candy and some magazines.
Somethin' to keep you busy at
night.

KARL
All right then.

BILL
I'll let you off while it's still
daylight.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Karl is walking down a residential street. He stops in front of the house where the boy, Frank, lives and stares at the house for a moment, then he walks up to the door and stares at it. A curtain moves and the boy's face appears at the window. He comes and opens the door.

FRANK
Hey there. I thought I heard
somebody on the porch. Wasn't your
name Karl?

KARL
Yeah it is. Your name's Frank.

FRANK
Yeah. What you doin' by here?

KARL
You told me to come by.

FRANK
Did you want to play ball with us?

KARL
I ain't no good at it. I just come
by.

FRANK
Well, anyhow, I was just fixin' to
go see my mama down at Ben's Dollar
Store. She's workin' two till
eight.

KARL
All right then. He starts to walk
away.

FRANK
Wait a minute. You want to go with
me? You can meet my mama.

KARL
I don't want to worry your mama
with company.

FRANK
Aw, come on. You'll like her. She's
real nice.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

She'll give us somethin' if we ask her to. Candy or somethin'.

KARL

I was kindly needin' to do some tradin'. Reckon they sell toothpaste?

FRANK

They sell some of everything. Come on let's go. I won't tell her about you bein' in the state hospital for killin'.

INT. BEN'S DOLLAR STORE - DAY

Frank and Karl make their way through the fairly crowded store. It's sort of a mini-version of a Walmart. They find Frank's mother in her red smock talking to a guy in a red Ben's knit shirt. They are laughing together and pricing some mouthwash. LINDA WHEATLEY is a short, plain woman in her thirties. The man, VAUGHAN CUNNINGHAM, is in his forties, with a neat flattop hair cut, glasses, and a paunch hanging over his belt. They eye Karl suspiciously, as the boys approach.

FRANK

Hey, Mama. Hey, Vaughan.

LINDA

Hey, sweetheart. What you up to?

VAUGHAN

Let me guess. You want a bunch of candy and a pop.

FRANK

Yeah.

VAUGHAN

You're gonna rot your teeth that way. But I bet I know what you would like even better. I put potted meat on special, four cans for a dollar and they're not moving very well. I'd sure let a few cans go for free to the right boy.

FRANK

I don't like potted meat. Daddy used to say it was made out of lips and peckers and intestints.

LINDA

Frank, don't talk that way. Who's that strange lookin' man behind you? Did he follow you in here?

VAUGHAN

Can I help you, sir?

FRANK

Oh, that's Karl. I met him at the laundrymat. Karl, this is my mama. And Vaughan, Vaughan's the manager. He lets mama off any time she feels like it cause they're best friends.

LINDA

Nice to meet you, Karl.

KARL

(keeping his distance)
Pleased to know y'all.

There's an uncomfortable silence.

LINDA

Frank come back here with me for a minute.

She shuffles him away and leaves Vaughan staring at Karl.

VAUGHAN

I don't think I've ever seen you before.

KARL

Naw, I don't believe you have. I don't reckon I never been in here. This store didn't used to be here.

VAUGHAN

It's been here seventeen years. Did you live here before or something?

KARL

I's borned and raised here up till I's twelve year old.

VAUGHAN

What brings you back?

KARL

What's that you say?

VAUGHAN
Why are you here now?

KARL
They turned me loose from the state hospital.

VAUGHAN
Is that right?
(pause)
Are you going to be staying here long?

KARL
I reckon Mr. Woolridge got me hired on to work for Bill Cox's outfit.

VAUGHAN
Do you have family here?

KARL
Not really to speak of.

Linda and Frank return from the back.

FRANK
Hey Karl, guess what. Mama said you can stay with us. Our car won't fit in there anyway. It's real neat.

LINDA
Frank told me about your situation. And Frank loves company. You know, especially after his daddy passed and all. There ain't no sense in you stayin' in that old greasy shop.
(to Vaughan, hushed)
He's mentally retarded, poor thing.

VAUGHAN
(hushed)
He just got out of the state hospital.

LINDA
(put out)
I know.

FRANK
Can we get some candy and pops?

VAUGHAN
Sure, go ahead.

They walk off down the aisle leaving Vaughan a little puzzled.

VAUGHAN

Are you sure it's safe to let him around that guy?

LINDA

Frank's just crazy about him. He likes the way he talks. He helped him carry home the clean laundry.

VAUGHAN

He's been in the state hospital a long time, something must be wrong with him.

LINDA

He's retarded's all. You know he's always after a father figure and Lord knows Doyle ain't a good one with his mean ass.

VAUGHAN

What about me?

LINDA

I don't think he sees you as a guy guy.

VAUGHAN

(wrinkles his brow)
Karl is a guy guy?

EXT. WOODED AREA - LATE AFTERNOON

Karl and Frank sit on stumps in a little clearing enjoying the spoils of their Ben's Dollar Store visit.

FRANK

This is what I call my secret place 'cause I come out here when I feel like bein' by myself. I used to come here with Karen Cross. She's kind of like my girlfriend, or used to be. She says she likes Jerry Maroney now. But I'm gonna get her back 'cause I love her. We used to come here and hold hands and talk and read books to each other with a flashlight. She didn't want to have anything to do with me in front of other people 'cause I don't have any money.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

Well, mama and me, I mean. She seemed to like me a whole lot when we were out here though. She said she loved me, too. Out here. Settin' right on that stump you're on. See, her daddy's a dentist so they're rich. So's Jerry Maroney's daddy. He owns the ice plant. Was your folks well off?

KARL

Naw. Didn't have too much. Enough to scrape by on, I reckon.

FRANK

They still around, your folks?

KARL

My mother's dead. My daddy's s'posed to be around still. He don't want to have nothin' to do with me though.

FRANK

How do you know?

KARL

He never did want to. I figure he ain't changed his mind much.

FRANK

How did your mama die?

KARL

(long pause)

You don't need to know all of that. You're just a boy. You need to think about good thoughts while you're still a boy. They'll be plenty of time for the other.

FRANK

I've had a lot of bad thoughts since my daddy died. Sometimes I wish I was still real little and he was still here. My mama's real good, but I wish I had both of 'em.

(pause)

When we went to Memphis one time in the car, it was rainin' so hard we couldn't see the road.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

But I wadn't scared because I thought as long as daddy was drivin' nothin' could happen to us. I feel that way about mama now.

He looks at the ground for a moment.

FRANK

Mama has a boyfriend now. His name is Doyle Hargraves. He works construction so he makes a pretty good livin'. He still don't help mama out with any money though. He ain't no good. He's mean to her. He don't like me at all. Mama says it's because he's jealous I belong to my daddy instead of him. He stays with us all night sometimes, but he's got his own house. Somebody told me it's so he can still have other girlfriends. I like it on the nights when he ain't at our house. I'm not so nervous then.

KARL

How come her to keep bein' girlfriends and all with him if he's mean to her?

FRANK

She says it's for the times when he's good to her. She's lonely since daddy died. She said sometimes she don't know why.

(pause)

He threatened to kill her if she ever left him. My daddy would kill him if he was here and somebody was mean to mama. Vaughan, he's real good to mama. Vaughan that you met. But he's not able to do anything to Doyle, he's funny you know. Not funny ha, ha, funny queer. He likes to go with men instead of women. That makes him not to be able to fight too good. He sure is nice though. He's from St. Louis. People who are queer can get along better in a big town. He got transferred here to work. But mama said the real reason he left is cause his daddy hated him. For bein' the way he is.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

I wish he liked to go with women.
I'd rather him be mama's boyfriend
than Doyle.

Pause as Frank looks at the ground again. He seems troubled.

FRANK

Karl.

(pause)

You know when I said daddy got hit
by a train.

KARL

Yeah, I remember you a-tellin' me
that.

FRANK

It ain't the truth. He shot hisself
with a shotgun on purpose.

KARL

Why did he do that, reckon.

FRANK

'Cause he didn't have enough money
to take care of us the way he
wanted to. That's what the letter
said. He got laid off from work and
had to just work odd jobs. I
thought he took care of us fine.

(pause)

Karl, did you really kill somebody?

KARL

Yeah, I did.

FRANK

Who did you kill?

KARL

Two people.

FRANK

Were they bad people?

KARL

I thought they was.

FRANK

Maybe they needed it.

KARL

I growed up and got taught it ain't
right to kill nobody.

FRANK

It's okay if you're lookin' out for yourself. If it's self defense. Was it self-defense?

Karl shifts around and makes a noise in his throat and doesn't answer.

FRANK

My daddy was good. I think too many good people die. It ain't right. That's what I think.

INT. SHOP - DAY

Karl is tying the strap around his books. His sack of toiletries is on the bed. Bill Cox comes in.

BILL

Now, Karl, you sure you want to go stay with these folks? You're welcome to keep on stayin here. It's workin' out real good.

KARL

That boy wants me to.

BILL

All right then. I'll see you bright and early. How you comin' along on that garden tiller?

KARL

I fixed it. Hit's a workin' pretty good.

BILL

You done fixed it? I'll be damned. Scooter told me it couldn't be fixed. 'Course Scooter's about as shitless as one poor son-of-a-bitch can be. You done fixed it. I'll just be damned. See you tomorrow.

INT. WHEATLEY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

DOYLE is in the comfortable easy chair with adjuster handle drinking beer. He's in his late thirties and dressed in his construction clothes. Linda sits on the arm of the chair and Frank stands before them.

DOYLE

Well, honey, I don't guess I give a shit.

(MORE)

DOYLE (CONT'D)

I ain't here half the time anyway. If you want a retard livin' in the garage, I don't guess I care. I've got a good tool box and socket set out there I don't want stol'd. I guess I could take it home with me.

FRANK

He's real honest. He wouldn't steal nothin'.

DOYLE

Now son, I wadn't talkin' to you, was I?

(pause)

Was I?

FRANK

No sir.

DOYLE

No sir's right. I'm talkin' to your mama. This is your mama's decision, not yours. I'm lettin' it go on because she asked me, not you.

(to Linda)

Now is this the kind of retard that drools and rubs shit in his hair and all that, 'cause I have trouble eatin' around that kind of thing. Just like I am about antique furniture and midgets. I can't so much as drink a glass of water around a midget or a piece of antique furniture. Same thing with a droolin' retard.

LINDA

Doyle, you're awful. You shouldn't be that way.

DOYLE

I ain't sayin' it's right. I'm just tellin' the truth. What was he in the nuthouse for?

LINDA

He's just mentally retarded, I guess.

DOYLE

He had of went nuts and did somethin'. They don't put you in there for just bein' a retard.

(MORE)

DOYLE (CONT'D)

They's retards all over the place
that ain't in the nuthouse. Do you
know, Frank?

FRANK

I ain't sure.

DOYLE

You might want to find out. He
might of hacked his family to
pieces with a hatchet or somethin'.

LINDA

Yeah, that's right, Frank, you
better ask him. I mean, don't hurt
his feelin's or anything, but it
would be good to know. I'm sure
it's nothin'. He seems real sweet.

DOYLE

You sure are hung up on people
bein' sweet.

(takes a long pull on his
beer)

Speakin' of which, where's your
girlfriend? I thought he was comin'
by here for something.

LINDA

He'll be here in a little while,
he's takin' me to get an ice cream.

DOYLE

Ain't that the sweetest thing. What
am I supposed to do about supper
with you traipsin' around with that
fag?

LINDA

You're not crippled. Get in there
and make somethin'.

DOYLE

Boy, ain't you somethin' else.
Talkin' back and everything. It
kinda makes me horny when you talk
back.

LINDA

Frank, why don't you go off and
play in your room if Doyle's gonna
talk nasty.

FRANK

I want to watch T.V.

DOYLE

Yeah, honey, let the kid watch T.V.
Hell, let's all watch T.V. like a
family till your retarded friend
and your homosexual friend gets
here.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Karl is standing on the porch with his bag and his books
staring at the door. After a moment, we hear a car door slam
and footsteps on the porch. Then we hear Vaughan's voice.

VAUGHAN

Karl?

Karl turns to face Vaughan.

KARL

Yes sir.

VAUGHAN

So, you're really going to stay
here?

KARL

That boy wants me to.

VAUGHAN

Did you knock on the door yet?

KARL

Naw, I ain't.

VAUGHAN

How long have you been standing
here?

KARL

Quite a spell, I reckon.

VAUGHAN

Listen, before you get very used to
staying here, I think you and I
need to talk about a few things.
Can I take you to lunch?

KARL

I done et just a little bit ago.

VAUGHAN

I mean tomorrow or the next day.

KARL

I reckon I can stand to eat a little somethin' or 'nother at noontime tomorrow. Bill Cox generally gets me a box of Frenchfried potatoes. But I reckon he can lay off doin' it tomorrow.

VAUGHAN

Okay, I'll come by Mr. Cox's and get you at noon.

They stand there for a moment. Vaughan doesn't really know exactly what else to do, so he knocks on the door. After a moment, Frank answers the door.

FRANK

Hey. Y'all come on in.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Vaughan ushers Karl in and they stand behind the sofa. Doyle looks up and grins.

LINDA

Hey, Vaughan. How are you, Karl?

KARL

Tolerable, I reckon.

LINDA

(in a hurry to get out)
Karl, this is my boyfriend, Doyle. Frank, why don't you and Karl go out in the garage and fix him up a place or play a game or somethin'. Vaughan, you ready to go?

VAUGHAN

Sure, I guess.

DOYLE

Don't rush ever'body, honey.

She starts to get her things together.

LINDA

(to Frank)
Maybe you and Karl want to go with us.

FRANK

Naw, I don't want to. Me and Karl got things we need to do.

DOYLE

Hey, Vaughan, you know what I heard? I heard you been puttin' it to Albert Sellers that works over at the funeral home.

VAUGHAN

I know Albert. We're friends.

DOYLE

I heard you was more than friends. I heard Dick Rivers caught y'all all bowed up and goin' at it in the same room with poor, little, old Mizz Ogletree and her dead as a doornail layed out on a gurney.

VAUGHAN

That's ridiculous. That's just a total lie.

LINDA

Let's go, Vaughan.

They start for the door.

LINDA

Frank, we'll be back in a little while. I'll bring you back somethin'. You're food's in the oven warmin' over.

DOYLE

See, you made him somethin'. Hey Vaughan, I was just goin' on with you, jokin' around, buddy.

VAUGHAN

(smiles a little)

Yeah, I knew that. You're a card all right.

Linda kisses Frank on the forehead and they leave.

DOYLE

So, Karl, come have a seat, talk to me.

Karl sits on the couch.

FRANK

Come on, Karl, let's go out to the garage.

DOYLE

Goddamnit, I'm talkin' to the man. You set right there, Karl.

Frank leans on the sofa arm beside Karl.

DOYLE

What's in your bag?

KARL

This and that. Toothpaste and whatnot.

DOYLE

What's all them books?

KARL

Different ones. The Bible's one of 'em.

DOYLE

You believe in the Bible?

KARL

A good deal of it, I reckon. Can't understand all of it.

DOYLE

Well, I can't understand none of it. This one begat this one and that one begat this one and begat and begat and begat and lo somebody sayeth some shit or another. Just how retarded are you?

FRANK

Stop it, Doyle!

DOYLE

You be quiet, Frank, we're talkin'. The adults are talkin'. Were you in the lockup for cuttin' somebody up with a hatchet?

KARL

I ain't never used no hatchet that I remember.

DOYLE

You're just crazy in a retarded kind of way then.

(pause)

It wouldn't matter to me if you did do violence on somebody 'cause I ain't afraid of shit. You think I'm afraid for you to stay here. You're just a humped over retard it looks like to me. Not really, I'm just jokin' with you. Welcome to our humble home, buddy. Frank needs all the friends he can get. Frank's a real weak little kid. His daddy taught him how to be a pussy.

FRANK

Stop it, Doyle! Don't talk about daddy, you hear me!

DOYLE

(mocking)

Don't talk about daddy. Y'all go on to the garage and let me be.

Frank is crying now.

FRANK

Come on, Karl.

They get up and walk away.

DOYLE

(yelling to Frank)

Don't tell your mama we had a little spat. She don't need to be worried with your ass.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Karl sits on an old sofa and Frank sits on an upside down paint bucket, still upset.

FRANK

I'd like to kill that son of a bitch. I hate him.

KARL

You ort not to talk that way. You're just a boy.

FRANK

Well, I hate him.

KARL

He ort not to talk that away to you
neither. He ain't no count. He's
mean to you and your mama.

(pause)

Yore mama and that feller that's
carryin' me to get somethin'
d'eat's gonna be back here
directly.

FRANK

Will you stay here with us for a
long time?

KARL

I reckon if you want me to.

(pause)

I got some of that potted meat and
sodie crackers left over if you
want some.

FRANK

I don't see how you can eat that
stuff with all those insides it's
made out of.

KARL

I reckon it tastes pretty good to
me.

FRANK

I like the way you talk.

KARL

I like the way you talk.

Karl starts to put together a cracker and potted meat delight
as we:

INT. HAMBURGER ESTABLISHMENT - DAY

Vaughan is carrying a tray of food as Karl follows him to a
table and they sit and immediately start to eat. After a few
bites, Vaughan starts to speak in an official manner.

VAUGHAN

Okay, Karl, the reason I brought
you here was to talk to you about
something that is on my mind.

Pauses for a response, instead Karl eats French fries and
stares at the table.

VAUGHAN

I guess I'll put it right out on the table. Where do I start. Linda and Frank are very important to me. They're like family. My own family was never like family. They're horrible people. As a matter of fact I prayed every night for years that my father would die. I finally realized through a lot of therapy that I was wasting my energy on hating him. Now I just don't care.

(pause)

You see, you and I are a lot alike, strange as that may seem. I mean not physically or even mentally really, just well, maybe emotionally or actually the hand we've been dealt in life. We're different. People see us as being different anyway. You're - well you have your affliction or whatever and I, well mine's not as easy to see. I'm just going to say it. I'm gay.

(waits)

Does that surprise you?

(waits)

That I'm gay. You know what being gay is, don't you?

KARL

I reckon not.

VAUGHAN

Homosexual. I like men. Sexually.

KARL

Not funny, ha, ha, funny queer.

VAUGHAN

Well that's a very offensive way to put it. You shouldn't say that. You were taught that, weren't you?

KARL

I've heard it said that way.

VAUGHAN

Anyway, it's hard to live gay, that's the right way to say it, in a small town like this.

(MORE)

VAUGHAN (CONT'D)

I've wanted to leave many times, but my love for Linda and Frank and another certain person that we won't go into have kept me from it. Anyway, I'm rambling. If you're going to live in the Wheatley garage you need to know that it won't be easy. Doyle is a monster. Not just a closed minded redneck, but a monster. A dangerous person. I've told Linda that one day that man is going to really hurt her or that boy. Maybe even kill one of them. I see it in his eyes. I'm very in tune, maybe even psychic. Doyle will make your life hell. You're a perfect target. When I first saw you I was afraid of you. Not really afraid, I guess, just taken aback. But also, I felt a real sensitive feeling from you. And for some reason, Frank has adopted you. Much like a stray animal. I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that. In a good way. Anyway, I just want you to know what you're in for. I have a good feeling about you. You're good for Frank. Maybe it's that he can have an adult friend on a child's level. I'm sorry, I didn't mean it in a bad way.

(pause)

There's one more thing. It's none of my business why you were in the state hospital. Everyone has something in their past, maybe you tried suicide, maybe you did something-terrible. But what I see before me is a gentle, simple man. All I want you to promise me is that you're capable of being around Linda and Frank. You know. You would never hurt them under any circumstances, would you?

KARL

I wouldn't never hurt them.

VAUGHAN

That's what I thought. I hope I haven't offended you in any way. You seem like a thinker. You seem to always be in deep thought.

(MORE)

VAUGHAN (CONT'D)
Tell me something. What are you
thinking right now?

Karl looks up and stares for a moment.

KARL
I was thinkin' I could use me
another helpin' of these potaters.

VAUGHAN
Oh. How about before that?

KARL
Before that I was thinkin' it'd be
good if I could get another three
or four cans of that potted meat if
you got any extry.

INT. WHEATLEY KITCHEN - NIGHT

Linda, Frank, and Doyle are eating.

LINDA
How come Karl won't eat here with
us?

FRANK
I don't know. He just said he'd eat
out there.

DOYLE
Well, I wouldn't let it get to you.

LINDA
I just feel sorry for the poor
thing.

DOYLE
Who could eat with him settin'
there makin' that goddamn racket
with his throat.

LINDA
He does make some funny noises.

FRANK
I sure like the way he talks. It
sounds like a race car motor
idlin'. It makes me not be nervous.

LINDA
I'm glad of it, honey.

DOYLE

What have you got to be nervous about? You're a damn kid. You ain't got any bills to pay or bidness to run or old lady to stay on your ass all the time.

FRANK

I get nervous, that's all I know.

They eat in silence for a while. Linda and Frank know where this conversation could lead and know when to leave well enough alone.

DOYLE

You know what, by God?

LINDA

What.

DOYLE

You know what we ought to do tonight?

LINDA

Please Doyle, don't.

DOYLE

Have a damn party! Call Morris and them and get the band together and just party our asses off. I'd like to show that fuckin' Karl to the guys. They'd get a kick out of that. Don't you know they would.

LINDA

Please don't. Not tonight. I'm not up for it. They always stay till mornin'. I'm just give out, Doyle.

DOYLE

You don't have to do anything but pour some potato chips in a bowl and bring beers out when we get low.

FRANK

Last time you got mad and run Morris and them off and said to stay away from here.

DOYLE

That ain't none of your damn bidness.

(MORE)

DOYLE (CONT'D)

Besides that's the way friends do one another. Fuck it, I'm gonna go call 'em. Honey, find my guitar, I think it's out there in the garage with that loony tune.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Karl sits on his cot eating from the plate Frank brought him. Frank and Linda come through the door. Frank comes and sits beside Karl. Linda gets a guitar case down from a shelf and comes over and stands in front of Karl.

LINDA

Karl, now listen, there's gonna be a party tonight here at the house. Doyle's invited his music-playin' buddies over to make a bunch of racket out on the patio.

FRANK

They ain't even no good. The only one can play is Randy Horsefeathers. He claims he's an Indian. His real name's Randy Collins and he works at the feed mill. He can at least play guitar.

LINDA

He's no more an Indian than I am though. Anyhow, Doyle's gonna try and tease you and be mean to you to show off to his friends. Just like he does to Frank and me sometimes. You just ignore it. Or stay out here away from 'em if he'll let you. He's an okay guy till he gets drunk but tonight he'll get drunk. I guarantee it.

FRANK

He ain't ever okay to me.

The garage door opens and Doyle appears. He seems really happy.

DOYLE

Well, it's on! We're gonna rock. Linda, call Vaughan. Tell him to get over here. I'd like him to be here. I owe him a good time.

LINDA

No Doyle. Vaughan don't want to come to a party with you.

DOYLE

Too late, Honey. Fooled you. Done called him. He'll be here.

(grins)

Or I'll go get him. Come on Karl, I need you to help me ice down a tub of beer, you and Frank.

INT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

White Christmas tree lights are strung above the patio. Karl sits to the side in a kitchen chair staring at the ground alongside Vaughan, Frank, and Linda. The "band" is set up on the patio. The band consists of MORRIS, a heavysset guy in a military uniform on tambourine, TERENCE, a skinny guy in a wheelchair on bass, RANDY, a long haired younger guy who's not an Indian on guitar, Doyle on a guitar which he can't play and MONTY "The Johnson" Johnson, a large guy with a ZZ Top beard on drums. A tub of beer is in front of them. They're all hooting and hollering and drinking. They've obviously been at it for a while. Doyle steps forward to address the 'crowd.'

DOYLE

Okay ladies and gentlemen.

(Points to Vaughan)

It's come to the time in our show when we like to introduce the band. Over here on lead guitar Mr. Randy Horsefeathers. Come on hit a hot lick, Randy.

Randy plays a lick.

DOYLE

Well, come on, y'all are supposed to clap now. Come on!

They clap a little except for Karl.

ANGLE ON LINDA

LINDA

Karl, you better clap your hands or he'll just keep on.

Karl claps his hands a little.

DOYLE

On the bass, give it up for Terence
"One Ball" Atkins.

(more half-assed clapping)

On the tambourine and lyrics Morris
Hobbs the fuckin' genius of the
group.

(claps)

On drums "The Johnson."

(claps)

And last and most importantly,
Doyle Hargraves on rhythm guitar
and business affairs and the only
motherfucker with a truck big
enough to haul this outfit on the
next world fuckin' tour. Come on, a
big hand for these guys. They're
workin' their asses off here.

(pauses for a slug of
beer)

Okay I'd like to dedicate this next
one to some very special people in
our audience tonight. To my lovely
female companion Linda, her lovely
son Frank, our new boarder Karl.
What's your last name Karl?

KARL

Childers.

DOYLE

Karl Childers just in from the
state facility. Make one of them
gruntin' sounds Karl or whatever it
is you do.

(nothing)

Oh well, Karl's a little retarded,
he don't know what the hell I'm
talkin' about. And to Vaughan who
fucks a mortician in the rear
entrance right in front of his
clients. Now that takes balls. Our
number one tune for the folks,
boys. Kick it off Johnson!

They play "Walk Don't Run" while the audience of four sits in
motionless silence. They finish the song and hoot and holler
and drink some more and say nasty things to each other.

DOYLE

You like that Vaughan?

VAUGHAN

Sure. It sounded like a number one
tune all right.

DOYLE

You enjoying yourself, Karl?

KARL

I reckon.

We hear the voice of an OLD MAN NEIGHBOR in the near
distance.

VOICE (O.S.)

I wished you all would lay off for
tonight. I can't hear myself think
for that racket. It's nighttime,
now let folks be! I'll call the
law!

DOYLE

(hollers back)

I told you already three times, the
laws on my side. I play cards with
J.D. Shelnut, chief of police. Get
fucked you old bastard!

(to the party)

Okay now, Linda, you and the kid
clean up and get a tarpaulin over
this instruments. Me and the boys
are goin' to the county line. We're
out of liquor and beer. Come on
Karl, you and Vaughan are goin'
with us.

VAUGHAN

I'd better go on home now, it's
late. I have to work tomorrow.

DOYLE

Come on, don't be a pussy.
Everybody has to work.

LINDA

He don't want to Doyle. Don't go
Vaughan if you don't want to.
You'll wreck Doyle, you're drunk.

DOYLE

(very sincere)

But honey, I'll be good. I promise.
I love you sweetie. I'm just tryin'
to help these two be part of
things.

INT. DOYLE'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Doyle is driving, Vaughan in the middle, and Karl by the window. Doyle cranks up the truck and pops in a cassette tape. The first few notes of "Ghost Riders in the Sky" play.

VAUGHAN

Are you sure you can drive? You've really had a lot of alcohol.

DOYLE

Shhhh! This is the national anthem.

They take off tires screaming on the pavement as the song goes louder.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The truck fishtails into the night and we see the rest of the "band" in the back of the truck trying to control Terence's wheelchair as it rolls back and forth.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

DOYLE

(points to tape player)
Not that you afflicted sons of bitches would know anything about it, but this is art.

They are stopped by a red traffic light. A police car pulls up beside them and Doyle looks over at the RED FACED COP on the passenger side and turns down the music.

DOYLE

Hey Freddy, what's goin' on boy. I seen your pitcher in the paper for catchin' that big-ass bass.

FREDDY

Yeah she was a big 'un. You ain't drunk drivin' are you Doyle?

DOYLE

Yeah.

FREDDY

I figured that. Well you better be careful with that cripple in the back. You'll throw him out. Looks like you got a wagonful.

DOYLE

We run outta somethin' to drink.
Goin' to the county line. You want
to race?

FREDDY

(laughing)

You know better than that. We're on
duty. Catch me in that Camaro next
week one night.

DOYLE

Catch you later Freddy!

Doyle peels out and the music blares again.

DOYLE

I bet you like sittin' between two
men in a dual wheel truck don't
you?

VAUGHAN

Oh, yeah, I'm thrilled.

DOYLE

Sarcastic right?

(pause)

You know the boys in the band are
probably gonna stay over tonight.
We'd be glad to have you.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Doyle slouches in his chair drinking whiskey from the bottle. Terence and Morris are sitting facing Karl and Vaughan who are on the sofa. Randy and The Johnson are sitting across the room in straight-backed chairs drinking beer. They really stocked up at the county line and beer and liquor bottles are strewn everywhere. Morris is in the middle of a monologue, which has obviously been going on for awhile.

MORRIS

Anyhow I'm not sure if you follow
me on those particular points, but
it's not really important in the
smaller picture, which is where
most people dwell anyway. Not that
being manager of Ben's Dollar Store
is insignificant. Or that making it
through years of incarceration in a
state supported facility is any
small feat.

THE JOHNSON

Morris, he's the only one in the band that went to college.

RANDY

I'm in junior college right now over in Westfield.

THE JOHNSON

That ain't no college, that's trade school. Auto repair ain't ever made a genius out of nobody.

MORRIS

Holidays are for campers.

RANDY

What do you know about bein' a genius, Johnson. You can't even hardly keep a steady beat on that high-price drum set.

TERENCE

I think y'all play really tight together, Randy. Y'all shouldn't throw off on one another.

MORRIS

Anything that has to be discussed can't mean anything.

DOYLE

You got that shit right.

VAUGHAN

What exactly do you mean by that? I don't understand.

MORRIS

Exactly the point, my young levelheaded friend.

VAUGHAN

I don't get it.

MORRIS

I rest my case.

TERENCE

Morris is real smart with philosophies and things. That's why him and me are the songwriting team of our group.

(MORE)

TERENCE (CONT'D)

I make up good tunes or melodies as we call them and Morris is the lyrics.

MORRIS

Not unlike Gary Brooker of the Protocol Harum.

RANDY

We don't ever play any songs that y'all wrote. I never even heard one of 'em. Y'all just talk.

THE JOHNSON

We don't even play any songs with words at all that I remember. We ain't got no fuckin' microphone. Or speaker set up.

TERENCE

We wrote one last night standin' outside Mini-Mart. Morris called it "Stuart Drives a Comfortable Car." Then, you know, like on country songs in parenthesis it says "There is usually someone in the trunk." I came up with a tune just humming.

DOYLE

See Vaughan, you shouldn't question a genius. Morris is a modern day poet like in the old days.

MORRIS

Our latest composition is as follows: entitled: "The Thrill" - "I stand on the hill. Not for a thrill but for a breath of a fresh kill. Never mind the man who contemplates doing away with license plates. He stands alone anyway. Baking the cookies of discontent. By the heat of a laundrymat vent. Leaving his soul" Then like in poetry I have dot dot dot then drop down to the next line kind of off center. "Leaving his soul parting waters. Under the medulla oblongata of... Then dot dot dot again. ...mankind."

Silence for a moment as everyone in the room just stares at something other than Morris.

TERENCE

I don't think that's right. I believe dot dot dot come between medulla and oblongata or something like that.

(Morris stares at him)

Well it did. It wasn't before mankind, I know that much.

MORRIS

The dots are where I say they are. Melody and tune. That's your trade. You're a tunesmith Terence.

VAUGHAN

I don't really understand the meaning of the words.

DOYLE

If y'all don't shut up I'm gonna go out of my mind. And plus you're liable to bust a spring in Karl's head. He's already off balance.

TERENCE

That wadn't the way you made it up before, Morris. That's all I know.

RANDY

We don't need fancy words, we need to practice. We don't ever rehearse.

THE JOHNSON

We need some payin' gigs instead of just messin' around on first one patio and then another'n.

RANDY

Morris, you should just be the manager, you can't play nothin' anyway.

Doyle jumps up and throws his whiskey bottle through the window. He has changed from groggy drunk to a wildeyed madman in a flash.

DOYLE

We don't have a goddamn band! Y'all just shut the fuck up! We don't need no practicin' or managers cause we ain't no fuckin' band! Morris ain't no genius and the rest of you are just losers.

(MORE)

DOYLE (CONT'D)

Am I the only one sane human bein' around here? Just get the hell out of my house and don't come back!

VAUGHAN

It's not your house, Doyle, it's Linda's.

DOYLE

I'll kill you, you fuckin' faggot! You mind your own business. Now get out! Now, before I get too mad to turn back.

TERENCE

What about our instruments?

Doyle grabs the handles of Terence's wheelchair and pushes him right out the screen door. We hear the chair clatter down the steps and a cry of pain from Terence.

DOYLE

Now!

They all file out the door except Vaughan and Karl who sit frozen on the sofa.

THE JOHNSON

(turning back)

You ain't right Doyle. Somethin's wrong with you. Nobody needs your shit.

MORRIS

(stops at the door)

The dots just look good on paper. You don't sing 'em anyway. You're showing your true Aries colors now.

DOYLE

Get out of my goddamn face, you fuckin' buzzard!

He slams the door and turns to see Vaughan and Karl on the sofa and Linda and Frank, in their nightclothes, standing in the doorway.

DOYLE

I thought I told everybody to get out of my house. That includes cocksuckers and retards. Get off your asses and go.

LINDA

This is not your house, Doyle. This is my house and I'll say who stays and goes. You've got a house, why don't you go get one of your girlfriends and go home to it.

DOYLE

You know better than to talk like that when I'm hurtin'. Don't make me knock the piss out of you.

VAUGHAN

Doyle, don't you lay one hand on her.

DOYLE

That's funny.
(to Linda)
You go to bed and take snot nose with you.

Linda walks up to him with Frank close behind. Vaughan gets up also. Karl stares at the floor rubbing his hands together.

LINDA

You're not stayin' here tonight. Go get sober before you come back. I'm tired of my child seein' this. Now you get yourself straight or I'll lock your ass out of my life for good.

DOYLE

You know what I told you, you even think of leavin' me, I'll kill you dead as a doornail.

LINDA

That might be better than this.

VAUGHAN

I'm a witness. I heard you threaten her life.

DOYLE

I thought I told you to keep out!

LINDA

Leave.

DOYLE

Don't tell me what to do.

LINDA

Leave.

DOYLE

Don't tell me what to do.

LINDA

Leave.

DOYLE

Don't tell me what to do.

LINDA

Leave.

DOYLE

(an inch from her face)

Don't tell me what to do.

She shoves him in the chest and he slaps her hard in the face. Vaughan starts looking for a weapon and Frank goes wild. He starts throwing anything he can find at Doyle. Empty cans, bottles, a lamp stand. He connects with an encyclopedia to the head. Doyle goes to the door. His face has changed from angry to sad, almost pitiful.

DOYLE

Okay, I'll leave and sober up.
Everything's botherin' me, that's
all. I'm hurtin' Linda. I love you.

FRANK

I hate you!

DOYLE

Well, I hate you, too. No I don't.
I love your mama. Nobody
understands what I go through. I'll
leave. You bunch of freaks have
fun. I'll call you tomorrow honey.
I'm sorry. You can kiss my ass,
really.

(to Frank)

You ever hit me again you little
bastard and I'll make you sorry
your daddy ever squirted your
little ass out.

He leaves and slams the door. Frank goes to Linda's side, as does Vaughan.

FRANK

You all right, Mama?

LINDA

I'm fine, honey. Let's just try and forget about tonight.

FRANK

We don't need to think bad thoughts, do we Mama?

LINDA

No, honey, we don't.

(pause)

I'll make some coffee and start cleanin' up this mess. Karl, you want some coffee, huh?

KARL

No, ma'am. Coffee kindly makes me nervous when I drink it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Linda cleaning up the last of the mess. Frank comes in sleepy-eyed in his pajamas.

LINDA

What are you doin' up again, Frank? You need to get a little sleep.

FRANK

Did Vaughan go home?

LINDA

Yeah, he has to go to work in a little while. I do too.

FRANK

Did Karl go to bed?

LINDA

I guess. He went to the garage. Poor thing, he's probably never seen such a crazy mess. He probably wants to go back and live in Mr. Cox's shop.

FRANK

I bet he don't. Karl likes me.

LINDA

I know he does.

FRANK

Mama?

LINDA

Huh?

FRANK

Is everything gonna be all right someday? I just stay nervous all the time just about.

LINDA

Yeah, honey, someday everything's gonna be all right.

FRANK

Doyle wouldn't really kill you, would he?

LINDA

I promise we're gonna get away from him. The time has to be right, that's all. I'd rather him get tired of me and leave me. Then he wouldn't want to hurt me. He wouldn't care then. We'll be fine. I promise. You go to bed now.
(she hugs him)
I love you.

FRANK

I love you, too, Mama.

He goes to his room.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Linda goes into the kitchen and pours a cup of coffee and sits at the table. After a moment, she looks up and is startled to see Karl in the doorway.

LINDA

You scared me.

KARL

I didn't aim to.

LINDA

Want to sit down? Did you need somethin'?

KARL

No ma'am.

Karl just keeps standing there and Linda keeps staring.

KARL

Two fellers was on a bridge a
takin' a leak and one feller says
the water was cold and the other
said it was deep water. One of 'em
came from Arkansas, I believe.

LINDA

(puzzled)
I'll be dog.

More silence.

KARL

Do you reckon you can make me some
biscuits?

LINDA

Right now?

KARL

Just whenever you take a notion to.
I don't aim to put you out.

LINDA

Well, it is nearly breakfast time
anyway. I can't go to sleep. I have
to be at work in three hours. You
know how it is when you just sleep
an hour or two, you feel worse than
if you hadn't slept at all?

KARL

Yes ma'am.

LINDA

Well, set down and I'll make some
biscuits and gravy.

KARL

Mustard's good on 'em to me.

LINDA

Okay.

Karl sets at the table and Linda starts to make the biscuits.

KARL

Thank ye.

LINDA

It's all right.

(pause)

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)

You know I was thinkin' there's this girl that works with me. She's real heavy, but she's cute in the face. Well, you know, she's slow. She's a little bit, I think. She's not retarded, just - it don't matter, listen to me. I thought you might like to meet her. Vaughan wants to have a little supper over at his house and we could invite her. Would you like that?

KARL

I wouldn't mind a havin' supper.

LINDA

Vaughan's "friend" will be there, too. He works at the funeral home. And Frank. You know Frank likes you a lot. He says you make him feel calm.

KARL

I like Frank. He's a good boy. Me and him's made friends.

She keeps working.

KARL

Hit ain't right for me to keep from tellin' you how come me to be put in the state hospital.

LINDA

That's okay. It's not really my business. I have wondered though. Why was it? Was it like a nervous breakdown?

KARL

I killed my mother and a old boy name Jesse Dixon. I thought they was a-doin' wrong. I was about your boy's age. They say I'm well now from it.

Linda stops working and turns to Karl, a little shocked, but not as much as you would think.

LINDA

Was that you? I remember that. I was only three or four, but I always heard about it growin' up.

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)

(pause)

They say you're well?

KARL

Yes ma'am.

(pause)

I like your garage.

(pause)

I wouldn't never hurt you or your boy. I'd lay my hand on the Bible and say the same thing.

LINDA

I believe you. I really do.

EXT. COX'S PARKING LOT - DAY

Bill Cox is standing beside a garden tiller with an old man. Bill is trying to crank it up, but it won't start. A car pulls into the parking lot and Gerry Woolridge gets out of it and comes over to Bill.

BILL

How 'bout you, Jerry.

WOOLRIDGE

How are you, Bill.

BILL

Doin' pretty good. Got a sick tiller here. What's got you down this way?

WOOLRIDGE

Just thought I'd check on Karl and see if everything's working out.

BILL

Well, he's pretty quiet. Except for them rackets and breathin' things he does. Ain't threatened me with a killin' or anything.

(laughs)

But boy you couldn't of been more right about him fixin' things. That son of a bitch is a regular Eli Whitney on a lawnmower. Loves French fries. Eats four larges and don't even so much as belch. I'm proud to have him.

WOOLRIDGE

Is him stayin' here workin' out?

BILL

He's gone to stayin' over with that Wheatley boy and his mama in their garage. I think that little boy adopted him damn near like a mascot. But he's got a key here to come and go as he pleases. Everything's worked out good.

WOOLRIDGE

Can I see him?

BILL

Sure.

Bill looks over at Scooter, who is putting up a sale sign on new mowers in the front window.

BILL

Scooter! Run get Karl for me.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Woolridge and Karl lean on the hood of Woolridge's car. In the background, Bill and the old man tinker with the tiller.

WOOLRIDGE

Are you sure you're okay staying with that woman and boy?

KARL

Yes sir.

WOOLRIDGE

Do they know about you?

KARL

My history.

WOOLRIDGE

Yeah.

KARL

I told 'em about it. They know I'm well. That Mizz Wheatley made me some biscuits.

WOOLRIDGE

I'll be.

KARL

That boy, he's my friend. He likes the way I talk and I like the way he talks.

WOOLRIDGE

I knew you'd do all right. Well, I just wanted to check on you. I'll say bye to Bill and get on back.

They walk over to Bill.

BILL

Karl, see if you can figure out what's wrong with this thing. It won't crank up and ever'thing seems to be put together right.

Karl squats beside the tiller.

WOOLRIDGE

I'll see you, Bill.

BILL

Okay, stop back by. Don't worry about your boy here, he's doin' good.

Karl looks up from the tiller holding the gas cap.

KARL

Hit ain't got no gas in it.

BILL

See there. Thinks of the simplest thing first.

INT. VAUGHAN'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Vaughan, ALBERT the 'friend,' Linda, Frank, Karl, and MELINDA, the Dollar-Store girl, are seated at the table. Karl and Frank are going at the delicacies while Melinda shyly picks at hers and the others are engaged in idle chit chat. This goes on for a few moments, then Albert's attention turns to Karl.

ALBERT

So Karl, do you intend to stay in the lawnmower business for a while or do you have other plans?

KARL

I reckon.

VAUGHAN

I think Karl is going to be a writer or a librarian eventually. You should see all the books he has. He must read constantly.

KARL

I ain't read 'em yet except two or three of 'em. I can't understand a lot of what I try to read. My mind, hit wonders off to somethin' else when I try to read.

ALBERT

I'm the same way. Of course, in my line of work, I stay too busy to read. But at least I have job security. People may stop doing a lot of things, but one thing is for sure, they won't stop dying.

LINDA

(looks at Frank)

Why don't we talk about something a little more festive.

VAUGHAN

Does everyone like the food?

Nods and yeses.

VAUGHAN

Good. I haven't decided yet if I'm a good cook.

LINDA

Hey Karl, you know what? Melinda was voted employee of the month at the Dollar Store last February. Isn't that somethin'?

KARL

Yes ma'am, I reckon.

MELINDA

Well, when you like pricing items as much as I do, I guess it's just bound to happen sooner or later.

VAUGHAN

Karl, maybe you and Melinda might want to take a walk or something after dinner. It's a nice night.

LINDA

Vaughan, don't get pushy.

VAUGHAN

I'm sorry.

KARL

I like walkin' quite a bit from
time to time.

MELINDA

I stay on my feet all the time at
work. I just can't find shoes
that's comfortable.

ALBERT

Hospital shoes might be the answer.
Nurses' shoes.

VAUGHAN

Or the kind old ladies who work in
the school cafeteria wear.

ALBERT

Same difference.

MELINDA

I get real mean when my feet hurt.
It's the only time I don't like
checkin' out the customers, when my
feet hurt.

LINDA

Frank, you and Karl aren't talkin'
much, you boys must really like
that food.

FRANK

I just don't have anything to say
about shoes.

Silence for a moment.

VAUGHAN

Listen everybody, I know this may
sound corny, I've had a few glasses
of wine and that kind of makes me a
little emotional, but I'm going to
say it anyway. It just came over me
in a rush. I want you all to know
that I care about each and every
one of you at this table.

LINDA

That's very sweet of you Vaughan.
We care about you, too. Don't we
y'all?

Nods, grunts, "sure do's".

VAUGHAN

Also, Melinda, please don't tell anybody at the store that Albert was here tonight, okay.

MELINDA

Why?

VAUGHAN

Well, a lot of people in town talk and spread cruel rumors. Unfortunately, I have to keep certain parts of my life private.

MELINDA

You mean about y'all bein' together in "that" way?

VAUGHAN

Yes.

MELINDA

I think everybody at the store knows that already. They always talk about it. Maureen Ledbetter told a awful story about why you ain't allowed over at the First Baptist Church no more.

LINDA

Karl, why don't you and Melinda go take a walk. It's nice out.

KARL

All right then.

He gets up and walks toward the front door. Melinda gets up and tries to catch up.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Karl and Melinda are walking in the moonlight. It seems a little hard for Melinda to keep up.

MELINDA

You walk fast, don't you?

KARL

I reckon.

They walk a little farther in silence.

MELINDA

These is the worst shoes I own for walkin'. How far did you want to go?

KARL

I ain't really thought about it too much I don't reckon.

They walk until they disappear into the darkness.

INT. COX'S SHOP - DAY

Karl is on the floor working on a mower with Scooter, they are ad-libbing semi-technical lawnmower things. Bill Cox appears in the door.

BILL

Hey Karl, they's somebody out here to see you. Some gal holding a nice bouquet.

(Karl doesn't move)

Come on now, she wants to talk to you. Don't just set there.

Karl gets up and goes to the counter followed by Scooter.

Melinda stands on the other side of the counter holding a cellophane wrapped store-bought flower assortment. Nobody says anything for a moment.

MELINDA

Hi, Karl, I'm on lunch break. These was on sale cause they're not fresh. Two ninety-nine a bunch plus my ten percent employee discount. Since I didn't bring you anything to our date last night, I thought you'd like to have 'em.

She hands them to him.

KARL

Thank ye.

BILL

Scooter, let's me and you go over to Dairy Queen and pick up a few things for lunchtime.

SCOOTER

I can go. You don't have to. You don't never go.

BILL

Goddamnit, Scooter, come on. Pardon my language, ma'am.

They start to leave. At the door, Bill Cox turns and winks at Karl. They exit leaving Karl and Melinda staring at the counter. They are silent for a while.

MELINDA

Well, I just thought I'd give you them. I liked walkin' with you. I got a blister the size of a quarter on one heel. Well, I'll see you sometime, I guess.

She walks to the door and stops as if she expects Karl to say something.

KARL

A blister shore can hurt.

MELINDA

Yeah.

KARL

Flowers is pretty. I've always thought that.

MELINDA

Me, too.

She leaves and Karl goes to the window holding the flowers and watches her walk away.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DUSK

Holding the flowers, Karl is walking down the sidewalk toward the Wheatley house when he sees Frank coming out the front door with a book and a flashlight. He sees Karl.

FRANK

Hey Karl, you off work?

KARL

Yeah.

FRANK

Where'd you get them flowers?

KARL

That gal that made employee of the month give em to me for awalkin' with her.

FRANK

I was goin' to the secret place. I borried one of your books to take down there. You ain't mad, are you?

KARL

Naw. You can look at all my books you want to.

FRANK

It's name's A Christmas Carol.

KARL

That's that un on Christmas I was tellin' you about.

FRANK

You want to go with me?

KARL

Yeah.

EXT. SECRET PLACE - NIGHT

Karl and Frank sit in the clearing, Karl on the stump, Frank on the ground. Frank is shining the flashlight on the book. He finishes reading a few lines and turns off the flashlight.

FRANK

I'm gettin' tired of readin' for a while.

KARL

All right then.

FRANK

Boy, folks sure had it rough back a long time ago, didn't they?

KARL

Yeah, I reckon they did. Hit like to tore me up when I read about that pore little cripple boy.

FRANK

Yeah, me too.

(pause)

That was nice of that woman to give you them flowers.

KARL

Hit was right thoughty of her.

FRANK

I was wantin' to ask you somethin'.

KARL

All right then.

FRANK

You know that girl I told you about. The one I love.

KARL

Yeah, I recollect it.

FRANK

Would you go see her with me? I kind of thought I might take her some flowers like that woman done you.

KARL

If you want me to.

FRANK

I ain't got no money to get 'em with but I bet Vaughan will let me have some of them flowers at the store.

KARL

I bet he will. I got a little money if he don't. I'll get 'em for ye.

FRANK

I usually get run off by her mama or daddy if they're home. Reckon why they don't like me?

KARL

They ort to. You're a good boy.

FRANK

Just 'cause I'm not rich don't mean I don't love her.

KARL

Naw.

FRANK

And I don't try to touch her. You know, in a bad way. Foolin' around, sex and all.

KARL

That's real good. You ort not to if ye ain't married to somebody. Bible tells you that much. Hit tells some things that don't seem right too, I reckon. I guess a feller ort to foller it close as he can, though.

(pause)

You don't touch yourself, do you?

FRANK

What do you mean?

KARL

Pull on your works. Your privates.

FRANK

Oh, jackin' off?

KARL

Yes sir. You ort not know that language.

FRANK

I didn't know till here while back a year or two ago when I spent the night with Ronnie Smart one time. He said just tug on your peter and think about your mama. I tried it, but I felt funny thinkin' about my mama. So, I switched over to thinkin' about his mama and then what he told me would happen, happened. It sure tingles, don't it?

KARL

You ort not to pull on yourself that away.

FRANK

I kind of like you tellin' me what to do and not to do. Just like my daddy. I didn't mind him tellin' me. I hate Doyle to tell me what to do. Mama said the only way to ever get away from him is for him to get away from us. That we can't leave him or he'll try and hurt her.

KARL

He ain't no count.

FRANK

You don't seem like a daddy. You seem like a brother.

(pause)

Wonder what makes you like somebody right off when you don't even know 'em like what happened with me and you.

KARL

I don't reckon I know.

FRANK

And then some people you don't like right off. It's funny.

(pause)

You know why I want you to play ball with me?

KARL

Naw.

FRANK

'Cause it's fun. It don't matter if you ain't no good. It takes your mind off of everything else while you're doin' it. When you run real fast tryin' to make a touchdown you don't think about anything else. I ain't no good, but my daddy always said he was proud of me when I threw a ball or ran with it. Did you have any brothers and sisters growin' up to play with?

KARL

I had one there for little bit. Hit didn't get old enough to play with.

FRANK

Why not? It died?

KARL

Yeah.

FRANK

Why?

KARL

Hit was borned a little too early on. My mother and father made hit come too early some way or other. I reckon they changed their mind about havin' another'n.

(MORE)

KARL (CONT'D)

I was about six or eight year old then and they didn't care too much for me so I reckon they didn't need somethin' else to worry 'em with.

FRANK

So it died when it come out?

KARL

My daddy come to the shed out back and got me and said throw this here away and handed me a towel with somethin' in it. I went for the trash barrel there and opened up the towel to see 'cause they was a noise and somethin' movin in it. Hit was bloody- like around that towel. Hit was a little ol' bitty baby, no bigger than a squirrel.

FRANK

It was alive?

KARL

Yes sir. Right then it was.

FRANK

A boy or girl?

KARL

A little ol' boy.

FRANK

You threw it in a trash barrel?

KARL

I didn't feel right about doin' that. I takened a shoe box from there in the shed and emptied out some screwdrivers and nuts and warshers from it and put the little feller in that and buried him in the corner of the yard there. That seemed more proper to me, I reckon.

FRANK

It was still alive when you buried it?

KARL

I heared it cryin' a little through that box.

FRANK

That don't seem right. It seems like you should have kept him alive and took care of him if he was your brother.

KARL

I wadn't but six or eight. I reckon I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to care for no baby. Mama and Daddy didn't want him. They learned me to do what they told me to. These days I figure it might of been best to give him right back to the Good Lord right off the bat anyhow.

FRANK

That makes me feel real sad. Couldn't you have done somethin', Karl? I would have. I wish I would of had him. He'd be here right now. Livin'.

KARL

Hits been hard thinkin' about it. They ain't a day goes by I don't think about it. I kindly have a picture of it up in my head that I see. Hit makes me sad, too. I have bad thoughts on it. I wished they was somethin' I could of did, too. Shouldn't no bad things happen to childern. All the ol' bad things ort to be saved up for folks that's growed up, the way I see it. I shouldn't of told you about that. A boy ort not hear about such things. It just kindly come out.

FRANK

I didn't mean to say anything bad about you. I know you're good. You didn't mean no harm.

(pause)

Did you ever think about killin' yourself on purpose like my daddy did?

KARL

I've studied about it. The Bible says not to or you end up goin' to Hades. Some folks calls it Hell, I call it Hades.

FRANK

Bible says the same thing about
killin' others, too.

KARL

Yes sir, I reckon it does.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Frank, flowers in hand, and Karl approach a very nice two story house. They get to the door and Frank rings the doorbell.

FRANK

I always get nervous when I hear
that doorbell. I'm okay just
walkin' over, but somethin' about
that dang doorbell. They have one
room where you can't walk on the
carpet or sit on the furniture. I
don't see much sense in havin' it.

The door opens and we see an older black lady, the
HOUSEKEEPER.

HOUSEKEEPER

(eyes Karl)

Son, I don't know why you keep
comin' over here. You know these
folks don't want you here. They run
you off ever' time. Don't keep
doin' this to yourself. You a sweet
boy. Now go give them flowers to
somebody that'll enjoy 'em.

FRANK

Ma'am, I really want to give them
to Karen.

HOUSEKEEPER

(to Karl)

You his daddy?

KARL

No ma'am.

HOUSEKEEPER

Well, whoever you are, you ought to
talk some sense into him. That
little old girl is way too fast for
him and don't wanna see him no way.

FRANK

Will you get her for me. Please. I really want to see her. She'll want to see me, too, 'cause we re not in public. Just don't tell her folks I'm here.

HOUSEKEEPER

(sighs)

Okay.

She disappears and a moment later KAREN appears. She's thirteen, pretty and very neatly dressed.

KAREN

(put out)

Hey Frank. You shouldn't be coming over here. My parents really don't want you to.

FRANK

I wanted to bring you some flowers. They're pretty good ones.

KAREN

They're from the Dollar Store. I'm not an idiot. Besides we have a garden full of flowers.

She eyes Karl.

FRANK

I wanted for you to meet Karl, too. He's my new friend. But I feel like I've always known him. I thought you should meet him.

KAREN

Why? Hi, Karl.

FRANK

He's gonna be around a lot and I hope you are too, so...

KAREN

Here give me the flowers, I'll do something with them. Thank you. Now you better go. Maybe I'll see you down at the secret place one day in a week or two or something. I have a boyfriend now you know. And we're pretty serious. He gave me a ring.

She proudly displays the ring.

FRANK

Can you go there with us now? Me and Karl. We could just hang out. Karl has some cool books.

KAREN

Frank, I just like you as a friend. Only at the secret place. Okay? I can't go there now. I'll see you later.

FRANK

But maybe just for awhile

KAREN

I'm closing the door now. I told you, I'll see you later.

She closes the door. They stand there for a moment, then walk away down the sidewalk.

FRANK

She said she'd see me later. That's kinda good, right?

KARL

I reckon.

EXT. WHEATLEY HOUSE - DAY

Frank and Karl walk up the steps to the house. Frank opens the door and they enter.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

As Frank and Karl enter, they see Doyle sitting on a footstool facing Linda who's in a chair. Doyle is holding both her hands and talking very softly to her. He sees the guys and looks up.

DOYLE

Well, I'll be damned, there's the boys. I'm glad y'all came in. I wanted to talk to y'all, too. I was just tellin' Linda here—Oh hell, I'll just start over, set down you boys.

They do, on the couch.

DOYLE

Well, what it is, I just, well I took off work early today and your mama was good enough to do the same so we could talk. I guess you'd say I'm really here to apologize, which ain't easy for me to do, about the way I acted the other night. I was just drunk and kinda got a little too worked up and one thing led to another. I care about y'all a lot, I do. I don't mean to be so damned, assholeish I guess the word would be. Now Karl, I don't believe I hit you, did I? So no apology needed there I guess, but Frank, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I hit your mama. I'm just jealous of her. I don't like her life or the way she runs it. I don't like homosexuals and she buddies with one. I don't like little wimpy ass kids or fuckin' mental retards and she's got one of each livin' with her.

(laughs)

I was just kiddin'. But really I guess people need to get along even if they have differences.

(pause)

You see, I work construction. I build things. Do you realize how important that is to the world? I have a lot of pressure on me. The upshot is, I'm gonna spend a lot more time over here and we're gonna get along. Like a family should.

(to Linda)

I may even surprise you one day and pop the question.

(he gets up)

Well, I'm goin' back to work. I just wanted to give y'all some little piece of happiness today.

(kisses Linda)

See you tonight honey. Karl. Be a good boy, Frank.

He leaves.

LINDA

Well, at least he's tryin'. But who knows for how long.

FRANK

He's lyin' Mama. He ain't gonna do better.

LINDA

I know honey. Just remember what I said, we'll bide our time. You just steer clear of him as much as you can. Doyle's had a real hard life. It's just about run him crazy I think.

FRANK

We've had a real hard life, too, Mama.

Linda moves to the couch and puts her arms around Frank.

LINDA

You're a hell of a boy, Frank. Someday you're gonna get all the good things you deserve. And Karl here's gonna get some more biscuits tonight. What do you think about that?

KARL

I could shore use some. Thank ye.

INT. SHOP - DAY

Karl is cleaning some parts in a bucket of gasoline. Bill comes to the door.

BILL

Hey there Karl, can you come unload a generator for me?

Karl wipes his hands on a shop towel and starts outside.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

A MAN and a TEENAGE BOY stand by a pickup truck. A small generator is on the tailgate.

BILL

Karl, lift this thing down and carry it to the back. It's on the blink.

(to man as Karl unloads
it)

We'll have it for you in a day or two, Walter.

WALTER

Y'ont us to he'p you there liftin'
that?

BILL

Oh no, that dang Karl can lift a
bulldozier. Fix anything, too.
(confidentially)
He's mentally retarded, but he's a
whiz on small engines. Lord works
in mysterious ways.

Karl carries the generator toward the shop. He turns and
watches the man and boy talking and laughing with Bill. The
man playfully puts an arm around his son's neck and tousles
his hair.

WALTER

Hell, he didn't just make the team,
Coach says he's probably gonna
start at end on defense. He's a
chip off the old block. Ain't you,
Steve?

STEVE

I guess so.

Karl turns and goes in the shop.

INT. WHEATLEY GARAGE - DAY

Karl is on his cot reading a book. Frank comes in. he looks
very depressed. He sits beside Karl.

FRANK

What you readin'?

KARL

Readin' on this book on how to work
carpentry. I aim to learn how to
build things out of wood one of
these times. I've always been
partial to wood buildings and
cabinets and whatnot. These
drawin's they got here don't make
no sense to me so far.

He looks directly at Frank, which he seldom does.

KARL

You seem like yore tails a'draggin'
a might. You got somethin' wrong
with ye?

FRANK

Seems like Doyle's wormed his way back in. Mama said he's stayin' over tonight and he's talkin' about movin' in for good. We ain't ever gonna be happy. We'll always be nervous, won't we Karl?

KARL

I don't reckon I know. I ain't found no way yet and I'm three or four times as old as you. Might be that's just the way folks is.

FRANK

I feel sad about Karen Cross, too. I just make like to myself she loves me. I know better, though. It just feels good to me when I imagine it.

KARL

Make believin' always made me feel good too from time to time.

They sit in silence for a moment.

KARL

Bill Cox is goin' to a funeral for a Mister Turner tomorrow and aclosin' up shop early.

FRANK

Is that right?

KARL

I'll play ball with ye. I reckon if neither one of us is no count it won't make no difference.

FRANK

You will? For sure?

KARL

Yeah.

FRANK

We'll be on teams, me and you?

KARL

Yessir.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

It's the practice field, so it's not very well kept. Karl, Frank, and two other boys around Frank's age are huddled up. Four boys are lined on defense. They break the huddle and come to the line. They are on about the fifty-yard line. Frank hikes the ball to one of the boys. He laterals it to Karl who stands there for a minute as the defenders run toward him. Then he takes off like the wind. He runs funny, kind of humped over and pigeon-toed, but fast. All the others are chasing him. Two of the other team's boys catch him on about the fifteen-yard line, but he drags them along. Karl sees Frank out of the corner of his eye and tosses him the ball just as Karl bites the dirt. Frank goes into the end zone untouched. There are cheers from Frank and the other boys. Frank runs over to Karl who's still on the ground.

FRANK

Way to go, Karl. We got a touchdown. That was a good lateral, man. That was just like the Wishbone.

KARL

I dern near had me a touchdown till them boys got a-hold of me there so I figured I better give it off to you. I seen you over there follerin' me.

FRANK

We're liable to win if we keep this up. For somebody like you, you sure run fast.

He grabs Karl by the hands and helps pull him up.

FRANK

Come on, let's kick off to 'em.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Karl and Frank, dirt, grass stains and all, walk toward home.

FRANK

I know you could of scored them three touchdowns by yourself instead of throwing 'em over to me.

KARL

Them boys was tryin' to pull me down pretty hard.

FRANK

You're strong though. You let me make them touchdowns so I'd feel good. My daddy used to do that kind of thing.

They walk in silence for a moment.

FRANK

It don't matter to me about us losin' does it to you?

KARL

No sir.

FRANK

It was fun, anyhow.

KARL

I wadn't thinkin' about nothin' else just like you told me I'd do.

FRANK

Can we play ever' Saturday?

KARL

If I ain't too stove up. I ain't like you. I'm old and give out.

(pause)

I'm proud of ye.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Karl sits on his bed rubbing his hands together, deep in thought.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Karl is walking down the street past rundown houses. He comes to an old gray wood frame house. It is in bad repair, the paint is peeling, the yard is grown up. There is an old wooden shed in the back yard. He stands looking at it for a moment then walks through the yard and opens the door to the shed. He's motionless for a moment, then goes inside.

INT. SHED - DAY

Sunlight comes through the cracks in the wood. The shed has nothing but dirt for a floor. A few tall patches of grass shoot up between boxes and rusty lawnmowers. A few old garden tools hang on the wall. In the center is a low circular spot in the ground and a few tattered shreds of an old quilt. Karl stands looking at the hole for a moment, then turns and walks out of the shed.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Karl walks across the yard to the house.

INT. SCREENED-IN PORCH - DAY

Karl goes onto the screened-in porch, looks through the kitchen window and goes inside.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The place is a mess. Dirty dishes are piled in the sink and on the table. It's not just clutter, but filth everywhere.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Karl walks into an equally filthy living room where an OLD MAN in overalls sits slumped in a chair looking at his lap. Karl stands facing him for several moments.

KARL

I'm ye boy.

OLD MAN

I ain't got no boy.

KARL

I'm ye oldest boy name Karl.

OLD MAN

I ain't got no boy.

KARL

They turned me aloose from the nervous hospital. Said I was well.

No response.

KARL

I got hired to work for a Mr. Cox fixin' lawnmowers and whatnot.

No response.

KARL

That grass out in the yard's all growed up. I figured I might cut it fer ye.

OLD MAN

I told you, I ain't got no boy, now get on out from here and let me be.

Long silence.

KARL

I learned to read some. I've read on the Bible quite a bit. I don't understand all of it, but I believe I understand a good deal of it. Them stories Mama and you told me ain't in there. You ort not to of done that to ye boy.

(pause)

I've studied on killin' you. But I don't reckon they's no reason fer it if all you're gonna do is set there in that chair. You'll be dead soon enough I reckon and the world'll be shut of ye.

Karl walks toward the kitchen and turns back to the old man.

KARL

You ort not to of killed my brother. He ort to have had a chance to grow up. Sometimes he would of had fun.

EXT. YARD

Karl walks out of the house and across the yard to a hedge in the corner and kneels down. He pushes some grass aside to reveal a rock about afoot tall and a foot across. In front of it, the ground is raised a little. He stares at the rock for a moment and touches it.

KARL

Little feller.

EXT. A LARGE OLD WOODEN SLAT BRIDGE - DUSK

Karl stands on the side of the bridge looking into the river below.

INT. WHEATLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

All the lights are out. We see a shot of Frank in his bed asleep, but tossing and turning. Then a shot of Linda in bed staring at the ceiling and Doyle beside her snoring. Suddenly, the lights come on and Linda lets out a little yelp and sits up, which wakes up Doyle and he sits up with a start. From their POV we see Karl standing in the door holding a hammer.

DOYLE

What in the goddamn hell are you doin'? It's the middle of the night.

LINDA
What do you want, hun?

KARL
I want to be baptized.

DOYLE
Baptized? Well, get baptized then.
I don't give a shit. Call a fuckin'
preacher, goddamnit! I can't
baptize you.

LINDA
We'll go to church and get you
baptized, tomorrow's Sunday. You go
on back to bed.

DOYLE
What are you doin' with that damn
hammer?

KARL
I don't rightly know. I just kindly
woke up a-holdin' it.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

We see a shot of Frank and Linda and Vaughan in a church pew. The church is pretty full. From their POV we seek Karl in a robe standing in the baptismal tank. The preacher takes Karl and dunks him under the water and brings him back up.

INT. WHEATLEY LIVING ROOM - DAY

Doyle is in his favorite chair as Linda, Frank, and Karl come through the front door.

DOYLE
How'd your baptizin' go?

LINDA
It went real good.

DOYLE
Well, that's good. It's about time
to eat and you know what I'm
cravin'? Some of that take out
chicken. Why don't you run get some
of it, honey, for lunch?

LINDA
(to Frank and Karl)
Would y'all like that?

FRANK

Yeah, I guess.

KARL

Yes ma'am. I like a fried chicken leg.

LINDA

All right, y'all gonna go with me?

DOYLE

Naw, hell, let them stay here with me and do men things. There might be some kind of ball game on we can watch. You go on.

LINDA

I'll be back in a little bit then.

She leaves and Doyle walks up to Karl and Frank.

DOYLE

I really just wanted to git your mama out of the house for a minute so we can have a talk. Y'all set down.

They sit on the couch and Doyle kneels in front of them.

DOYLE

Now here's the deal. Now that I'm gonna throw my entire life away doin' what I want to come live here with y'all, we have to get a few things straight. See, Frank, me and your mama wouldn't have any problems if it wadn't for you. We'd never have a bad word between us. But since you do exist, if I'm gonna be here as the head of the household, we'll have to live by my rules. And my rules are you don't speak unless you're spoken to. Stay out of my way and do what a regular kid does. You're a weird little shit. I don't get you. So wake up. Face what they call reality. We're gonna be a family now. And it's my family. I'll be payin' the bills so you got me. But I ain't your daddy. You just treat me like I am. I'm the boss, okay. And the other thing is your friend Karl has to go.

(MORE)

DOYLE (CONT'D)

We can't have a normal family with him livin' in the garage and comin' in the bedroom at four in the mornin' with hammers and shit. See?

FRANK

Karl can stay if he wants to. Mama said-

Doyle slaps him across the face and Karl grabs Doyle's arm. Doyle shakes him off

KARL

Don't hit that boy no more.

DOYLE

You shut up you, fuckin' retard. Get your shit and get out of here.

(to Frank)

That was a wake-up slap, Frank. Remember. Reality, like I said. Don't forget any bit of what I said to you and we'll be fine.

Frank jumps up and runs from the house and Doyle sits back in his chair and pops a beer. Karl gets up and goes to the garage.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Karl ties his books up with his strap and gets a bag from his bed and leaves.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Karl is walking away as Linda pulls up in her car and gets out with fast food bags.

LINDA

Where are you goin', Karl? Didn't you want some chicken and things?

KARL

No ma'am. I'm a'goin' off sommers.

LINDA

Well, okay. I got you some.

KARL

Frank, he went off, too. He ain't gonna be in there when you get indoors.

LINDA

Where'd he go? What's goin' on?

KARL

He wanted to go off and play, I reckon.

(pause)

You go in there and you and that Doyle eat ye dinner. You don't have to worry yourself none.

LINDA

All right then. Well, I'll see you later. If you see Frank, tell him to come on back home. I don't get to see him all day except Sundays. He can play tomorrow.

KARL

Ma'am?

LINDA

Yeah.

KARL

You're a good mama to that boy. You care for him. You work hard fer him to take care of him. You light him up in his eyes, I've seen it. He wouldn't know what to do without ye.

LINDA

Well thank you, hun. That's real good of you to say. I wouldn't know what to do without him either.

KARL

You've been real good to me, too. It ain't ever'body that'd make biscuits in the middle of the night. You and that boy has give me a good feelin'.

LINDA

We sure like havin' you.

KARL

Thank ye.

(Karl walks away, then turns)

I'm just getting around to tellin' you, but I fixed your warshin' machine.

EXT. SECRET PLACE - DAY

Frank is on the ground digging a trench in the dirt with a stick. He hears footsteps in the leaves and looks up and sees Karl coming toward him.

FRANK

Hey, Karl. How'd you know to come out here?

KARL

I knowed you'd be here.
(Karl sits on the stump)
What are you a-doin' digging with that stob?

FRANK

Just diggin'.
(pause)
I ain't ever gonna be happy now. Not with that son of a bitch movin' in for good. I wish me and you and Mama could just run away. But she said he would find us wherever we went. He's crazy. Sometimes I think it would of been better if I wadn't ever born.

KARL

I'm glad of it you was borned.
(pause)
I reckon I ain't gonna be there in the garage no more.

FRANK

You have to Karl. You have to look out for me. You don't let that son of a bitch run you off.

KARL

You're just a boy. You ort not to use that sort of language.

FRANK

Karl, I ain't tryin' to say nothin' bad about you, but why don't you stop Doyle when he gets that away? You're older than him. You're strong, too. My daddy wouldn't let him do that to me and Mama.

KARL

That feller's a whole sight meaner than me. He'd just whup the tar out of me.

FRANK

Yeah, I guess so. I'm real tired, you know that. A kid my age shouldn't be tired of things.

KARL

I'm tired, too, Frank.

(pause)

If I ain't around no more, it don't mean I don't care fer ye. I care for ye a good deal. I care for you more than anybody they is. We made friends right off the bat.

FRANK

I care for you, too. But you'll be around, don't say that.

KARL

Hit don't make no difference where I was to be. We'll always be friends. There ain't no way to stop that.

(pause)

I aim for you to have these books.

He hands him the books.

KARL

Maybe you can make more sense out of them than I can. I made you a little old book marker and stuck it in that book on Christmas.

FRANK

You don't want to give away all your books.

KARL

I aim fer you to have em.

FRANK

Man. Thanks.

(pause)

You know when you get a feelin' and you don't know why?

KARL

Yes sir.

FRANK

I've got a feelin' today.

KARL

Reckon what kind of a feelin'?

FRANK

Like something different. I don't know.

(pause)

You're leavin' ain't you, Karl?

KARL

Will ye do somethin' for me if I ast you to?

FRANK

You know I would. Whatever you want.

KARL

Don't go home tonight and stay with that Doyle. He's got it in for ye tonight. I got me a feelin', too. Feels like to me you ort not be there in that house with him liquored up and mean. Ye mama neither. When you get up from here, I want you to go to that feller's house. Your mama's friend. I want you to give me your word on it.

FRANK

Okay. I give you my word. Is ever'thing gonna be okay? Are you all right?

KARL

Ever'thing's okay, boy. I kindly want to put my arm around ye for a minute and then I'm gonna go on and leave here.

FRANK

Okay.

Karl lays his arm on Frank's shoulder and Frank puts his hand on Karl's arm. They sit like that for a few moments, then Karl gets up with his paper sack and walks away. Frank takes the book marker out of the Christmas book. It is just a folded piece of notebook paper. On it is written 'You will be happy.' He looks up at Karl who is now thirty yards away in the trees.

FRANK

Karl!

Karl turns around and he and Frank stare at each other through the trees.

EXT. VAUGHAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Karl knocks on the door. After a moment, Vaughan answers in a pair of big shorts and a sweatshirt.

VAUGHAN

Karl, what are you doing here? Come in.

KARL

I ain't a-stayin'. I need to ast you fer a favor.

VAUGHAN

Okay.

KARL

This evenin' I want you to go get Mizz Wheatley and that Frank and have them stay with you tonight.

VAUGHAN

What's wrong? Is everything okay?

KARL

That dern Doyle is in a bad way again with that drinkin' and bein' mean to folks. Will you give me your word you'll do it?

VAUGHAN

Well, sure, okay. He hasn't hurt them, has he?

KARL

Naw, not yet.

(hands the bag to Vaughan)

I want ye to give this to Mizz Wheatley. Hit ain't much, but maybe there's a little somethin' to hep out. Hits what I've earned fixin' lawnmowers and whatnot fer Bill Cox.

Vaughan takes the bag.

VAUGHAN

What about you, Karl? Do you want to stay here?

KARL

I don't reckon you have to go with women to be a daddy to a boy.

(pause)

You've been real square dealin' with me. The Bible says two men ort not lay together. But I'll bet you the Good Lord wouldn't send nobody like you to Hades. Some folks calls it Hell, I call it Hades.

(Karl starts away)

That boy lives inside of his own heart. Hits an awful big place. You take care of that boy.

Vaughan watches Karl walk away.

EXT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

Karl stares at the bus station door.

EXT. WHEATLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Karl stares at the house from the sidewalk.

EXT. OLD WOODS BRIDGE - NIGHT

Karl stares into the river.

INT. COX'S SHOP - NIGHT

Karl has a lawnmower blade sharpening it on a grinding wheel.

EXT. WHEATLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Karl carrying the blade walks onto the porch and enters the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Doyle is in his chair drinking beer and watching TV. He looks up as Karl comes around and sits on the sofa.

DOYLE

Where's ever'body else? You seen 'em?

(no response)

I thought I told you to get the hell moved out of here anyway.

KARL

How does a feller go about gettin'
ahold of the police?

DOYLE

Pick up the fuckin' phone and call
'em, I guess.

KARL

What numbers do you punch?

DOYLE

I told you to get away from here,
didn't I? I'm tryin' to relax and
look at TV.

(notices blade)

What are you doin' with that piece
of iron? I swear to God you're the
weirdest son of a bitch I ever
heard of.

KARL

I aim to kill you with it.

Doyle keeps drinking and watching TV.

DOYLE

Yeah, okay. Well, to get the police
you push 911. You'll need to tell
'em to send an ambulance, too. Or a
hearse. You fuckin' idiot. You're
gonna kill me.

(laughs)

Karl gets up and walks slowly toward Doyle out of frame. We see the flickering light of the TV on the wall. OFF SCREEN we hear one short dull thud.

DOYLE (O.S.)

Oh God! Oh God!

We hear one more thud, then the sound of Doyle's body hitting the floor. Karl appears in frame again and we follow him to the kitchen where he picks up the wall phone. He stares at it for a moment, then pushes 911. He has a few specks of blood on his face, hand and shirt.

KARL

(into phone)

Yes ma'am. I need the police over
here at the Wheatley house.

(pause)

(MORE)

KARL (CONT'D)

I've killed somebody with a mower blade.

(pause)

Yes ma'am, I'm right sure of it. I hit him two good whacks. That second time just plumb near cut his head in two.

(pause)

Hits a little old yeller house right on the corner of Marigold Street and some other street. They's a red pickup truck out front says "DOYLE HARGRAVES CONSTRUCTION" on it. I'll be a settin' here waitin' on ye. Beside sendin' the police, Doyle said you might want to send a ambulance or a hearse. Thank ye.

He hangs up and goes to the refrigerator and takes out a jar of mustard. He gets a knife out of the drawer and sits at the kitchen table and pulls back a table cloth that is covering up some leftovers. He picks up a biscuit and opens the mustard jar and runs the knife around it. There's hardly any mustard in it. He dabs a little on the biscuit and takes a bite and relaxes to wait for the law.

CLOSEUP OF CHARLES THE NUT CASE

He's in the middle of one of his sick monologues. We pull back and see we 're in the recreation room of the hospital again with Karl in his usual chair listening to Charles. Karl is now wearing the hospital issue clothing.

CHARLES

On the third day I washed her. She wasn't very clean. I got all the right spots. She was the first one I ever kept for any length of time, you see I get bored easily, I have a short attention span. I can't say she enjoyed her stay, although the washcloth in her mouth held in place by good duct tape kept any complaints to a minimum. I don't really like people who talk a lot. I like to do the talking. I guess that's why I'm so fond of you. You're so easygoing, although I do sense a little tension in you sometimes. By the way, how was it out there? Did you have any fun? Make any new acquaintances? Tell me what it was like.

KARL

They was a boy. We made friends.

CHARLES

I bet you did. I was never bent that way. I'm bent the other way. So, you liked it out there in the world.

KARL

It's too big.

CHARLES

Well, it's not too big in here, is it?

(pause)

I feel very generous today. I feel like listening. I'm sure you have plenty to tell me. And please bore me with the details.

(long pause)

Come on Karl, who did you kill? Was it the boy?

KARL

Don't say nothin' about that boy.

Karl looks him right in the eye for the first time ever.

KARL

Don't you say another word to me. I ain't listenin' to you no more.

Karl gets up and goes to the window and looks out at the grass that separates him from the next building. He stares out the window, as we:

FADE OUT

THE END