

THE DEVIL ALL THE TIME

A Knockemstiff Tale

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Based on the book by
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OVER BLACK: THE DEVIL ALL THE TIME : A Knockemstiff Tale

1

AN OLD MAP OF OHIO FILLS THE SCREEN.

1

DISSOLVE: into the area of Southern Ohio.

DISSOLVE: into the area called "Ross County."

A FINGER enters frame and points at a spot on the map
"MEADE".

NARRATOR

Meade, Ohio. Meade was, and still is,
a piddling paper mill town an hour
south of Columbus that smells like
rotten eggs.

EXT. BIRD'S EYE VIEW- MEADE, OHIO

The smoke stacks of the paper mill frame the medium sized
downtown in the distance.

NARRATOR

A stranger might be heard complaining
about the stench, but the locals
bragged that it was the sweet smell of
money.

The NARRATOR speaks with a level of ease and familiarity that
suggests he knows this place and these people intimately.

EXT. DOWNTOWN MEADE- DAY

A bustling downtown. A police car pulls up to a SEARS
department store. Two officers run in. Pedestrians watch.

NARRATOR

By 1957, just about every pervert and
criminal from Southern Ohio lived in
Meade.

Soon the police return outside with a MAN dressed only in
ripped overalls screaming bloody murder.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

This afternoon, Calvin Claytor was
being arrested in the Sears Roebuck.
The Meade Gazette would describe the
suspect as brushing up against elderly
women in a "lewd and aggressive
manor..." The Gazette did not report
Calvin was wearing a pair of ripped
overalls and had a foot of Polish
sausage tied to his thigh. But
everyone found out anyway.

INT. TECUMSEH BAR- DAY

ANGLE: Through a bar window, the scene of Calvin being dragged into the police car plays across the way. The muffled shouting can be heard over the music inside the bar.

A man who we will come to know as TATER aims a pool cue and lines up a shot. Another man, who we will come to know as BOBO stands behind him watching. Tater takes the shot.

Tater leans up, admiring his shot and for an instant acknowledges the camera.

EXT. BIRD'S EYE VIEW- FROM THE WEALTHY PART OF TOWN- CONT.

An OLDER, WELL-DRESSED MAN, drinks a highball on his porch overlooking downtown Meade. Beyond town, in the distance we see the smoke stacks from the paper mill.

NARRATOR

Far from the stench, near the country club, Brewer Heights overlooked downtown. And for those not wealthy enough to live in the Victorians in Brewer Heights but eager to be far from town, there was a holler called Knockemstiff.

CLOSE UP ON MAP: Meade, OH. The finger moves to the next point- Knockemstiff.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Four hundred or so people lived in Knockemstiff in 1957 nearly all of them connected by blood through one godforsaken calamity or another, be it lust or necessity or just plain ignorance.

He taps his finger over the spot.

2

EXT. KNOCKEMSTIFF, OHIO- VARIOUS

2

Images accompany the NARRATOR's words, taking us on a brief tour. Knockemstiff is a holler, what people up north refer to as a "hollow." A secluded rural area in a valley. The roads are windy, and the foliage is thick, with pockets of life scattered throughout.

NARRATOR

Along with the tar-papered shacks and cinder-block houses, the holler included two general stores, a Church of Christ in Christian Union and a joint known throughout the township as the Bull Pen.

A slack-jawed man named HANK sits outside Maude's general store.

A DRUNK PATRON can be seen through a dirty window talking loudly in the Bull Pen.

3

EXT. THE RUSSELL HOME- EVENING

3

A house on the top of a hill. A modest two story home.

CHARLOTTE RUSSELL (late 20s) walks out onto the porch, wiping her hands on her apron, and takes a seat. She daintily lights a cigarette and takes a drag. She watches on contentedly as her husband, WILLARD (late 20s), and their son, ARVIN, 9 years old, head into the woods surrounding the house.

Following dutifully right behind Arvin, JACK, a kind looking, lab-looking mutt.

NARRATOR

The Russells had rented the house on top of the Mitchell Flats for five years now, but most of the neighbors down below still considered them outsiders. Arvin was the only kid on the school bus who wasn't somebody's relation. Three days before, he'd come home with another black eye.

4

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS- CONT.

4

Arvin follows close behind Willard, swatting through brier patches, tangled weeds, and thistle. He keeps his eyes up towards his father, almost in awe.

WILLARD

I don't condone no fighting just for the hell of it, but sometimes you're just too easygoing.

(beat)

Them boys might be bigger than you, but the next time one of 'em starts his shit, I want you to finish it.

They come out into a clearing where a home made cross and knocked down tree trunk sit in the middle and serve as a *prayer log*.

Willard kneels to pray and Arvin follows.

NARRATOR

Unless he had whiskey running through his veins, Willard came to the clearing every morning and evening to talk to God.

Arvin- his black eye on display- prays. He adopts a grave face that mimics Willard's. The forest is silent except for their whispered prayers.

A branch breaks in the distance.

Two pairs of feet step through the woods not far off.

Arvin starts to turn back.

Willard presses Arvin's shoulder returning the boy's focus to the log.

The feet stop moving and settle just on the edge of the clearing.

A breeze rustles the leaves in the trees.

The sound of a man's cackle hits Willard's ear.

Willard looks up at the homemade cross above him.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

When he'd pray, his mind - for reasons that may seem obvious but were unknown to Willard - would drift back to the Solomon Islands and the day he and a couple soldiers came across the body of Gunnery Sergeant Miller Jones.

5 EXT. CLEARING IN THE JUNGLE- SOLOMON ISLANDS- DAY 5

A clearing in the middle of a jungle. Palm trees sway in the wind under a haze of smoke.

In the middle of the clearing, the body of a naked MARINE slumps on a tilted cross made out of palm trees.

The murmuring of men in the bushes can be heard.

MAN

Clear.

Three American MARINES exit the bushes, rifles ready. They slowly approach the body.

FOCUS ON: A grizzled, dirty, *younger* Willard, 21 years old. His breath speeds up as the sound of millions of buzzing black flies rises as he approaches a crucified marine who has been *skinned alive*.

His hands are nailed to the palm tree cross crudely with two sharp shards of bamboo. Under the swarm of flies, the Marine's heart continues to beat quietly.

MARINE #1

Aw, Jesus. He's still alive under there. He's still alive.

Willard looks down and notices dog tags hanging from what remains of his big toe. "GUNNERY SERGEANT MILLER JONES".

Willard's breathing quickens. His actions move faster than his thoughts; he unholsters his pistol, steps behind Miller Jones' body. He points the gun behind Jones' ear, *fires*.

The black flies scatter.

A frozen Willard processes his action as the two other soldiers observe him.

WILLARD
Let's get him down.

The flies return to Miller Jones.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
Bring any medals back?

TITLE OVER BLACK: WILLARD

7

INT. GREYHOUND BUS- SOUTHERN OHIO- DAY

7

A quiet Willard sits in a sharp uniform with a large green knapsack beside him. He takes a swig from a pint bottle of whiskey and slips it back into his sack. In front of him, an overweight BUS DRIVER.

BUS DRIVER
(getting his attention)
Said, "Bring any medals back?"

WILLARD
Just this skinny carcass I'm walking around in.

BUS DRIVER
If it wasn't for this damn ulcer, I'd have been out there with you boys.

WILLARD
You didn't miss nothing.

BUS DRIVER
I don't know. I sure would have liked to got me some medals. I got a wife at home who goes nuts every time she sees one. Talk about suffering. I worry myself sick anytime I'm out on the road she's gonna take off with a purple heart.

WILLARD
(with disgust)
You think Miller Jones would give a shit if his old lady was out fucking around on him? Buddy, he'd trade places with you any goddamn day.

BUS DRIVER
Who the hell is Miller Jones?

WILLARD
Just some poor bastard who went and fought in that war they cheated you out of, that's all.

The Bus Driver shuts up and keeps his eyes on the road.

Willard looks out the window.

A sign reads "WELCOME TO MEADE!"

8 EXT. MEADE, OHIO- MAIN STREET- LATER

8

The Bus Driver steps off the bus and stands by the door as passengers disembark.

BUS DRIVER
We'll be back on the road in 30
minutes with or without you.

Willard exits the bus and nods at the Bus Driver.

NARRATOR
Willard was sorry he'd brought up the
marine's name like he did. He vowed
that though he would never forget him,
he'd never mention Gunnery Sergeant
Miller Jones to anyone again.

Willard spots a diner. A piece of white cardboard in the
window advertises a 35 cent meat loaf special.

9 INT. THE WOODEN SPOON- SOON AFTER

9

Willard walks into a dusty but busy little hole in the wall.

A larger, disheveled man holding a small camera goes for the
same seat as Willard. They're about the same age. The man
nods at Willard's uniform and gives up the seat. We will meet
this man again later. His name is CARL. Carl makes his way to
a crammed spot by the window counter.

Willard looks around for a waitress. Beside him, an ELDERLY
MAN sits staring out into space. Willard pulls out a smoke
just as the kitchen door opens and a young waitress comes out
with a couple plates. This is CHARLOTTE.

Charlotte drops a bowl of pea soup for the ELDERLY MAN and
passes by Willard to another solo customer down the counter.

CHARLOTTE
(to Willard)
Be right with you.

Another waitress, SANDY (20s), rushes past Charlotte,
slipping on her apron. Sandy is friendly and naive.

SANDY
I'm so sorry, I couldn't find my damn
keys.

Sandy walks up to Carl sitting by the window fiddling with
his camera.

SANDY (CONT'D)
What'll you be having?

CARL
Ham and cheese.

She tries to find a pen in her apron.

CARL (CONT'D)
Bit green on the job, huh?

SANDY
(smiles)
That obvious, huh?

Carl smiles.

SANDY (CONT'D)
You take pictures?

NARRATOR
In the years to come, Carl would call
Sandy "the bait" and she'd call him
"the shooter."

CARL
(winks)
Only when I find a smile pretty enough
to photograph.

NARRATOR
They'd both call the hitchhikers
they'd kill "the models."

Sandy blushes and starts to turn away.

SANDY
Let me think about it.

CARL
All right. I'm Carl by the way.

SANDY
Sandy.

Charlotte approaches Willard pulling out her order pad.

CHARLOTTE
(to Willard)
Waiting long?

Willard shakes his head and smiles for the first time.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
What can I get you? Meatloaf's the
blue plate special.

WILLARD
Just coffee and a donut.

Willard watches Charlotte as she turns to a small glass
cabinet filled with pastries. She places the plate with a

single donut on it in front of him. She pours him his cup of coffee. She finishes pouring and looks up. Willard is staring at his plate, taking in the simple beauty of the donut and the mug filled with coffee. He looks up and their eyes connect.

WILLARD (CONT'D)

Thank you. That's really fine.

CHARLOTTE

(cracking a smile)

It's just coffee and a donut.

A bell dings off-screen as the front door is opened, followed by a loud cough. The MANAGER comes running out from the kitchen. Charlotte looks up, Willard turns to see what's going on.

MANAGER

No. No. Now, get out!

A ONE-ARMED HOMELESS MAN stands at the door swaying. The Manager has his hands on him.

HOMELESS MAN

I ain't bothering-

MANAGER

I told you last time, next time it's gonna be the cops drag you outta here.

The Homeless Man backs away and exits as the Manager watches.

Willard looks back at Charlotte as she places the bill down.

CHARLOTTE

Excuse me. I'm gonna take my break outside.

She grabs a pre-made ham and cheese sandwich and exits.

Willard watches her go out the back door. Linger on the door.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND THE WOODEN SPOON- DAY

Willard walks out, carrying his knapsack and pops around the corner just in time to see Charlotte passing the sandwich to the Homeless Man. He takes it, mumbles something and walks away. Charlotte lights a smoke.

Willard approaches, pulling out his cigarettes. She smiles kindly.

CHARLOTTE

Did you need anything else?

WILLARD

No, I'm fine. That was nice what you did.

Charlotte is soft-spoken but resolute.

CHARLOTTE

Some people just need a little help once in a while, you know what I mean?

WILLARD

Yeah. Your boss surely didn't care to.

CHARLOTTE

I figure, it's easier to just do something yourself than to convince somebody else to do the right thing.

(beat)

You back home from the war?

WILLARD

Passing through. On my way back to West Virginia. My people're from Coal Creek.

CHARLOTTE

Too bad. You have a nice face.

She takes one last drag and stubs her cigarette out. She smiles. He nods, and watches her go back into the restaurant. He looks back at the bus across the street.

INT. THE WOODEN SPOON- CONT.

Sandy drops off Carl's ham and cheese. As she drops it off, Carl sneaks a snapshot with his camera. She hears the click and turns.

SANDY

Oh, no! You got me I guess.

CARL

Yep.

Willard runs by the window.

CAMERA pans with him as he crosses the street and gets on the bus.

The bus pulls away. Willard looks back towards Charlotte at the Wooden Spoon, getting further and further away.

11 EXT. RURAL ROAD- COAL CREEK, WEST VIRGINIA- EVENING 11

A ratty Ford pickup drives down a small dirt road lined by
shacks or large sheds.

12 INT. PICKUP TRUCK- CONT. 12

EARSKELL, late 40s, a sprightly fellow with a ratty beard,
drives while Willard digs through his knapsack.

EARSKELL

Is it true the Japs ate their own
dead?

WILLARD

Now, where'd you hear that?

EARSKELL

Read it in the paper.

WILLARD

(shaking his head)
How's mother doing?

EARSKELL

Well, I gotta say, when they sent
Junior Carver's body back, she went
off in the head there for a while.
Heck, she even made a deal with God to
marry you off to Helen Hatton!

WILLARD

Helen Hatton? Who's that?

EARSKELL

Oh, some gal goes to your mother's
church. She's the one that'd read your
postcards to us. Her family burnt up
in a fire couple years ago. Your momma
says she a simple thing, but decent.
She just looks ugly to me.

Willard pulls out a bottle of whiskey and passes it. Earskell
takes a swig.

EARSKELL (CONT'D)

Lord! This is good stuff.

WILLARD

I got three more in my kit. Drink up.
Oh, and I got something else for ye.

CU: Willard pulls out a German Luger from the bag and holds
it up.

WILLARD (CONT'D)

This here supposed to be the gun
Hitler used to blow his brains out.

EARSKELL
 (grinning)
 Still got the bullshit in ya, ain't
 ye?

WILLARD
 (feigning disbelief)
 What? You think the guy lied to me?

Earskell chuckles.

13

EXT. SMALL HOUSE- LATER

13

Earskell and Willard walk up a little hill towards a modest but welcoming house in the middle of a desolate holler. A lantern is the only source of light from inside.

EMMA RUSSELL, early 40s, large, soft and kind, runs towards Willard. In tears, she wraps her arms around him. Willard's bag drops at his feet and he buries his face in his mother's shoulder.

Earskell slips past them and into the kitchen.

EMMA
 Oh, Lord, I was so worried.

WILLARD
 (patting her back gently)
 Ah, it wasn't that bad.

EMMA
 (letting loose of him)
 I'd ask you to get down with me and
 thank Jesus but I can smell the liquor
 on your breath.

Willard nods.

WILLARD
 I know, I know, but I felt the need to
 celebrate. I'm in love.

Emma smiles and wipes the tears away from her face with her apron.

14

INT. EMMA'S KITCHEN- LATER

14

Earskell and Willard sit drinking whiskey and laughing loudly at the kitchen table. Emma watches on.

15

INT. WILLARD'S BEDROOM- LATER

15

Emma helps her son undress as he mutters. He lays back into the bed he's now outgrown.

FOCUS ON: a picture hung over the bedroom door of Simon of Cyrene taking the Cross for Jesus.

WILLARD
Take that down, momma. I don't
wanna...Mill..er Jones.

Emma ignores his rambling.

EMMA
Now, this waitress. What is it you
like about her?

WILLARD
Everything.

EMMA
Well, maybe you oughta pray on it
before you do anything.

Emma looks long at her son's face as he passes out.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Just not when you're drinking.

16 INT. WILLARD'S BEDROOM- MORNING

16

The sun fills the room. Willard, a wreck, rubs his face. His first sight is a Bible on the bed side table.

Willard opens the table drawer and slides the Bible into it. He looks back up at the picture of Jesus above his door. He slips that into the drawer too.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE- NIGHT

Back to Bataan, a war picture starring John Wayne, plays on the big screen. A scene in which John Wayne is dealing with Filipino POWs is on.

Earskell and Willard sit in the middle, taking swigs of whiskey. Willard begins to squirm a bit as he watches.

WILLARD
Come meet me at The Hole if ya want.

EARSKELL
Leave the whiskey if ya don't mind.

Willard takes a swig and passes it to him. He walks past, eyeing the audience.

INT. THE HOLE- LATER

Willard stands over a pool table swaying, using his cue to keep balanced. He surveys the bar full of drunks and loose women. A LOCAL, early 40s, mostly sober (a guy who spends time at a pool hall) looks up at Willard before shooting. He shoots and sinks the 8 ball.

WILLARD
I saw that.

LOCAL

Saw what?

WILLARD

What you just did, you piece of shit.

LOCAL

Listen, boy, I ain't been doing
nothing but beating you.

Willard throws a punch and knocks the guy in the mouth. The
two fall to the floor.

17 EXT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED- EVENING

People file into a small worn white painted church.

REVEREND ALBERT SYKES (60s)- clean shaven but rusty- greets
people as they come through the door.

18 INT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED- CONT. 18

Willard - a black eye from his bar fight fading - sits in the
back pew watching his mother speak to a thin, odd woman
wearing broken glasses, repaired with electrical tape. This
is HELEN HATTON.

Emma approaches Willard.

EMMA

I asked Helen to sit with us.

Willard stands up, nods respectfully and lets her by. When
she passes, he winces at her body odor.

Emma sits next to her son and leans in to check his breath.

WILLARD

(patiently)
It's been four days.

EMMA

Good.

REVEREND SYKES (O.S.)

(to loiterers outside)
Put out them cigarettes, we're about
to get started!

The Reverend shuts the door and a small CHOIR of two men and
three women stand and sing "*Sinner, You'd Better Get Ready.*"

Reverend Sykes stands in front of the altar counting the
heads of everyone. He nods to the choir and the choir stops.

REVEREND SYKES (CONT'D)

Whew, it's hot. But it's bound to get
hotter, ain't that right? Especially
for them that ain't right with the
Lord.

CHURCH MEMBER #1
Amen.

CHURCH MEMBER #2
Surely is.

REVEREND SYKES

Well. We gonna take care of that
shortly. They's two boys from over
around Topperville gonna lead the
service tonight, and from what
everyone tells me, they got a good
message.

(beckoning them)

Boys...

In the shadows off to the side of the altar, hidden from the
congregation by a frayed black curtain, exits ROY, tall
skinny in his late 20s. He pushes a wheelchair bound
THEODORE, fat and 20s. It squeaks as they approach.

EMMA

(whispering to Willard)

That one in the wheelchair drank too
much strychnine or antifreeze or
something is why he can't walk.
Testing their faith, they call it. But
that's going too far, the way I see
it.

Theodore holds a banged-up guitar in his lap. His thin legs
drag on the floor as he wheels over.

ROY

Thank you, Reverend.

Reverend Sykes takes a seat. Theodore strums as Roy strolls
the aisle. Roy bows his head, and from out of this sad
looking creature's mouth comes a *sweet hymnal*.

A calmness comes over Willard's face as he takes in the
music. At this moment, this little church in the middle of
nowhere is the most peaceful place in the world.

Theodore finishes the verse, but continues strumming.

ROY (CONT'D)

My name's Roy Laferty and there's my
cousin, Theodore.

Theodore's eyes follow Roy's every movement. His strumming
amplifies during pauses. He keeps rhythm with Roy's flow.

ROY (CONT'D)

(revivalist voice)

Now! I tell you now that the Holy
Ghost's gonna visit this little church
that bears his sacred name!

Roy lets out a high, painful wail. A few churchgoers jump.
Willard smiles at the theatrics. Emma covers her ears.

ROY (CONT'D)

Now, what is it you most afraid of?
Because if your worst fear is rats,
then Satan will make sure you get your
fill of 'em. Brothers and sisters,
you'll see 'em eatin' away at ya while
you lay there unable to lift a single
finger, and it won't ever cease. A
million years in eternity! Now don't
even try and figure that up. Ain't no
human head big enough to calculate
misery like that. And really, brothers
and sisters, ain't no man ever been
evil enough, not even that Hitler
feller, come up with the ways Satan is
gonna make the sinners pay come the
Judgement Day.

Roy looks at the crowd whose attention he's claimed. From
behind the altar, he grabs a gallon jar with a dark mass
rolling inside.

SOMEONE IN CHURCH

Praise God!

ROY

That's right, my friend. That's right.

(beat)

Let me tell you something, friends.
Before I found the Holy Ghost, I was
scared plumb to death of spiders.
Ain't that right, Theodore?

(Theodore nods solemnly)

I was a runt hiding under my mother's
long skirts. Spiders crawling through
my dreams, layin' eggs in my
nightmares. I couldn't even go out the
house 'less someone clutched my hand.
They was hanging in their webs
everywhere waiting. Had fear in me all
the time, awake or asleep. Didn't
matter.

(beat)

That's what hell is, brothers and
sisters. I got no rest from them
devils. Not until the Spirit gave me
strength.

Roy drops to his knees and jiggles the jar. He unscrews the
lid. Theodore's music turns into a slow, sad, ominous dirge.

Roy raises the jar over his head.

ROY (CONT'D)

Brothers and sisters, behold! The Lord
looks out for me now!

Roy takes a deep breath and turns the jar over. A mass of
spiders- brown, black, orange, small and large- pour onto his
head, shoulders and the floor. The congregation *gasps*,
screams.

Roy stands up and lets out another wail through the church. He slams the glass jar onto the ground, smashing it.

CONGREGANTS
AMEN! PRAISE THE LORD!

While a lot of the church is moved by this show of faith, a handful start to make their way to the door in shock and disgust.

Emma gasps and jumps out of her seat. Helen remains enthralled by Roy's dark sermon. Willard shakes his head.

WILLARD
(laughing)
Wish Uncle was here to see this.

ROY
Mark my word, people, the Spirit'll
take away your fears if you're
willing!

Emma reaches for Helen's hand, but Helen is fixated on Roy and instinctively pulls away.

EMMA
Willard, let's get out of here!

Willard follows Emma towards the door.

Roy notices Helen and beckons her to him.

Helen, holding her Bible, gets close and kneels in front of Roy. Roy looks down at Helen. He nonchalantly brushes a spider off his ear.

Theodore continues playing, lost in his music.

HELEN
(softly; heartfelt)
Oh, bless me, Reverend. Bless me.

Roy taps her on the shoulder gently, and she rises. The two stare at each other for a moment amidst the chaos.

ROY
Let the Lord look upon you.

Theodore notices the undeniable connection between Helen and Roy and stops strumming. A sense of doom hangs in the air.

19 INT. PICKUP TRUCK- CONT.

19

Willard drives the car and Emma sits in the passenger seat shaking her head.

EMMA
I'll bet Reverend Sykes is regrettin'
he ever invited them.
(MORE)

EMMA (CONT'D)
 (sighs)
 I wish Helen had left with us.

Willard lights a cigarette, lost in his thoughts.

EMMA (CONT'D)
 You know she might have come with us
 if you'd paid a little more attention
 to her. The right man would make a
 good life for Helen.

Emma looks at her son who's already hundreds of miles away.

INT. THE WOODEN SPOON- DAY

Charlotte finishes pouring a cup of coffee for a PATRON. A man takes a seat in the neighboring stool. She looks up, recognition on her face.

CHARLOTTE
 Passing through again?

WILLARD
 No. I'm going to be staying here for a while.

Charlotte gives him a look to see if he's serious.

CHARLOTTE
 Really?! That's something.

WILLARD
 I forgot to ask your name last time.

CHARLOTTE
 Charlotte.

WILLARD
 My name's Willard.

20 INT. MEATPACKING PLANT- DAY

20

A knife slides into a large hog, opening its guts. The sour-grey colored innards start to slowly emerge.

Willard, dressed in a large rubber apron, holds the long blade. The hog hangs on a hook in the middle of a large assembly line.

21 EXT. PICKUP TRUCK- MEADE, OHIO- EVENING

21

Willard, in plain clothes, sits among several other workers from the meatpacking plant in the back of a pickup truck driving away from the plant and towards town.

EXT. SMALL BUILDING- CONT.

Willard approaches his building on the corner off a busy intersection in downtown Meade. It's a small building in the rough part of town.

As he approaches his door, he eyes the loud dive bar across the street. It's equal parts tempting and off-putting.

23

INT. SMALL APARTMENT- CONT.

23

The place is small and dark, but a vase of flowers and a couple bright pieces of decoration add some warmth.

Charlotte prepares dinner. She turns around upon Willard's entrance. The music from the bar outside comes through the open window.

WILLARD

Charlotte, sweetheart.

She walks over and kisses his neck. He pulls out a few dollars from his pants. She takes the bills and places them in a tin of small savings on the counter.

Willard shuts the window. Music is muffled.

Willard leans down and picks up his baby boy, ARVIN, just under a year old, and gives him a kiss on his head. He is gentle with him in a way we've never seen him be.

24

INT. BATHROOM- CONT.

24

Willard washes his hands and his face.

25

INT. KITCHEN DINETTE- LATER

25

The remnants of a simple dinner on the table.

Willard stares out his window down at the loud drunks coming out of the bar.

A couple DRUNK BUDDIES- smoking and talking shit- eye Willard looking at them. Their gestures and lascivious looks feel like a silent threat through the window pane.

Willard looks down at Arvin playing with a rinky-dink toy on the dusty apartment floor. Charlotte sits across from him.

WILLARD

Those drunks ever bother you or Arvin?

CHARLOTTE

I don't pay no mind to no one.

The Drunks finish their smokes, toss the butts and stumble back into the bar.

NARRATOR

Though he hadn't talked to God in years, not a single petition or word of praise since he'd come across the crucified marine, he could feel it welling up inside him now, the urge to get right with his maker before something bad happened to his family.

26 EXT. MITCHELL FLATS FARMHOUSE- DAY

26

Peaceful- a farmhouse surrounded by a piece of open land, bordered by woods.

The years have chipped away at the house's original red and white paint, leaving it a dark brown, run-down and leaky relic. But it has potential.

Behind the house- a ramshackle barn.

A plump man wearing a suit and tie stands on the small porch. This is HENRY DUNLAP. He flicks something off his shoe as he speaks.

HENRY

You see, real estate isn't my business but I own a few of these properties around Meade and Knockemstiff.

(More to himself)

Real long-term investments.

27 INT. MITCHELL FLATS FARMHOUSE- CONT.

27

Charlotte walks through the rickety house with baby Arvin in her arms, surveying the state of each room.

CHARLOTTE

I don't see any sinks in here.

HENRY (O.S.)

Ain't no running water, missy. Just the well out back.

28 EXT. MITCHELL FLATS PROPERTY- CONT.

28

Henry and Charlotte's voices in the distance. Willard crosses into the woods.

Willard arrives at a small clearing surrounded by the thick wood. It is peaceful. He walks to the center where an uprooted birch has come down. The *prayer log* from earlier...

Willard leans down onto the tree. He senses something he has not felt in a long time and holds his palm against the wood.

29 INT. FARMHOUSE- LATER

29

Henry frowns at his watch.

WILLARD (O.S.)
That clearing up through the woods? Is
that part of this property?

HENRY
Yes, it is.

Willard approaches the house and goes up the few steps past
Henry briskly.

He finds Charlotte sitting on a chair left in one of the
small rooms, singing to Arvin.

CHARLOTTE
Where'd you go?

WILLARD
Looking the land over. The rent seems
fair for what we get. What you think?

CHARLOTTE
It's nice. Wouldn't it be something if
we could buy it someday? Arvin have a
place he could always call home?
(beat)
I never did have that.

HELEN'S VOICE
"Things are good, momma."

INT. EMMA'S HOME- DAY

Helen sits with her little baby, LENORA, in her arms and a
postcard in her hand. Across from her, Emma and Earskell
listen.

HELEN
*"We found a place in a holler called
Knockemstiff. Arvin just turned two
and he has lots of grass to play on
now. We're saving money to buy the
house one day, so things are going to
be tight for a while. We'll get to you
as soon as possible. Your son
Willard."*

(Helen smiles at the next
line)
"Ps. I got the urge to pray again."

Emma smiles approvingly. A car HONKS outside.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You sure you don't mind watching
Lenora for just a little while?

EMMA
Well, sure. I don't mind. Hand her
here. Where you going?

Helen stands and hands over the baby to Emma. She starts to adjust her hair delicately.

HELEN
(smiling, happy)
We just thought we'd take a ride. Get
out of that little house for a bit.

Helen leans down and gives Lenora a kiss.

EXT. EMMA'S HOUSE- MOMENTS LATER

Helen exits and the horn impatiently honks again. Helen gets into a car. Roy sits in the driver seat. He's two years older from when we last saw him, and more worn but dressed nicely. In the back seat, Theodore, looking like shit.

The car drives off.

INT. EMMA'S HOME- LATER THAT NIGHT

Emma holds the sad looking baby in the dimly lit room hours later. Lenora cries. Emma looks out the window while Earskell smokes a cigarette by the door.

NARRATOR
No one came back that night or the
next to pick up Lenora.

EXT. THE WOODS- DAY

A YOUNG COUPLE necks on a blanket in a clearing in the woods. The GIRL's ears perk up when she hears her dog growling. She looks up to see the DOG gnawing and yanking on something from the ground.

NARRATOR
It'd be seven years til they figured
out what happened to the preacher, his
wife, and the cripple.

The Girl approaches as the dog continues to struggle with a human bone.

WE WILL RETURN TO THIS LATER...For now, we go back to Meade.

30 INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE LINE- DAY (SEVEN YEARS LATER) 30

Willard slams a blade into a big hog and drags it down. The pig hangs on a hook. He pushes the pig down to the next person on the assembly line and steadies the next pig.

31 EXT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE- DAY 31

Willard's truck pulls up. Arvin, nine years old now, comes running out of the house along with his dog Jack. Willard notices something and pulls his chin up to get a better look.

Arvin has a black eye.

WILLARD

You're coming out back with me today,
boy.

Charlotte sits on the porch sewing up a pair of Arvin's
ripped pants. Willard approaches and gives her a kiss.
Noticing her pallor, he lifts her chin to study her eyes.

CHARLOTTE

(sounding official)
Would you like to make a deposit
today, sir?

WILLARD

You feeling all right?

CHARLOTTE

I'm fine.

Willard studies her before pulling out a few bills.

32 THE KITCHEN

32

The little tin box has become a thick roll of bills. She adds
the new ones.

A sharp pain shoots through her stomach. She coughs.

On her fingers, a little blood. She wipes it off.

33 EXT. PRAYER LOG- DAY

33

Arvin kneels with his father by the prayer log.

Jack lays peacefully in the long grass nearby.

CLOSE: Above them is the weathered cross, fitted together out
of boards pried from the ramshackle barn.

A branch breaks. Willard presses Arvin's shoulder when the
boy begins turning to the sound.

*(Some will remember this moment as the one from the start of
our story.)*

Ten yards away in the woods, two POACHERS-rifles slung over
their shoulders- watch Willard and Arvin from the treeline
without making an effort to conceal themselves.

POACHER ONE

Shit. Wouldn't now be the time to pay
his old lady a visit. Probably over
there in bed keeping it warm for me.

POACHER TWO

And how much you'll be paying the doc
for getting near that.

POACHER ONE

Shut the fuck up, Lucas. I'd take more'n just a piece of that. She's a looker. Damned if she ain't.

Willard, *without his son seeing*, bites his lip. He's angry, but he swallows it. Willard looks at his boy who is looking back towards the poachers.

WILLARD

(under his breath to Arvin)

This here is the Lord's time, not nobody else's.

(looking at Arvin)

You understand?

Willard places his hand on Arvin's head and nudges it back into a bowed position.

34

INT. ARVIN'S ROOM- AFTERNOON

34

Arvin sleeps in his clothes on top of the covers. Jack lays next to him.

WILLARD (O.S.)

Arvin! Gonna go gas up. No sense in you napping in there like a house cat all day.

ARVIN

Can Jack come?

Willard thinks for a moment. He nods.

35

INT. TRUCK- DAY

35

Willard drives down a dirt road. He slows at each house they pass and peers out at any cars parked out front.

Willard passes the gas station. Arvin's head follows it.

Willard makes a sharp turn into the parking lot of a tin roof bootleg joint with "Bull Pen" painted on the front door.

The Poachers sit on a picnic table out front, surrounded by beer cans. Their shotguns lean against a nearby tree.

WILLARD

Roll up yer window.

Arvin begins rolling up his window.

EXT. THE BULL PEN- CONT.

Willard shuts the engine off and pushes his door open while the truck rolls to a stop. He charges the men.

Jack starts barking loudly, saliva flying from his mouth onto the window.

Poacher One lobs a beer can: such a bad throw that it's hard to tell if he threw it defensively or out of pure shock.

Poacher Two grabs his rifle and runs for a car parked nearby.

Willard tackles Poacher One, knocking him over the picnic table. They end up in front of an open outhouse door. Willard has mounted Poacher One's back. He pins his face to the dirt with his knees and lands punches into the back of his head, forcing his face into the outhouse overspill.

He turns Poacher One over to be sure he's alive.

Walking back from the outhouse, Willard picks up Poacher One's shotgun.

INT. TRUCK- DAY

Arvin watches his father from the truck walk from Poacher One towards Poacher Two's car.

INT. POACHER TWO'S CAR- CONT.

Poacher Two is starting his engine when Willard pulls him out of the car onto the ground.

Willard beats him with the butt end of his friend's shotgun.

36

INT. TRUCK- LATER

36

Willard pulls a rag from under his seat and wipes blood and filth off his hands.

WILLARD

Now you remember what I told you?
About them boys on the bus give you
the black eye.

(beat)

That's what I meant, you just got to
pick the right time.

ARVIN

Yes, sir.

Arvin studies his father in awe.

WILLARD

There's a lot of no-good sonofbitches
out there.

ARVIN

More than a hundred?

WILLARD

(laughs)

At least that many. How about I buy
you a candy bar?

ARVIN
(smiling)
We got to get sugar for Momma too.

NARRATOR
Arvin would often think back on this day as the best day he ever spent with his father.

Willard smiles at his son.

39

INT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE- DAY

39

Charlotte prepares biscuits in the kitchen. She stops when a pang shoots through her stomach. She lets it pass. *Breath.*

CU: Charlotte pours ingredients into a bowl. She stirs.

CU: She rolls out the dough and appears pale.

She takes a breath, leans down and slips the pan of dough into the oven.

She stands up too quickly. The color drains from her face. Her eyes flutter shut. Her head slams to the floor.

EXT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE- A LITTLE LATER

Arvin jumps out of the pick-up and runs towards the house. Willard parks it further down by the barn in the back.

INT. THE RUSSELL HOME- CONT.

Arvin enters. Burning biscuits fill the room with smoke.

Charlotte lays on the floor passed out in a puddle of watery blood around her waist. Arvin runs towards his mother.

ARVIN
Momma! Dad!

41

INT. HOSPITAL BEDROOM- LATER

41

Willard sits by the bed watching his wife sleep. Arvin is crawled up into a ball sleeping at her feet.

Charlotte wakes suddenly.

CHARLOTTE
(straining to speak)
I think I had a dream.

WILLARD
A good one?

CHARLOTTE

Yeah.

(hushed)

I know it sounds crazy, but I want to go home and pretend we own the house for a while.

WILLARD

How we gonna do that?

Charlotte leans back into her pillow some more.

CHARLOTTE

With this stuff they got me on, they could tell me I was the Queen of Sheba and I wouldn't know any different. Besides, I know what the doctor is saying. I sure as hell don't want to spend what's left of my time in this place.

WILLARD

Is that what the dream was about?

CHARLOTTE

(puzzled)

What dream?

42 INT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE- DAY

42

Willard carries Charlotte through the house, places her in bed. He covers her with a blanket. Jack follows loyally behind Arvin.

WILLARD

Arvin, get your mother some water.

(to Charlotte)

Are you okay?

Arvin goes to the kitchen, Jack follows.

CHARLOTTE

Just my medicine.

Arvin comes back with a big glass of water. Willard pulls out a pill container. He hands Charlotte a large pill.

She struggles to swallow it.

WILLARD

Watch your mother for a bit. I'll be back.

43 EXT. PRAYER LOG- DUSK

43

Willard kneels at the prayer log in a grey sunset.

His eyes are shut and hands gripped tight.

Willard opens his eyes and stares out across the small clearing and listens to the evening's peace.

He looks up at the small cross in front of the log.

CU: The center of the weathered cross.

45 INT. ARVIN'S BEDROOM- MORNING 45

The sunlight pours into Arvin's room. He sleeps peacefully. Willard comes in, covered in dirt and sweat, and shakes his son awake.

WILLARD

Get up. I'm gonna need you to help me.

46 EXT. PRAYER LOG- LATER 46

Willard hacks at the briars and saplings. Arvin helps.

47 INT. WILLARD'S BEDROOM- LATER 47

Charlotte, at her window, watches Willard and Arvin carry bundles of wood from the barn into the woods.

48 EXT. PRAYER LOG- LATER 48

CU: Willard crisscrosses the boards of wood and hammers nails into them hard.

CU: Arvin's small hands dig a hole and one of the boards slides into the dirt.

Willard steps back and takes in what they have built.

49 INT. WILLARD'S BEDROOM- LATER 49

Willard brings a small bowl of hot broth to the table next to Charlotte. He touches her face and she leans into it.

50 INT. ARVIN'S BEDROOM- NIGHT 50

Willard enters and stands an arm's length away from his son sitting on the bed.

Willard grabs his boy's hands and looks at them compared to his, also blistered and worn.

ARVIN

Is she gonna die?

WILLARD

The Lord can do anything if you ask him right.

51 EXT. PRAYER LOG- DAY

51

Before the prayer log, Willard grips Arvin's hands together.

WILLARD

Hold them tight. And pray so's your
voice reaches heaven.

Willard looks back to his hands and begins his petitions.
Arvin watches.

WILLARD (CONT'D)

LORD. PLEASE SAVE MY WIFE.
PLEASE TAKE AWAY THIS CANCER THAT'S
INSIDE HER, LORD. PLEASE SAVE MY WIFE.
PLEASE TAKE AWAY THE CANCER INSIDE
HER! PLEASE SAVE MY WIFE, LORD! I KNOW
YOU CAN DO IT. SHE'S A GOOD WOMAN,
LORD. PLEASE, WE NEED YOUR HELP.

ARVIN

Lord, please save my momma. Please
help us.

Arvin spots the movement just nearby. It's Jack. Arvin smiles
at him. Willard *smacks* his son across the back of his head.

WILLARD

You want your momma to die?

ARVIN

No, sir.

WILLARD

Then, pray goddamnit and stop wasting
time.

(beat)

Don't be crying.

Arvin swallows the pain from his father's hit and looks back
towards his clasped hands.

ARVIN

PLEASE! LORD! PLEASE, SAVE MY MOMMA!
CLEAN THE CANCER OUT OF HER!

WILLARD

SPARE MY WIFE, LORD! DESTROY THE
CANCER IN HER! LORD!

The two continue to shout their prayers. The dog watches on.

52 INT. CHARLOTTE'S ROOM- SAME TIME

52

Charlotte lays in bed looking out towards the woods, hearing
her husband and son shouting their prayers.

53 INT. CHARLOTTE'S ROOM- LATER

53

Charlotte lays in a cold sweat in her bed. Willard brings a bowl of broth to the bedside table and sits on the bed.

CHARLOTTE

Willard, that foolishness. . .

He spoons a bit of soup over to her mouth.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

That foolishness out there isn't going to do me no good.

WILLARD

That's not true. The Lord hears us. I can feel it. Eat, now.

54 INT. ARVIN'S BEDROOM- NIGHT

54

Arvin lays in bed. His hand dangles off the side of the bed and strokes Jack laying on the floor. Willard comes in and Arvin pulls his hand up.

WILLARD

I'm sorry I hit you, Arvin.

Arvin lays in bed looking at his father.

WILLARD (CONT'D)

You know that, right?

Arvin nods.

WILLARD (CONT'D)

Get some rest. I'll come get you in the morning.

55 EXT. PRAYER LOG- SUNRISE

55

Willard is frozen in a kneeling position. His head leaning into his clasped fingers. His voice is hoarse from shouting, but he continues his petition in a whisper.

WILLARD

Tell me what to do if there is more
for me to do if I have to do more if
there's something you want if words
ain't enough if my prayers ain't
enough I'll do it...

Willard remains quiet for a moment. He studies a cut on his hand. He rubs the open wound across the bark of the log, leaving a streak of blood.

56 INT. CHARLOTTE'S ROOM- DAY 56

Arvin lays in his mother's bed with Jack.

Charlotte closes her eyes again. They remain still.

Willard's pickup truck bouncing on the dirt road leading up to the house is heard in the distance. Arvin lifts his head.

57 EXT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE- DAY 57

Willard has a *live lamb* in the bed of the pickup. The truck stops and Willard starts to turn around so the back of the truck faces the small barn. Arvin runs out with Jack.

ARVIN

Can we give it a name?

WILLARD

This ain't no goddamn pet. Get in the house with your mother. Go on.

59 EXT. PRAYER LOG- LATER 59

A waterfall of blood pours out over the white-grey log from a rusty bucket.

Willard places the bucket down and kneels down before the cross.

WILLARD

LORD! PLEASE SAVE MY WIFE. PLEASE TAKE AWAY THE CANCER INSIDE HER!

60 EXT. SIDE OF A ROAD- DAY 60

Raccoon roadkill lays on the country road. A car stops and a hand grabs the corpse.

Willard throws it into the back of his pickup truck onto a small pile of dead animals- a couple possums, a deer, a groundhog.

61 EXT. PRAYER LOG- DAY 61

CLOSE: Arvin wears a flannel shirt despite the August heat, sweating profusely. A maggot falls onto his arm from a rotting animal corpse strung up. He flinches and brushes it off, but never stops praying. The stench of death around him causes him to choke up.

WILLARD (O.C.)

This is what death is like. You want such as this for your mother?

ARVIN

No, sir.

WILLARD
Then pray, goddamnit!

Arvin looks back at the cross and resumes his petition.

CU: The prayer log is covered in various coats of blood. The old ones dry underneath the freshest coat just poured on.

EXT. PORCH- DUSK

Charlotte and Willard sit on the porch. Charlotte rests her head against Willard's shoulder, watching as Arvin plays fetch with Jack.

CHARLOTTE
He's such a sweet boy...Wouldn't it be something if this was really our home?

WILLARD
It is, don't you remember?

CHARLOTTE
(laughs lightly)
Don't matter, right now is good.

66

INT. CHARLOTTE'S ROOM- NIGHT

66

Willard sleeps beside his wife, his clothes and shoes still on. Charlotte starts to wake slowly. Something is bothering her. She opens her eyes with a start. A pain shoots through her. She screams and grabs Willard's hand.

WILLARD
What is it what is it?

Charlotte writhes in pain. Willard tries to hold her down.

She grabs his hand, her fingernails dig trenches in its skin.

CHARLOTTE
I'm gonna be sick!

Arvin comes running in with Jack beside him.

WILLARD
Get outta here!

Arvin backs away. Jack stays, looking at Willard.

67

INT. TECUMSEH LOUNGE- MEADE- NIGHT

67

Sandy, a decade older from the last time we saw her at the diner with Carl, pours a glass of whiskey for Willard. Her face is made up and her clothes are loose to appear sexy, but the years haven't been kind to her.

SANDY
You good, honey?

Willard nods and drinks his whiskey. Sandy gestures towards a dark hallway in the back of the bar with a Mounted Stag's head above it.

WILLARD
I'm fine, thanks.

Willard shows no interest in Sandy. She scuttles off, but his gaze remains fixated on the dark hallway.

68 INT. ARVIN'S ROOM- LATER 68

Arvin sleeps with Jack. Willard stands by the door with some sandwich meat in his hand. Jack perks up.

69 EXT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE- CONT. 69

Jack follows Willard outside. In his right hand, he holds the cold cuts. The dog gingerly nips at the meat. Willard pulls it away. Willard enters the barn.

70 INT. THE BARN- CONT. 70

Willard drops the stack of the meat on the ground. Willard watches the dog eat. He drops onto the ground in front of the dog. He runs his fingers through the dog's fur.

The pain in Willard's eyes is clear.

Willard pulls out a pistol.

71 EXT. THE RUSSELL HOME- CONT. 71

The house sits quietly. A GUN SHOT ECHOES THROUGH THE AIR.

Arvin comes running from inside the house and sees his father carrying the limp body of his dog. Arvin screams and runs to Willard.

ARVIN
Dad! No!

WILLARD
(resolute)
The Lord told me all this killing
doesn't mean anything if it don't
matter to us.

Arvin hits Willard with his small fists.

72 INT. CHARLOTTE'S ROOM- NIGHT 72

Charlotte sleeps restlessly. In the background, muffled sounds of prayer come through the closed windows.

73 EXT. PRAYER LOG- CONT.

73

Jack's body hangs from the cross. Arvin lays by the edge of the clearing crying.

WILLARD

LORD! This is my boy's dog! I've done this for you. Take him and save my wife! Destroy the cancer in her! Please Lord! Save my wife! Please Lor-

74 CU: DIRT BEING THROWN ONTO A COFFIN.

74

INT. CEMETERY- DAY

Arvin dressed in his Sunday best stands over Charlotte's grave. His eyes puffy from crying. Willard stands beside him, his face a stone. The only other people present are the PRIEST and the GRAVE DIGGER.

PRIEST

Dear God, You are our Creator. You are the author of life. A precious gift. Today we come to mourn and honor a life that was precious to us...

76 INT. PICKUP TRUCK- AFTERNOON

76

Arvin is quiet. Willard drives, his eyes lost in the distance

WILLARD

I'm thinking we might take us a trip. Go down and visit your grandma in Coal Creek. Maybe stay for a while. You can meet Uncle Earskell, and that girl they got living with them would be just a little younger than you by now.

Arvin does not say a word.

WILLARD (CONT'D)

Maybe stay for a while. You'll like it there.

77 EXT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE- DUSK

77

The truck stops and Arvin walks towards the house. On the porch, a package wrapped in newspaper. Arvin opens it up to find a blueberry pie.

Willard watches his son.

WILLARD

Arvin.

Arvin doesn't turn around. Willard watches him walk straight into the house. Willard turns and makes his way to the clearing.

He disappears into the thick woods.

78

INT. ARVIN'S BEDROOM- LATER

78

Arvin sits on the floor in his undershirt eating the pie. His face is covered in blueberry goo.

He gets up and into bed.

ARVIN

(whispering)

Jack? Can you hear me, Jack? I'm sorry dad hurt you, Jack. I never said nothing out loud but I always wished mom would just die. She was always in pain. She was always sad. Jack, I wish you were here. When dad goes to sleep I'm gonna take you down and give you a proper burial like they gave to momma.

(beat)

Jack? You hear me?

He closes his eyes.

LATER

Arvin opens his eyes and sees it's dark. The house is quiet.

79

EXT. THE RUSSELL HOUSE- NIGHT

79

Arvin walks outside into the darkness. The night is silent, for the first time in a long while.

ARVIN

Dad? You out there?

80

INT. BARN- MOMENTS LATER

80

Arvin walks in and it's empty. He grabs a flashlight by the door and walks out.

81

EXT. WOODS- MOMENTS LATER

81

A flashlight leads the way through the dark towards the clearing.

ARVIN

Dad? You out here?

Arvin arrives to the edge of the clearing, the light reveals Willard leaning against the log.

ARVIN (CONT'D)
 I'm not doing that no more.
 (beat)
 You hear me? I'm not doing that no
 more! I ain't praying! You hear me?

Arvin approaches a silent and unmoving Willard. He pokes his father's shoulder. Willard's body slumps over.

CLOSE UP: A bloody penknife falls out of Willard's hand and into the dirt.

83

INT. POLICE CAR- LATER

83

DEPUTY LEE BODECKER, late-twenties, sits in the driver's seat talking to FLORENCE, a proper looking young lady sitting beside him. He speaks in an odd tone, softly, every once in a while taking a breath.

BODECKER
 Way I figure it, Matthews can't be
 sheriff forever. There's money to be
 made if a man of the law is careful
 and doesn't get a big head. Matthews
 is a joke. Whole goddamn county smells
 his shit, but if a man's careful, he
 can do well...

FLORENCE
 I wanna get out of my house, Lee.

BODECKER
 I told you, sweetie, it's just a
 matter of time. Then no more hand jobs
 in parking lots. No more Pepsi cups.
 Just a big ol' bed-I'll get the
 support of some people. People like me
 in this town. You know that, honey?
 Yeah, I get myself elected. Get a
 cushy place up in Brewer Heights. You
 seen them...

He goes quiet and takes a breath and exhales.

BODECKER (CONT'D)
 That was good.

She wipes her hands on the cushion of the car.

BODECKER (CONT'D)
 You get it all in the cup?

Lee examines his pants off screen. He takes the Pepsi cup and throws it out the window.

The police scanner kicks in.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
 Lee, you still out? We got a call from
 Hank over at Maude's.

BODECKER
 Aw, fuck.

FLORENCE
 Can I come with you?

BODECKER
 You crazy? I'm supposed to be on duty
 right now. Didn't you hear anything I
 said? I got an election to think
 about.

84 EXT. MAUDE'S STORE- NIGHT

84

Arvin sits on the porch of Maude's store finishing a root
 beer next to Hank, a lanky, slack-jawed fellow who we met
 briefly earlier.

HANK
 You want another root beer?

A car's headlights approach from up the road.

HANK (CONT'D)
 I think here he comes.

BODECKER
 Well, what is it this time? It better
 not be one of those goddamn window
 peepers you keep callin' about.

HANK
 I wish it was, but, no, it's about
 this boy's daddy.

BODECKER
 Well, what is it, son?

ARVIN
 He's dead.

HANK
 And they just buried his poor mother
 today. It's a damn shame, it is.

BODECKER
 You ain't fooling around?
 (beat)
 Is that blood on your face?

ARVIN
 No. Somebody left us a pie.

EXT. THE WOODS- MOMENTS LATER

Lee follows Arvin, holding his own flashlight. The stench starts to hit Lee's nose.

ARVIN
(pointing)
He's right there.

BODECKER
Jesus, what the hell is that
smell? *

Lee turns his light towards the clearing revealing Willard's body laying on the ground beside the prayer log.

He starts to move his light around and take in the surroundings.

Bit by bit, his light reveals the corpses of dead animals hammered to the makeshift crosses that fill the clearing and the scope of this backwoods cathedral.

His light moves up the cross above Willard and the dog Jack's body hangs just above where Willard lays.

Lee moves his flashlight back to Arvin, his face still covered in blueberry pie. A blank look on his face after all this horror. A maggot falls from another corpse hung up from a tree above him. Unphased, Arvin brushes it off.

BODECKER (CONT'D)
God-damn it, boy, what the hell is
this?

ARVIN
It's a prayer log.

BODECKER
A prayer log?

ARVIN
Yeah. But it don't work too good.

INT. BODECKER'S CRUISER- LATER

The car door is slammed. Arvin- mouth still covered in dry blueberry pie- sits alone in the back of the cruiser, almost like a little criminal. Outside, the house has become a small crime scene with another police car and an ambulance to collect the body.

Bodecker walks around the car and gets in the front seat. He takes a breath and looks in the rear view mirror and eyes the boy. Something like fear comes over the lawman.

EXT. EMMA'S HOME- DAY

A car approaches Emma's home in Coal Creek, West Virginia. Arvin sits in the front seat. He's cleaned up and has a small

knapsack by his side. A pleasant looking young man in a cheap suit, a SOCIAL WORKER, drives the car.

Earskell sits on the porch, smoking. Emma exits. Beside her- like a lost kitten- a sweet but homely looking little girl follows, just a couple years younger than Arvin. This is LENORA. The car parks.

SOCIAL WORKER

(out window)

G'day, mam. You Emma Russell?

EMMA

Yes.

The Social Worker nods "Okay" at Arvin and grabs a clipboard with some papers on it and a pen. Arvin walks out with his suitcase and slowly approaches the house. The Social Worker holds out the clipboard.

SOCIAL WORKER

Just goin' to need you to sign some papers, and the boy's all yours.

Emma nods. She gives Arvin a big hug, not that different than the hug she gave Willard upon returning home years ago.

EMMA

(to Arvin)

Hello, sweetie. We're so happy you're here. I got a big lunch all ready for you. You must be starvin'.

(looking back)

That's your uncle Earskell. And this is Lenora. She's your step-sister.

The sad little girl looks at her new step-brother with a warm smile.

LENORA

Hi, Arvin.

Arvin's eyes- cold and impenetrable from the horror he has witnessed- are starting to thaw.

TITLE OVER BLACK: ARVIN

INT. EMMA'S HOME - NIGHT - 9 YEARS LATER - 1965

EMMA, hair snow white, enters carrying a small yellow cake in an iron pan with a glowing face that starkly contrasts her thin quivering arms. Nearly centered in the cake is a dinner candle. Birthday candles wouldn't have been expected.

LENORA, 16 years old now, trails just behind, dressed more reverently than anyone else in a long blue dress. She skips

around Emma in the narrow space, a box of matches in one hand and Bible in the other.

Emma stops with the cake pan over the table. ARVIN, 18 years old today, has grown up to be an uncanny combination of his mother and father. He's a handsome young man.

LENORA
(in a singsong voice)
Happy birthday, Arvin. Happy birthday,
Arvin.

EMMA
Make a wish before them candles burn
out.

Arvin leans back and thinks for a moment too long.

EARSKELL
That looks like a dandy cake.

LENORA
Arvin!

ARVIN
Okay!

Arvin blows out the candles.

LENORA
Now what was your wish for?

EARSKELL
(present again)
That's not something you ask.

ARVIN
That's all right, Uncle Earskell. I
don't know if it's a wish, but I want
to take you all back to Ohio and show
you where we lived. It was nice up
there on the hill. Least before Mom
took sick.

Emma cuts into the cake, the candle still in its center, with a butter knife, a fork ready to lift a piece out.

Earskell leans down and pulls a wooden box from under his chair. Emma passes out dishes of cake.

EARSKELL
This was your daddy's.

Earskell places the box in Arvin's lap. Arvin opens it revealing something wrapped in cloth, next to a small box of ammunition. Emma passes the second piece to Lenora.

Arvin unravels the cloth revealing the old German Luger.

EMMA
(raising her eyebrows at
the pistol)
What's that?

EARSKELL
That's Willard's gun he gave me.
Figured it was time to pass it on.

EMMA
Oh, my.

Emma gently drops Earskell's dish down with a clink.

EARSKELL
It's a German Luger. Brought back from
the war. I got no use for handguns
myself but I figure he'd want you to
have it.

A shadow grows up Arvin's face at the mention of Willard.

The pistol's been oiled and catches a glint of light cast
from the kerosene lamps hanging at both ends of the room.

ARVIN
Never did hear him talk about it.
Being in the service, I mean.

Earskell digs into the piece of cake hungrily.

EARSKELL
I wanted him to tell me about the
Japs, but anytime I brought it up he'd
start in about your mother.

ARVIN
(raising the box like an
offering)
This is the best present I ever got,
Uncle Earskell.

EARSKELL
(absent-minded; about the
gun)
Ain't much use for anything. The
shotgun's what'll do you good.

EMMA
Time does pass.

Lenora is pushed to the ground next to a dumpster behind the
high school. She throws her hand up above her face.

GENE DINWOODIE

Hell, you're so damn ugly I'd have to
put a sack over your head to get a
hard on.

The knees and elbows of three high school thugs surround her. GENE DINWOODIE, tall with the gait of a factory worker at closing. ORVILLE BUCKMAN, pudgy and usually sweaty. TOMMY MATSON, a jock in used cleats, hair slick with pomade, cut chin.

Buckman laughs. Matson reaches into the dumpster digging for something.

Tears run down Lenora's face. She clasps her hands.

LENORA

Please!

Her hands folded in prayer are pushed down. Matson pulls out a paper bag from the trash and passes it to Dinwoodie.

Lenora tries to stand up and Dinwoodie pushes her back down and covers her face with the paper bag.

Arvin appears out of nowhere and wraps his arm around Dinwoodie's neck. They stumble, Arvin's fist connects two or three times.

Buckman and Matson take Arvin down to the gravel. Dinwoodie, back on his feet, kicks Arvin. Matson lands a punch to his face.

LENORA (CONT'D)

Stop please stop!

EXT. GRAVEYARD - HELEN'S GRAVESTONE

The gravestone of *HELEN HATTON LAFERTY 1926-1950*.

Not far away, the small Coal Creek Church seen earlier.

Lenora- eyes red from crying and holding her bible tight- leans an unframed black and white photograph against the tombstone: Helen in a shapeless dress under a tree. She kneels at the gravestone.

Arvin- a big welt on his eye and nursing a busted lip with a handkerchief crouches on his haunches.

An audible breeze crosses both their faces. Lenora turns to Arvin and smiles. She takes the handkerchief and spits a little and starts to clean his face up properly.

LENORA

It was a sight you didn't end up in
the hospital.

ARVIN

There's a lot of no good sonsofbitches out there.

LENORA

My Lord, Arvin you've been saying that almost since the day I met you.

ARVIN

Because it's true.

LENORA

Maybe you should try praying for them then. Would that hurt none?

ARVIN

You already do enough for all of us. An' where's it doing you much good?

LENORA

(curiously)

You ever think about how we ended up orphans living in the same house?

ARVIN

No. Besides, you might not even be an orphan. As far as most people around here's concerned, your daddy's still alive and kicking. Hell, he might pop over the hill any now dancing a jig.

LENORA

I hope so. I pray every day he will.

ARVIN

Even if it meant he did somethin'?

LENORA

I don't care. I've already forgiven him. We could start over.

ARVIN

That's crazy.

LENORA

(absent-mindedly)

No, it's not. What about your father?

ARVIN

What about him? I know what my dad did.

LENORA

Well, forgivin' him... if he could come back-

Arvin stands up and tosses the weed he was chewing away.

ARVIN

Girl, just shut up about it. We both know that ain't gonna happen.

LENORA

I'm sorry for bringing it up.

Lenora reaches out and grabs Arvin's hand tenderly.

LENORA (CONT'D)

I appreciate you always coming with me. You'd probably rather be doing something else.

ARVIN

We're kin. We look out for each other.

Reverend Sykes limps out of the church in the distance.

REVEREND SYKES

Lenora! Arvin! Come here.

The shouting gives him a burst of a coughing fit.

MOMENTS LATER

An older Reverend Sykes, a napkin in hand for his coughing, leans heavily on the banister on the church steps. Arvin stands at the bottom of the steps and Lenora by the Reverend's side.

REVEREND SYKES (CONT'D)

It's nothin' serious I don't think.

LENORA

You need to see a doctor.

REVEREND SYKES

I am. Going up to-

A coughing fit keeps him from saying more than one or two words. Blood trickles down his chin and swells into a splotch on his collar. Lenora moves towards him.

He shoos her away with a smile, wiping the trickle of blood.

REVEREND SYKES (CONT'D)

Going over to Lewisburg next week to see a new one they got over there. Someone told me he's got six years of schooling. Might be gone a while.

LENORA

We'll be praying for you.

REVEREND SYKES

In the meantime, my sister's boy down in Tennessee gonna come up and take my place. He just graduated from one of them Bible colleges a couple years ago, says he wants to work with poor people.

(beat)

I figure he's a Democrat.

The Reverend laughs at his own joke that Arvin and Lenora don't get.

REVEREND SYKES (CONT'D)

I ain't seen him in years, so I don't know what he's like, but I'd appreciate it if you all try to make him feel welcome. Tell your grandma I'm asking everyone prepare a dish for next sermon.

LENORA

Of course. You just get healed up.

105 INT. GROCERY STORE - MEAT COUNTER

105

A patient BUTCHER leans against the tile wall behind the counter while Emma scrutinizes the selection inside. Arvin stands to the side, studying her expressions.

EMMA

(not the first time she's asked)

You think chicken livers would be all right?

ARVIN

Why wouldn't they be?

EMMA

I don't know... Everyone says they like the way I do 'em but-

ARVIN

All right.

(claps)

Get them a big steak then.

EMMA

(swats him playfully)

You know I can't afford anything like that.

ARVIN

(to Butcher)

Chicken livers it is.

(to Emma)

Grandma, quit worrying about it. He's just a preacher. Even if he's not from

(MORE)

ARVIN (CONT'D)
 Coal Creak I'd say he's et a lot
 worse. And, anyway, everyone says
 ain't no one does 'em like you.

106 INT. EMMA'S HOME - DAY

106

Music plays on a crackling radio.

CU: Sunlight falls on an unlit burner until a hand with a match whisks by and the burner lights.

NARRATOR
 Emma was known as one of the best
 cooks in the county. She always told
 people when they praised her food that
 she couldn't fry an egg until she
 found the Lord, and that he was the
 one that made everything turn out
 good.

CU: A shadow over the burner, a cast-iron skillet sets down.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
 Today she hoped the food she and
 Lenora was preparing would show the
 new preacher that he was welcome.

CU: Oil slides down the pan's face like blood on blacktop.

107 EXT. EMMA'S HOME- GARDEN- SAME TIME

107

CU: Lenora's hands examine several long-stemmed onions.

108 INT. EMMA'S HOME- DAY

108

Music is still playing on the same station.

CU: The onions are stripped and chopped: a larger pile of thin coils builds.

CU: Emma's hand drops three onions slivers in the skillet. The oil comes alive around the onions. Half the batch of cuttings drop into the pan. They caramelize and are spread onto a platter.

CU: An empty mixing bowl. A small amount of oil. A small cloud of flower. Salt and twists of pepper.

CU: A single chicken liver is laid into the flower mix, coated.

CU: The chicken liver is placed into the same pan the onions were caramelized in where they sizzle until browned and set on the platter next to the onions.

EXT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED- DAY

The line of congregants holding dishes to present the new reverend goes out the door and down the steps of the small church.

109 INT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED - CONT109

A pot luck is laid out. A long table for food runs along the wall nearest the door. Communal tables have been set up. One, for the new preacher, is on a stage.

CU: Two fingers dip into tray of chicken livers and onions, follow them up to a man's mouth as he sticks them in and sucks them clean. He smiles and we are introduced to:

PRESTON TEAGARDIN, 30, tall and portly with blonde hair slicked back to cover his ears and neck, stands near the potluck table greeting congregants approaching one by one in a line. His outfit contrasts the entire congregation. It's a crooner's get-up: tight, shiny powder blue pants and a white ruffled shirt, drenched in sweat.

TEAGARDIN

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst
for righteousness.

Emma, Lenora, and Arvin stand at the head of the line in front of Teagardin who whose other arm hangs over a flushed and plain-looking creature, early 20s: his wife, CYNTHIA.

EMMA

(slightly confused)
I hope you like them, Reverend.

Teagardin shows her his licked clean fingers.

TEAGARDIN

I can't say I didn't, now can I?
(re: Lenora and Arvin)
And who are these miraculous children?

ARVIN

Good to meet you, Reverend.

TEAGARDIN

Thank you, young man.

EMMA

This is Lenora.

Lenora smiles warmly, and half lowers her head out of respect.

TEAGARDIN

This is Cynthia, my sweet, righteous
bride from Hoenwald, Tennessee.

Teagardin releases Cynthia's arm and takes out a soaked handkerchief and tries to dry his brow with it.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)

Lord, it's hot in here, isn't it?

ARVIN

Yeah, a bit warm.

Teagardin nods and smiles to indicate they can move on. ALMA REASTER and her teenage daughters BETH ANN and PAMELA-SUE in matching dresses are next. Teagardin takes in the young girls. Before Arvin gets too far, Teagardin GRABS his wrist and yanks him back.

TEAGARDIN

(Inspired)

I see here a gathering of young people! Here, a young man dedicated to work and family. No different from many of our progenitors in the Good Book.

He drops Arvin's hands go without giving him a second glance.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)

Here. A pair of devoted daughters.

He extends a hand to Pamela-Sue, who joins him.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)

Yes. A pair of daughters devoted to their mother. Bless you.

(turning back)

Now. What did you and your lovely family bring for us today?

110 INT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED- LATER 110

The congregants watch Teagardin as he fills up his plate carefully. Tasting one here, sniffing another there, smiling back at his audience approvingly.

He stops just before Emma's dish. Emma takes a breath, nervous.

Teagardin stands upright and drops his plate full of food on the table. He pushes it away, abandoning it.

Teagardin holds a hand up to the ceiling in a reverent way and lowers it singling out Emma's dish to the congregation.

TEAGARDIN

Friends, there's no doubt we're all humble people gathered here tonight and you all have been awful nice to me, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the welcome. Now, they ain't a one of us got all the money and fine cars and pretty clothes that we would like to have. But friends, the poor soul that brung in them chicken livers in that beat-up plate, well, let's just say I'm inspired to preach on it for a minute before we

(MORE)

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)

eat. Recall what Jesus said to the poor in Nazareth many centuries ago. Sure, some of us are better off than others, and I see plenty of white meat and red meat laid out on this table, and I suspect that the people who carried them platters in eat mighty good sometimes. But poor people got to bring what they can afford, and sometimes they can't afford much at all-

(pointing at the chicken livers)

-and so them organs is a sign to me, telling me that I should, as the new preacher of this church, sacrifice myself so that you all can have a share of the good meat tonight. And that's what I'm going to do, friends, I'm going to eat those organs, so you all can have a share of the best. I model myself on the good Lord Jesus whenever he gives me the chance, and tonight he has blessed me with another opportunity to follow in his footsteps. Amen.

CONGREGATION

(murmured)

Amen.

Lenora watches Teagardin in awe. The more poorly dressed members look confused.

Teagardin strides with the platter of chicken livers up to the raised platform and, taking the head of the table, tucks his wet handkerchief in his collar.

A few glance at Emma who stands near the back of the line with Lenora. She swoons from embarrassment. Arvin catches her.

111 EXT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED - DUSK 111

Arvin gently helps Emma into the car. Lenora gets into the backseat, but her eyes remain on Teagardin saying goodbye to congregants by the church door.

ARVIN

Now don't you worry about that pus-gutted blowhard. He probably don't got two nickels to rub together.

EMMA

(whisking at tears)

I've never been so embarrassed in all my life. I could have crawled under the table.

ARVIN

I'll talk to him.

EMMA

No, Arvin, none of that. But he sure ain't the preacher I was hoping for.

Arvin puts the side of his head against hers and strokes her hair.

ARVIN

Grandma, that ain't no preacher. He's as bad as they got on the radio begging for money.

(grinning)

Heck, he just wanted them chicken livers all for his own self. That's why he did that. You see the way he was gobbling 'em down?

Emma, a slight grin. Arvin takes the driver's seat.

LENORA

You shouldn't talk like that, Arvin. Preacher Teagardin wouldn't be here if the Lord hadn't sent him.

112 EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT- DAY

112

A school door bursts open and Lenora comes running out. Just as it starts to shut the two bullies from earlier, Gene and Orville, bust out after her.

Arvin waits by the curb in his pick up truck with the motor running. Lenora runs around to the passenger side.

Arvin hits the gas and they're off.

DINWOODIE

Chicken shit!

The boys cursing fades away. Arvin keeps his eye in the rearview and catches sight of:

IN THE REARVIEW: The boys parting ways. Tommy Matson heads back into the school while Orville and Dinwoodie cross the street and into a car.

Arvin takes notice.

113 EXT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED - LATER 3

Arvin stops the car in front of the church. There's only one car parked in front - a conspicuous looking sedan.

ARVIN

That preacher's a little flashy.

Lenora, her eyes still red from crying, starts to get out.

LENORA

Are you not coming?

ARVIN

I got things to do before we go home.

LENORA

Well, can't we do them together after
I see Momma?

ARVIN

No, you go on. I'll be back.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM PARKING LOT- LATER

Arvin sits in his pickup, his eye on the gym door. Inside, a varsity basketball game.

He lights a fresh cigarette off one he's almost finished. He puts out the older one and drops it through a hole in the driver's seat floorboard onto a small pile under the car.

Tommy Matson comes out a side door with his arm dangled over SUSIE COX, a freshman with a shaggy home-done haircut.

Matson leads her to a school bus. He opens the rear emergency exit door and lifts her in by her lower thighs. Matson laughs as he shuts the school bus door behind him.

INT. SCHOOL BUS- CONT.

Susie Cox sits up with a start.

SUSIE COX

What was that?

TOMMY MATSON

Nothing. I must not got it shut all
the way. Now let's get them bloomers
off.

SUSIE COX

You close that door.

TOMMY MATSON

(grumbling)
Goddamn better be worth it.

Matson moves to the door holding his pants up. He reaches for the handle with his free hand. Arvin hits him across both kneecaps with a tire iron.

Matson's pants come down as he falls forward out of the school bus.

TOMMY MATSON (CONT'D)

Jesus!

Matson's shoulder lands in gravel. Arvin hits him again in the ribs.

Arvin pulls a rope and a bag out and crouches down. He twists his fingers into Matson's pomade.

Matson sees Arvin a moment before the bag is put over his head.

114 EXT. DINWOODIE FAMILY GARAGE - IN/OUT OF THE CAR- DAY 114

A radio plays while Gene Dinwoodie bends over his '56 Chevy's engine.

Orville Buckman sits in the car, pop bottle in one fist and a Little Debbie in the other, bopping his head to the radio. He bites into the cake and rinses his mouth with soda, swallowing the mix audibly.

BUCKMAN

Yum!

A rag in one hand, Dinwoodie tugs at an old spark plug.

A shadow falls across the hood of the car, interfering with his view of the engine.

Dinwoodie begins to stand. The hood slams on his body and he falls to the floor.

Buckman, still in the car, jumps out of his seat, spilling soda all over himself. He gets halfway out of the car when Arvin walks over and slams the door against his body and yanks him out on the floor. Arvin punches him in the head. Out of his back pocket, he takes twine and a paper bag.

MOMENTS LATER

CU: One paper bag bound with twine at the neck covers Buckman's head. Blood slowly seeps through the bag. Arvin releases his grip and the unconscious Buckman falls limp.

Pull back to reveal Dinwoodie in front of the Chevy in a similar state.

Arvin's car drives off.

NARRATOR

Arvin had done as his father had told him and picked his time, but there would be other bullies. Other no good sons of bitches to deal with. There always is.

115 EXT. CHURCH CEMETERY DAY 115

Lenora kneels by Helen's gravestone.

Teagardin peers out the window of the church and makes it his way to the door.

TEAGARDIN

Who is it there?

LENORA
 (faintly)
 It's Lenora Laferty, Preacher
 Teagardin.

He walks towards her and bends down beside her.

TEAGARDIN
 Girl, you been crying?

LENORA
 It's nothing. Kids at school, they
 like to tease. And I ain't gonna have
 family there come next year.

TEAGARDIN
 I was like you when I was your age.
 Full of the Lord. There was some other
 kids who came down hard on me.

LENORA
 What did you do about it?

TEAGARDIN
 It was a rough time.
 (pinches his lips,
 reflecting)
 They was just jealous. Envy brings out
 the worst in people. Especially the
 young ones.
 (beat)
 Please, I interrupted your prayers.

He strokes the back of her head gently after a moment.

Once she's finished praying her eyes open and look up.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)
 I don't know if you got anywhere you
 have to be, but maybe we could take a
 little drive? There's a quiet place I
 go and pray on things.

LENORA
 No, not really.

TEAGARDIN
 So how about we go there and you tell
 me about it?

Lenora looks at Teagardin, framed by the sunlight.

EXT. FARM ROAD - DAY

A car is parked on a narrow dirt road at the edge of a
 farmer's overgrown field. A thick wood is on the other side.

INT. TEAGARDIN'S CAR - DAY

Teagardin rolls down his window, which looks out over the
 field. He leans over Lenora's lap to unroll hers.

TEAGARDIN

Take in some of the good Lord's air.

LENORA

It's a good breeze.

TEAGARDIN

We can feel the Lord out here, can't we?

LENORA

I feel more. . .

(covers her mouth)

I don't always have the right words.

TEAGARDIN

I bring those who come to me to places like this to feel the Lord together.

LENORA

That's kind of you to come all this way.

TEAGARDIN

(pretending to hesitate
before he speaks)

Have you truly opened yourself to the Lord? With Reverend Sykes or another preacher?

LENORA

"Opened myself?"

(thinks)

Once Reverend Sykes wept with me on-

TEAGARDIN

That's not my meaning.

He touches the top button on her dress. Taps it.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)

Have you shown yourself? As the Lord made you?

LENORA

(confused, curious)

If you're meaning my birthday suit?
No.

TEAGARDIN

To show yourself to the Lord as He made His first children is to truly turn yourself to Him and His witnessing of you is courage itself.

LENORA

Meaning to take off my clothes.

TEAGARDIN

Just the top will do.

Long pause as Lenora's hands lay in her lap. A wind blows some of her hair; she reaches up to move it out of her eyes.

Teagardin's hand closes softly around her wrist and suspends it in the air before she can return it to her lap.

He nods his head and begins mumbling what sounds like a prayer.

Lenora slowly undoes the first and second buttons. She undoes the rest as slowly but with two hands.

Teagardin pulls the top of her dress down off her shoulders, down to her elbows, restricting her movement. She seems less meek than just the moments before.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)
We're together before the Lord.

Lenora bows her head. He beatifically kisses her forehead, then each cheek. He whispers a prayer into her ear.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)
Amen.

LENORA
Amen.

He places his lips against hers and waits to see if she'll pull away. When she doesn't, he puts his arm over her shoulder and opens her door and lets it swing open.

Lenora lays back and stares into the sun.

EXT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED - DAY

Lenora waits outside. She smiles to herself. Arvin pulls up, and Lenora gets in.

ARVIN
Sorry I didn't come today.

LENORA
It's okay. Anyway, I know there's other things you want to be doing probably. I don't mind coming on my own.

NARRATOR
Like her mother years ago, Lenora felt the same force that drew Helen to Roy Laferty. The girl imagined that she could actually touch the love emanating from the preacher.

Lenora looks back at the small church as they drive away.

PRE-LAP: The sound of a baby CRYING.

TITLE OVER BLACK: ROY & THEODORE87 INT. ROY AND HELEN'S HOME- EVENING - 16 YEARS EARLIER 87

CLOSE UP: A baby in a crib, LENORA. A stove sizzles. Roy shouts incoherently off-screen.

Helen walks around preparing dinner.

Roy's shouting continues, muffled, from the other room. Helen, unfazed, goes about her work.

ROY (O.S.)
Is it the *kind* of father I've been?
I've tried! You gotta know that! Show
me a sign!

Helen accidentally kicks an empty whiskey bottle on the floor into a couple other similar bottles laying on the floor. She picks it up, but thinks twice, frowns and returns it to the floor, placing the bottles upright and out of her way.

Next to the kitchen is a small living room. The couch is made up as a bed and the crib with Lenora sits beside it.

88 INT. ROY AND HELEN'S BEDROOM- CONT. 88

The bed is bare with remnants of late night drinking on the floor. Roy's voice comes from inside the closet.

ROY (O.S.)
I know there must be a reason you want
me in here. There must be a reason you
punished me. Lord?
(waits for response)
SPEAK!

NARRATOR
Roy had been bitten by a spider during
a sermon and his head puffed up big as
a pumpkin. Though his head was back to
what would be considered a normal
shape, he was convinced the Lord had
slowed him in order to prepare him for
something bigger.

Helen enters and places the plate in front of the closet casually, as though this is everyday.

HELEN
Roy, your dinner's ready!

Roy stops muttering and the room goes quiet.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Roy, I've been thinking.
(softly)
Maybe the Lord wants you to come out
into the light. How can you be close
to God stuck in there? Maybe He's out
here.

(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Roy?

No response.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Alright, then. Enjoy your dinner.

Helen, disappointed, exits. The closet opens just enough for a hand to come out and grab the plate and then shuts.

89 EXT. ROY AND HELEN'S HOME- LATE NIGHT

89

A car barrels down the road and stops abruptly.

MAN'S VOICE (O.C.)

Wake up, goddamnit!

The MAN gets out of the driver's side and walks around to open the passenger door. Theodore falls out.

THEODORE

Fuck.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

You're home.

The Man pulls out a wheelchair from the back of truck and dumps it next to Theodore lying on the ground.

THEODORE

You still owe me five dollars!

MAN'S VOICE

I don't owe you shit. You drank that and more.

The Man gets back into the car and drives off.

Theodore tries to get his bearings.

THEODORE

Don't fuck with me! I'll put a hole in your guts... Hey, Roy, let me in.

Helen opens the front door.

HELEN

You're gonna wake up Lenora.

THEODORE

You don't tell me what to do!

HELEN

Shhh now! My God.

Helen makes her way over to the wheelchair. He waves her off.

She leans down to help him up. She braces his weight as his crooked legs don't have the strength to walk on their own.

The baby starts to cry inside the house.

90 INT. ROY AND HELEN'S HOUSE- CONT.

90

Helen helps Theodore through the door, leaves him on the floor and goes back outside. He crawls over to the crib.

THEODORE

We were doin' great until you showed up.

Helen returns carrying the wheelchair. She sees Theodore by the crib, quickly drops it and pulls her baby away from him. Lenora shrieks.

THEODORE (CONT'D)

Can't I talk to my family?

HELEN

Stop talking strange Theodore and go to bed.

Theodore crawls over to the bottles of booze left on the floor, grabs one and gets into his wheelchair. He rolls towards the room with Roy's closet.

THEODORE

(loudly)

This ain't no place for a baby.

Helen sits on the couch, cradling Lenora.

91 INT. BEDROOM- CONT.

91

Theodore rolls in and moves from the chair to the bed.

Roy is silent behind the closet door. Theodore pulls out a ten dollar bill from his pocket and slams it on the table.

THEODORE

Some bastard at the Hungry Holler made fun of my affliction tonight. Pulled me right outta my fucking chair to make me dance. Motherfucker. Hate the whole goddamn world...

(sleepily)

I've been thinking about Jesus on the cross. And all that suffering they talk about. That wasn't that bad. I suffered more than him in my life and ain't no one praying to me.

(fading)

What I do for you, Roy.

On the closet door.

92 INT. BEDROOM- LATER

92

Theodore is passed out on the bed, snoring softly.

The closet door opens and Roy appears. His beard is matted and his hair greasy. His white shirt is stained.

93 INT. THE LIVING ROOM- CONT.

93

Roy walks through the silent house and approaches the crib. Helen sleeps on the couch. He watches her to be sure she is asleep. He leans over close to the crib.

ROY
(whisper)
Lenora. Daddy loves you. The Lord
loves you, Lenora.

Roy places his hand over where Lenora's little heart is.

ROY (CONT'D)
They say you born with sin, but I know
there ain't any in you. You'll see.
Better days are coming. Pray now for
the Lord to send your daddy a message.
Pray.

94 INT. ROY AND HELEN'S BEDROOM- MORNING

94

Theodore sleeps on the bed alone with a sheet over him. Helen walks in dressed for the day and takes the ten dollars from the nightstand. She exits.

95 EXT. ROY AND HELEN'S PORCH- AFTERNOON

95

Theodore, looking like shit, sits on the porch drinking a warm beer. He passes the time *sharpening* his screwdriver.

Through the front door and down the hall, a wail comes from behind the closet door.

Roy storms out wailing.

ROY
I hear you! I am here! Helen!
(outside)
Theodore! Where's Helen?

THEODORE
My ten dollars is gone and she ain't
here.

ROY
He sent me the word.

Roy paces up and down the small porch.

ROY (CONT'D)
We need to get a cat.

THEODORE
A fucking cat? Whatever tricks you're
on about-

ROY
(hurt)
Tricks, Theodore?

Theodore watches Roy turn away and look across the road.

Roy turns suddenly.

ROY (CONT'D)

I never needed tricks! I can prove it

Theodore blows the shavings from the sharpened screwdriver.

THEODORE

Prove what?

PRE-LAP: A man's voice howls loudly.

96 INT. THE HUNGRY HOLLER BAR- LATE NIGHT

96

It is Theodore *howling*. He sings and plays his guitar in the corner the bar populated with local degenerates. He sings a sinful tune, "*Whoopee Blues*" by King Solomon Hill.

The song carries through into:

97 EXT. EMMA'S HOUSE- DAY

97

Helen knocks on Emma's door, holding Lenora in her arms.

Emma, 10 years younger, answers. Earskell sits in the kitchen playing solitaire.

EMMA

Helen, it's so good to see you, honey!

HELEN

It has been a while, ain't it?

EMMA

Everything all right?

HELEN

Oh, everything's fine now. Roy finally got himself straightened out.

Emma looks down the hill past Helen at the old car Helen arrived in. Roy sits in the driver seat, and Theodore sits in the back.

EMMA

Well, that's good to hear.

HELEN

Anyway, I was wondering if you'd mind keeping an eye on Lenora for a while? Just a couple hours.

EMMA

Course. Would you mind reading a postcard Willard just sent before you leave?

Helen looks anxious to go, but she can't refuse. She looks back towards Roy and signals "one moment".

Emma pulls out a card from her apron. On it, a painted image of a bridge over the Ohio River. Helen takes the card and sits with Lenora in her arms.

HELEN

"Things are good, momma. We found a place in a holler called Knockemstiff. Arvin just turned two and he has lots of grass to play on..."

98

INT. ROY'S CAR- LATER

98

Helen softly sings a Gospel song as Roy drives.

ROY

I'm thinking we take a walk. It'll be fine to pray outside under all them trees.

HELEN

Whatever you want to do, Roy. But what about Theodore?

ROY

Ah, Theodore will be all right a-sittin' in the car.

THEODORE

That's right. Don't you worry about me. Maybe I'll take me a nap.

ROY

It'll just be you and me, sweetheart.

99

EXT. IN THE WOODS- A LITTLE LATER

99

Roy and Helen walk, holding hands.

ROY

This beech tree seems as good a place as any, don't it?

Helen smiles and nods.

She gives her hand to Roy to help her get on her knees in her dress. She bows her head.

Theodore opens his eyes from his pretend sleep. He squints.

Roy falls on his knees and wraps his arm around her shoulder.

Helen basks in this moment of affection and leans in to give her husband a kiss.

Roy's hand SWINGS towards Helen's neck in one swift move. She gasps.

BACK IN THE CAR:

Theodore leans up and shakes his head with a grin.

THEODORE
The sonofabitch did it.

Helen reaches up to her neck and grips something.

She pulls something out as Roy lets go and she falls out of his arms onto the ground.

BACK WITH HELEN AND ROY:

Helen looks at Roy in despair, one hand on her neck where blood seeps through her fingers and the other weakly holding Theodore's screwdriver.

HELEN
Lenora.

Helen begins to crawl away towards the car. She collapses on her belly, takes a few shallow breaths, and then dies.

Roy falls to the ground and lifts her up. With faith and conviction, Roy begins his supplications.

ROY
GOD! I have heard your word.
(beat)
Helen! I resurrect you!

Helen remains lifeless.

ROY (CONT'D)
With the grace of God in me, I
resurrect you! Return!

Blood continues to seep out of Helen's neck.

ROY (CONT'D)
God! It is time! Return, spirit!

Theodore lights a cigarette, watching.

ROY (CONT'D)
Resurr-

LATER- APPROACHING DUSK

Roy's voice has fallen into a garble as he continues to call for God's help.

ROY (CONT'D)
Jesus, I think I killed her.

Theodore rolls over to Roy, leans down and presses the back of his hand against Helen's cold face.

ROY (CONT'D)
Don't you touch her!

THEODORE
She's cold as ice, Roy. I hate to say it, but if they catch you for this, them ol' boys in Moundsville will fry you like bacon.

ROY
I don't know what went wrong.

THEODORE
Maybe you was right. You shoulda tried it on a cat first.
(cooly)
Shit, you just miscalculated the thing, that's all.
(beat)
I put a change of clothes and a shovel in the boot. Just in case things didn't turn out right.

Roy looks at his wife's body. Theodore rolls closer to Roy.

THEODORE (CONT'D)
Been thinking on it. That old car would probably get us pretty far south.
(beat)
Once we get there, we could start preaching again. Which is what we should have been doing all along.

ROY
What about Lenora?

THEODORE
She'll be fine with the Russell lady. You don't want her growing up running from the law.
(beat)
Maybe you should start digging?

INT. CAR- HIGHWAY- NIGHT

Roy, still in a state, drives, while Theodore remains calm.

ROY
(muttering to himself)
I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry please lord I'm sorry

THEODORE
Let's keep driving until we see a place we can get rid of this car and find another.

ROY
What do you mean?

THEODORE

They's going to be looking for this car by tomorrow morning when Helen and you don't come back for the baby.

ROY

I could tell the police what happened that it was an accident.

THEODORE

You stabbed your wife in the neck with a screwdriver, tried to bring her back from the dead, and buried her body. That ain't no accident, Roy. That just sounds like a crazy person who killed his wife.

(beat)

Keep driving south. If we stay off highways, we should be fine.

Theodore tosses his cigarette, turns on the radio, and closes his eyes.

EXT. CAR- HIGHWAY- DAWN

The car speeds down a quiet road. The landscape has turned from the more rural Virginia to marshland and palm trees.

INT. CAR- HIGHWAY- SAME TIME

Theodore wakes up groggily from the dawn light on his face. Seeing the palm trees gives him reason to smile.

Roy has not slept in over 24 hours at this point. He wipes his eyes and blinks rapidly, trying his best to stay awake.

THEODORE (CONT'D)

You doing all right?

Roy nods without looking at him.

THEODORE (CONT'D)

We in the Carolinas?

ROY

South.

THEODORE

This is what we needed, Roy.

INT. STOLEN CAR- NIGHT

The radio plays a quiet tune. Roy drives down a small country road as Theodore sleeps.

Roy turns off the music. Slowly, Theodore wakes up.

OUTSIDE: The headlights illuminate road signs. They pass one with a familiar sounding town name.

Theodore turns his head back. The next reads "Welcome to North Carolina!"

THEODORE

Where the fuck are we going? We ain't going south.

ROY

I seen the light, Theodore. We need to turn ourselves in and I need to do right by Lenora.

THEODORE

You outta your fucking mind?!?!

ROY

No. It's the only thing to do. I got to get right. You'll be fine.

Theodore grabs the wheel. Roy fights him off but Theodore keeps trying to steer the car around. Roy loses control.

The car swerves off the road through bushes and into a river.

EXT. RIVER- NIGHT- CONT.

The car begins to submerge. The headlights are the only thing illuminating the area.

THEODORE

I can't swim! Roy! Help!

Roy swims around and tries to pull Theodore out, but the door won't open.

Roy comes up for air and submerges again.

Theodore screams underwater. Roy pulls him out of the window and swims to shore with his cousin in his arms. Roy catches his breath and turns to Theodore lying unconscious.

ROY

Theodore.

Theodore does not move. He leans in to check his breath. He smacks his face.

ROY (CONT'D)

Theodore!

Theodore's already dead. Roy falls on the ground next to him.

LATER

Roy pushes Theodore out into the water and his body flows down river. The light from the car, under the water, starts to flicker until it goes dark.

EXT. HIGHWAY- DAY

Roy walks down a highway with nothing but the clothes on his back. A few small cuts and bruises but his face is clean. He continues to look over his shoulder for cars coming by. He lifts up his finger to hitch a ride, but no one stops.

He continues to walk until a black station wagon pulls up alongside him. A window rolls down and a woman speaks.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Hey, honey, you need a ride some place?

ROY

Yes, ma'am. You wouldn't be heading up north by any chance?

WOMAN'S VOICE

Might be.

INT. CARL AND SANDY'S CAR- MOMENTS LATER

Roy sits in the back seat. In the front seat are Carl and Sandy, familiar faces to us from back in Meade, Ohio, but now in their 30s.

ROY

Coal Creek, West Virginia.

CARL

We'll get you close enough! I'm Carl, this is Sandy.

Roy nods. Roy feels the cushion of the seat under him and sinks into it. He closes his eyes for a moment, taking in the peace of not being on his feet.

ROY

Mister, I do appreciate this.

CARL

Yeah, I don't understand people who won't pick up strangers. That should be a good thing, helping someone out.

ROY

You sound like a Christian.

Sandy holds back a laugh but Carl ignores her. Roy smiles, his eyes getting heavier as they drive along.

CARL

In some ways, I suppose I am. I don't follow it quite as close as I used to.

ROY

Mister, it's hard to live a good life.

SANDY

What's your name, honey?

ROY
Roy. Roy Laferty.

SANDY
So what's in West Virginia, Roy?

ROY
Going back home to see my daughter.

SANDY
That's nice.

CARL
What you doing on the road all by your
self?
(silence)
I said...

Carl looks back to see Roy sleeping.

CARL (CONT'D)
Shit, he passed out.

SANDY
Just let him be for now. And as far as
me actually fucking him, you can
forget that. He smells worse than you
do.

INT. CARL AND SANDY'S CAR- LATER

The car is parked somewhere near the woods. Carl's hand comes
in and shakes his shoulder.

CARL
Hey there, buddy, come on, I want to
show you something.

Roy, half-asleep, gets out of the car.

CARL (CONT'D)
I'm giving you a good thing here.

EXT. CARL AND SANDY'S CAR- MOMENTS LATER

Roy finds himself in the middle of a clearing surrounded by
tall pine trees.

Under one of the trees, he sees Sandy taking off her clothes
on top of a red picnic blanket.

He looks back at Carl who has a black camera hanging around
his neck and a black cigar in his mouth. In his right hand is
a pistol pointing at Roy.

ROY
What?

CARL
(inviting)
I said. I'm giving you a good thing
here, buddy. I wanna get some shots of
your ugly mug next to a pretty lady.
(winking)
She likes lanky ol' studs like you.

ROY
What's going on here, mister?

CARL
Jesus Christ, man, pay attention. Like
I said, you're gonna fuck my wife, and
I'm going to take some pictures,
that's all.

Sandy lays on the blanket.

ROY
Here I thought you was a good feller.

CARL
Just shut up and get that welfare suit
off.

ROY
Look, I just can't.

SANDY
Oh, come on, sweetie. We'll just a
take a few pictures and then the big
dumb bastard will leave us alone.

ROY
Woman, look at me. Do you really want
these hands touching you?

CARL
You're gonna do what I say, you son of
a bitch.

ROY
No. I ain't.

Carl spits out his cigar.

CARL
Looks like we got a fruitcake.

Sandy starts to button up quickly. She's nervous.

SANDY
We should get out of here then.

NARRATOR
This was still early days for the
pair. Carl had only just started them
on this path. As he studied the dirty
toothbrush in front of him, he knew he
(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
 would have to get more selective with
 his "models."

Carl shoves the pistol against the side of Roy's head. Carl huffs. Roy raises his eyes and searches out a small patch of sky above. He sees a cloud drifting slowly.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
 Roy realized as he looked up at the clouds that *that's* what dying must be like. Just floating in the air. He knew that he would never preach again, but that was all right. He'd never be much good without Theodore anyway.

ROY
 Just one thing.

CARL
 What's that?

ROY
 Her name is Lenora.

CARL
 Who the fuck you talking about?

ROY
 My little girl. Lenora.

Carl pulls the trigger. BANG.

TITLE OVER BLACK: LENORA

135 EXT. PICK UP TRUCK- MORNING

135

Arvin rides in the back of a pick up with several other workers. Some hold hard hats, all of them wear yellow overalls.

NARRATOR
 After taking care of the no good sonsofbitches, word got around and no one would mess with Lenora. Lenora had stopped asking Arvin to join her at Helen's grave. He didn't mind much. His mind would always drift back to Willard, the prayer log and his poor dog Jack on those visits.

EXT. ROUTE 60 ROAD WORK- AFTERNOON

A large truck dumps black asphalt onto the ground.

Arvin, dressed in a hard hat and yellow overalls, watches on along with other LABORERS.

NARRATOR

Arvin had decided to keep his head low and avoided any more trouble. He even got himself a job and was making money.

As soon as the truck gets a good distance, everyone steps in with shovels and start smoothing out the piles of asphalt.

They step back and a paving unit rolls in, smoothing out the black asphalt.

139 INT. ARVIN AND LENORA'S BEDROOM- MORNING

139

Lenora pukes into a wash basin next to her bed. Arvin-dressed in his "Sunday best"- simple frayed and mismatched clothes-sits beside her, holding her hair back.

LENORA

(weepy)

I ain't never missed before. I'm so ashamed...

Arvin wipes her mouth with a cloth.

ARVIN

(calming)

Ah, I'm sure the Lord will forgive you for missing one Sunday. Ol' Jesus probably had his share of bad mornings.

LENORA

I love you, Arvin.

ARVIN

We'll go for a visit to your momma's grave when you're better. Sound good?

She smiles sadly.

140 EXT. EMMA'S HOME- SOON AFTER

140

Earskell sleeps in a rocker as Arvin helps Emma into his car.

EMMA

You remember her coming even when she had the pneumonia?

Arvin closes the door and walks around to the driver's side.

ARVIN

She's worse about it than you, Grandma.

141 INT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED - DAY 141

Teagardin, sweating, paces before a sweltering congregation. Arvin sits beside Emma in the back.

TEAGARDIN

Back in Nashville, I studied something in my psychology course. Delusion. A belief that is clearly untrue and suggests an *abnormality*... (that's a big word)... in the affected person's thinking. Now, we have beliefs we know are *true*...Beliefs we know to be *facts*...

Teagardin stops a moment and leans on his podium to get his thoughts together. Arvin tilts his head, trying to follow.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)

Don't worry. We ain't here to talk about my studies in Psychology. The Good Book is filled with good men and women sufferin' delusions. Eve in the garden. Noah, naked and drunk bringing shame upon his family. The idol the Jews bowed before in the desert. Even the Lord Jesus himself was presented with delusions in the desert that only His faith and strength overcame. The Lord's delusion in the desert was a game! of the so-called "Devil"!

Teagardin's fury and conviction has Arvin and the rest of the church's undivided attention, and he feels it.

He delivers the rest of this speech without moving a millimeter off the spot behind the podium.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)

And what the Lord experienced was a delusion that would have kept Him from saving us. But he did not fall for it. Our delusions lead us to sin! Striking a mother or wife for something you *thought* they said. Feeling gluttonous and drinking the day away, neglecting work or Sunday service, for that matter. Some girl gets a feeling for a fella and lets him have her holy gift. De-lusions! Blaspheming the Lord in your mind and your heart for some wrong done to ye by another person. The list goes on and on. And on. And on. And. On.

Teagardin takes a deep breath.

EXT. EMMA'S HOUSE- LATER

Arvin helps his grandmother out of the car. The sound of the door slamming rouses Earskell out of his sleep on the rocking chair.

ARVIN
How's Lenora doing?

EARSKELL
(drowsy)
I ain't been...um...

He starts to nod off again.

142 INT. EMMA'S HOUSE- LENORA'S ROOM- MOMENTS LATER 142

Arvin walks into an empty room.

143 EXT. EMMA'S HOUSE- MOMENTS LATER 143

Arvin searches. He heads to the smokehouse in the backyard.

CAMERA: Approaches the smokehouse.

NARRATOR
Just before her foot slipped, Lenora
had convinced herself the Reverend was
just upset. And that he couldn't have
meant what he had said to her when she
told him.

144 INT. SMOKE HOUSE- LATER 144

Arvin opens the door.

ARVIN
Lenora!

A stool lays on its side. Lenora's feet sway back and forth
above it. Arvin wraps his arms around her leg and desperately
tries to free her from the noose around her neck.

NARRATOR
No one would ever know that her
suicide wasn't a suicide at all.
According to the rules, the girl was
all right by her maker.

145 EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY 145

Natural sound. Glaring sun.

Only the family and a GRAVE DIGGER are present: Arvin stands
beside his seated uncle and grandmother.

A minister is conspicuously missing. Emma weeps. Arvin holds
her.

EARSKELL
(absent mindedly)
Ain't someone sayin' prayers?

146 EXT. ROUTE 60 ROAD WORK PROJECT PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON 146

Arvin starts to unbutton his overall and wipe his hands clean. On the way out, he passes his hat to another LABORER starting his shift.

SHERIFF THOMPSON- 30, broad shoulders, brick chin, but thoughtful eyes- waits by Arvin's car.

SHERIFF THOMPSON
Need to have a word with you, son.

Arvin stops a distance away, wiping his hands with a rag.

SHERIFF THOMPSON (CONT'D)
(shaking his head)
It's about Lenora.

ARVIN
What about her?

SHERIFF THOMPSON
I came by here 'stead of home so
nothing's put on your grandmother.

Sheriff Thompson pulls off his hat, holding it in both hands.

ARVIN
"Put on?"

SHERIFF THOMPSON
Ol' Dudley in the Coroner's. . .

ARVIN
Never heard of a Dudley.

SHERIFF THOMPSON
He's a drunk but ain't no liar. Had
family here back before the war.

ARVIN
And so?

SHERIFF THOMPSON
He had to have a look at her, ya
know... after. Did you know Lenora was
carrying a baby?

Arvin's pale and tight.

ARVIN
Bull. Shit.
(beat)
Some sonofabitch is lyin'.

SHERIFF THOMPSON
I tell ya. Dudley ain't a liar. He
came to me privately so as your family
knew. I felt he was right.

Arvin lights a cigarette. He turns his back to Thompson and looks at the Church just visible in the distance.

He steps forward and rests a hand on Arvin's shoulder.

SHERIFF THOMPSON (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about Lenora, son. I truly
am. I might've put my foot in
something, it wasn't my intentions.

ARVIN
(turning back)
You know the Preacher wouldn't say no
words for her. For people that kill
themselves.

Sheriff Thompson slowly fixes his hat back on.

SHERIFF THOMPSON
This ain't a matter for the law. You
come from good people and I wanted you
to know the truth.

ARVIN
If there ain't nothing for the law
here then I should be heading home to
get some rest. I got another month
working this road.

Arvin throws his cigarette away. He offers Thompson his hand.

ARVIN (CONT'D)
Good-bye, Sheriff Thompson.

153 EXT. TEAGARDIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

153

*Note: The following sequence of scenes of Teagardin are
framed from a distance.*

A square single-level house, with chipped white paint faces
the road and is surrounded on its three other sides by
unmowed grass and willows. There isn't another house for
miles.

Teagardin can be seen through the window.

His shirt is open; his sweaty chest exposed; his face in a
state of ecstasy as his hands push his wife's head downwards
off-screen.

154 EXT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED - DAY 154

Outside the church, Teagardin gets into his car with Pamela-
Sue Reaster, one of the young women from the welcome party.

FOLLOWING REAR OF CAR: Music plays from the radio.

Teagardin's car heads down a road along a wide field.

He pulls a sharp left onto a dirt road, separating overgrown farmland from the woods.

155 EXT. FARM ROAD - LATER 155

A blanket laid out, Teagardin pushes his head between Pamela-Sue's legs. She moans loudly. He pushes up her blouse.

She raises her arms and moans again.

EXT. FARM ROAD - LATER

Pamela-Sue takes her bike out of his trunk and rides away. He listens to the radio, drinking whiskey. He tosses the bottle and a pair of panties left on the passenger side into the glove compartment.

147 INT. BANNER'S STORE- CONT. 147

A ramshackle little general store off the main street run by a sour old man BANNER. Banner sits on his stool reading the paper.

ARVIN

Gimme a fifth of whiskey. Your good stock.

BANNER

The high-priced stuff? What'd you do? You come into some money?

ARVIN

(impatient)

You got it or not? I can buy at the Hungry Holler too.

Banner groans getting off his stool.

148 EXT. EMMA'S HOME PORCH - NIGHT 148

Earskell sits in his porch chair with the bottle of whiskey Arvin bought. Arvin leans against a post.

Earskell raises the bottle.

EARSKELL

You sure are good to me, boy.

ARVIN

You gotta be good to Grandma, Uncle.

Earskell hands the bottle to Arvin.

ARVIN (CONT'D)

You noticed she ain't hardly been out since the funeral, right?

EARSKELL
 (oblivious)
 Gonna have to get firewood soon. Be
 cold before you know it.

ARVIN
 She's gotta get out of bed for her own
 good.

Wanting Earskell's attention, Arvin doesn't pass the bottle
 back.

EARSKELL
 I don't see how she stays in that
 bedroom. It's like an oven.

ARVIN
 I went in and said, "grandma, we can't
 go no longer without you fixin' us
 breakfast."

EARSKELL
 Fixing breakfast. Cooking. That's what
 she loves doing, ain't it?

ARVIN
 As long as I've known her.

EARSKELL
 We'll get her fixing up some biscuits
 and eggs. Sawmill gravy.
 (beat)
 I'll drink to that.

Arvin hands Earskell back the bottle.

149 EXT. EMMA'S HOME- PORCH- MORNING 149

Natural sound. Earskell is sleeping on the porch with the
 whiskey bottle empty beside him.

151 INT. ARVIN'S BEDROOM- EARLY MORNING 151

The wooden box that once held the Luger is empty.

Arvin sits on his made bed holding the gun. He looks up at
 the image of Jesus over his door (*Note: This is the image of
 Jesus Willard had shoved into a drawer years back.*)

Arvin loads the Luger.

150 INT. EMMA'S BEDROOM- EARLY MORNING 150

Natural sound continues. Emma sleeps. Arvin quietly enters
 the room and sets a coffee tin full of twenty dollar bills
 folded around a note beginning "Dear Grandma..."

157 INT. COAL CREEK CHURCH OF THE HOLY GHOST SANCTIFIED - MIDDAY

Teagardin sits reading on a sunlit bench towards the front of the church. The door opens in the back. He turns and sees a congregant entering then kneeling in the shadows. Making out that it's a man, BUT not realizing it's Arvin, Teagardin returns to the book.

ARVIN

Excuse me.
(raising his voice)
Preacher?

Teagardin's thumb saves his place.

TEAGARDIN

How's that, son?

ARVIN

You got a moment for a sinner?

Teagardin walks back so that he is a couple rows away from Arvin, who remains kneeling with his head lowered.

ARVIN (CONT'D)

I been doin' wrong and I want to get right by the Lord.

TEAGARDIN

That's what I'm here for, son.

ARVIN

I done lustful acts.

TEAGARDIN

That can be a big problem, especially with young people. Go on, tell me about it.

ARVIN

I got me a pretty wife at home, one that will do anything I say, but I treat her bad.

TEAGARDIN

What do you mean, "anything"?

ARVIN

Just what I said.

(beat)

Well, she'll be going down on me with, well, you know, her mouth, and damn, I get so excited I start forcing it, and-

Teagardin responds somewhere between advice and bonding.

TEAGARDIN

She ever puke on ya? They got a trigger back there in their throats.

ARVIN

Yeah, but that's not really the problem.

TEAGARDIN

Okay, well, what's the problem then?

ARVIN

This guy I work with got himself a daughter. A real young thing just started high school. One day I got this girl in my car and drove her out in the sticks and had my way with her.

TEAGARDIN

Did she put up a fight?

ARVIN

No, she was all right with it, but the thing is, once I'd had a taste, I couldn't stop myself. Kept takin' her out there every chance I got.

TEAGARDIN

I understand, son. Keep on.

ARVIN

So I'd strip her clothes off then have her pray with me before we got started.

The word "pray" strikes a chord. Teagardin tenses up.

TEAGARDIN

That so?

ARVIN

Sometimes I'd give her money for her panties so I could sniff 'em after she rode off on her bike. Then I'd go home to that whore of a wife of mine and have her fix me a big cake, like I was celebrating.

Teagardin tries to stand. Arvin rises. Willard's Luger is in his right hand.

ARVIN (CONT'D)

So what I wanta know, Preacher, is can you ask forgiveness for that?

TEAGARDIN

What the hell is this? You been spying on me?

ARVIN

I been watching every move you make for the last couple of weeks. You can't get enough of that Reaster girl, can ye? Is that the way you did Lenora too?

TEAGARDIN
 (slow recognition)
 You Mrs. Russell's boy?

Arvin walks out from the back pew into the aisle and towards Teagardin, holding the Luger level at Teagardin's chest.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)
 Look here, son, don't do anything
 you'll regret. Why don't you put the
 gun down and we'll talk about it.

ARVIN
 Go ahead and talk. From what I've
 seen, you must be good at it.

Teagardin mouth is dry from fear. He licks his lips.

TEAGARDIN
 It wasn't my fault. Lenora was just
 like this Reaster girl. She wouldn't
 let me be! But I want you to know, I
 pray for her soul every night.

ARVIN
 You pray for the baby's soul too?

TEAGARDIN
 (feigning confusion,
 pleading)
 I didn't have anything to do with
 that. She came to me sayin' she got
 that way. Said... said it was some...
 some boy over on-

ARVIN
 You're a fuckin' liar.

Teagardin shifts tactics and becomes indignant.

TEAGARDIN
 The lies are *hers*! She was crazy.
 Delusional. Had it in her head I was
 the father. I was gonna take care of
 everything. I really-

The Luger's safety clicks. Teagardin's breath quickens.

TEAGARDIN (CONT'D)
 Goddamn it, boy, listen to me. I
 wasn't gonna take the blame for no
 bastard child. I'd have been ruined.
 Hell. You can see that, can't ya, boy?
 (silence)
 Don't you listen, boy? She was
 delusional.
 (taps his temple)
 She was crazy.

Unseen by Arvin, Teagardin's other hand closes around the book he had been reading.

ARVIN

(calm)

No, she was just lonely.

Arvin adjusts his grip on the gun just as Teagardin swings his book at Arvin.

Arvin leans back and the book flies over his head. He fires *one shot* through Teagardin's hand. Teagardin yowls.

Arvin slams the preacher's head down on the bench in front of them and fires *two more shots* into his skull.

Arvin quickly picks up the shells. Two are in reach. He takes the pair of girl's underwear and a folded paper note from his jacket and puts them in Teagardin's pocket.

Crouching in the center aisle, Arvin looks for the third shell that landed somewhere in the shadows but can't find it.

ARVIN (CONT'D)

Fuck.

Giving up, he sits back down, processing what he has just done. The hand holding the gun shakes. He stops it with his other hand. He looks at the dead preacher one last time.

He stands and exits the church, leaving the doors open.

In the light from the open doors, Teagardin's toes coyly touch near an expanding pool of blood.

158 INT. ARVIN'S CAR - AFTERNOON

158

Static gradually begins disrupting the radio when Arvin passes a sign: CHARLESTON 50 MILES.

While trying to find another station, a clunking sound from under the car becomes audible and grows louder and louder.

ARVIN

Shit.

161 EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

161

Arvin with his bag in hand, exhausted from walking, hopelessly thumbs an oncoming car.

It slows. Stops.

DRIVER ONE

Where you heading?

ARVIN

Ohio.

DRIVER ONE

Sorry, there. I'm about to turn east toward Pennsylvania.

ARVIN
You passing Hillsdale?

162 EXT. FIELD - DAWN

162

The Ohio River and a bridge come into view near the road. A line of cars leading up to the bridge.

Arvin, on foot again, stands by the bridge thumbing for a ride.

Sign: "Ohio Welcomes You!"

From the other side, a car honks and a window rolls down. Arvin briskly runs across the road, looking both ways.

In the passenger seat is CARL, while Sandy drives.

They are years older and rougher looking from when we last saw them with Roy.

CARL (O.S.)
Where you going?

ARVIN
Meade, Ohio. You heard of it?

CARL
Paper mill town, right? We're going right through there. Hop in.

Arvin gets in the car and Sandy pulls out onto the road.

ARVIN
How far is it from here?

CARL
Meade? Oh, a couple hours.

CU: Sandy looks in the rearview mirror back at Arvin.

SANDY
What's your name, handsome?

ARVIN
Arvin.

Sandy smiles revealing her teeth- stained from years of smoking and from generally poor oral hygiene.

TITLE OVER BLACK: CARL & SANDY

163 INT. CARL AND SANDY'S CAR - NIGHT

163

Alone in the car, Sandy hunches over the steering wheel, wiping away a stray tear. After a moment, she sits straight and wipes her cheeks.

NARRATOR

It was 1965 and the couple was getting ready for what would be their seventh summer road trip. Over the past four years, Carl had come to believe hitchhikers were the best.

ON SANDY'S LAP: Her fingers dab wet spots off a map of Pennsylvania. She traces a route with her index finger.

SANDY

The 33 to Athens, 50 to Clarksville and 79 North to Pittsburg.

(beat. Then memorizing)
33, 50, 79. 33, 50, 79. 33,
50, 79.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Sandy couldn't put the words in her head that she wanted independence. The idea that she deserved to be free was bound by Carl's rules for killing and the violence she'd complied with for years.

*

She turns the ignition and backs out toward the road.

SANDY

Fuck you, Carl.

CU: Sandy's foot hits the break.

SANDY (CONT'D)

Shit.

164 EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

164

OVERHEAD: The car abruptly returns to the parking spot, sloppily at an angle over the white line. Sandy gets out and heads upstairs back to their apartment.

165 INT. CARL AND SANDY'S APARTMENT - CONT

165

A small apartment: worn catalogue furniture and outdated appliances crammed together. A sofa separates the living room from a kitchenette.

Sandy's almost to the sofa when a groggy Carl flips on the kitchen light.

CARL

The fuck's this?

SANDY

I couldn't sleep.

CARL

Ya goin' outside for?

SANDY

Thought maybe I'd pack the car early.

CARL
We don't pack early. That's a rule.
(Suspicious)
You fuckin' around?

SANDY
No.

CARL
You know I got business tomorrow.
Think I'm driving around with a car
full of bags?

SANDY
I was just tryin' to help.

Carl sees the remaining suitcases are all his.

CARL
Help me by packin' your shit first?

SANDY
Mine was lightest.

CARL
We always pack the heaviest first.
(to himself, walking back
to bed)
Ya do things fuckin' right.

166 EXT. CARL AND SANDY'S APARTMENT- NEXT MORNING

166

NARRATOR
Serial murderers aren't the most
trusting kind. Carl brought the
additional quality of being manically
paranoid. He had rules for how he and
Sandy lived on the road and at home.

Carl briskly heads out of the apartment and to the car. As he
opens the driver's side door, he notices the front wheel
parked over the line.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Rule 11: On the trips, she was the
driver, but he was the only one that
drove the car in Meade. Sandy would
get rides to work or back home if he
couldn't pick her up.

He looks suspiciously up towards the apartment, towards
Sandy. He gets into the car and turns on the ignition.

167 INT. CARL AND SANDY'S APARTMENT - LATER - MIDDAY

167

Sandy sits at the kitchen table in a shirt and underwear,
staring at pictures spread in front of her.

Knocking on the front door turns to banging while she stares,
lost in her head.

BODECKER (O.S.)

It's Lee!

CU: Sandy's hands sweep the photographs (ON THE PHOTOS: *flashes* of skin, some clean, some bloody, a pair of terrified eyes) into a pile and runs into the bedroom.

BODECKER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I'm gonna kick this door in if you
don't answer.

She's RETURNS with a shoebox and sweeps the pile into it.

One photo whisks across the rim, glides across the linoleum and under the couch. A peek of its white back sticks out.

Bodecker *kicks* the door. A collectable spoon falls off the wall.

CU: On the spoon. A mermaid over "Neptune Beach, Florida."

NARRATOR

Neptune Beach was a boy nineteen,
Jasper Taps. He took couples out for
boat tours.

Another bang on the door. She drops the shoebox just beside the door frame inside the bedroom door and shuts it.

SANDY (O.S.)

I'm coming, goddamnit!

The front door opens on SHERIFF LEE BODECKER, 45 years old now, slightly doughy since the last time we saw him with Arvin as a boy. His eyes are sharp.

BODECKER

You don't look too good.

SANDY

I was asleep. What do you want?

He crosses to the kitchen and goes through the cabinets, leaving them hanging open.

BODECKER

You got any candy? I had a rough
morning.

SANDY

Flo got you dry again?

Sandy slides by Bodecker into the bedroom.

Bodecker walks to the rear of the couch and looks down before leaning on it. The stray photograph peeks up at him. He reaches down to grab it. He only has a moment to look at it before the bedroom door opens.

Bodecker tucks the photo in his coat pocket.

Sandy returns with a bag of Mary Jane caramel candies. He unwraps one and pops it in his mouth. He sucks on it as they speak.

SANDY (CONT'D)
Why you here, Lee?

BODECKER
Been gettin' a lot of calls from people about girls selling snatch out of the Tecumseh. They've even mentioned your name a couple times.

SANDY
That's horseshit.

BODECKER
I got another election comin' up, Sandy. Ol' Matthews is lookin' for anything he can get to make me look bad.
(stern)
Is Carl the one pimping you? That fat sonofabitch?

SANDY
NO!
(glaring)
He's working. Making deliveries.

BODECKER
Deliveries? For who?

SANDY
Hell if I know. He's bringing in money that I don't gotta ask you for.

BODECKER
So who is it? Le-roy?

Sandy glares at Bodecker.

SANDY
Get outta here, Lee.

BODECKER
(muttering)
Sonofabitch has it coming. Just Leave off the whoring until after the election, understand.

Bodecker heads for the door. He stops at the door. He digs into his pocket and pulls out a handful of buttons. He drops them on the table.

They read "RE-ELECT SHERIFF BODECKER!"

Bodecker adjusts his belt and slams the front door behind him.

170 EXT. TECUMSEH LOUNGE - AFTERNOON

170

Bodecker backs into the parking lot of a dive bar with a metal roof tapered in the style of a long hall. There's a broad red sign inscribed with an Indian headdress and hatchet and TECUMSEH in a woodcut font.

He puts its keys in his jacket pocket, feels something and pulls out the picture he'd found at Sandy's. He's angry.

BODECKER

What the fuck you doing, Sandy?

IN THE PHOTO: A WELL BUILT YOUNG MAN reclines on the grass, posed like a Roman with his legs extended and head, propped on a hand, turned skyward.

Sandy, topless, holds a bunch of grapes level with his lips for him to eat without effort.

NARRATOR

Cody Hamilton, a 20 year old carpenter
out fishing early one morning in West
Virginia.

INT. TECUMSEH LOUNGE - AFTERNOON

Smoke-filled light filters through windows high along the walls. Soot and dust covered paintings hang randomly.

ANGLE ON: Dark hall at the back of the bar. A mounted stag's head hangs over it.

Bodecker's boot shoves the front door and sunlight cuts into the room.

Two of THREE MEN at a table near the pool table turn away from the light. The one who doesn't turn away is an INDIAN in a black tank top, sitting straight as a matchstick. The Indian drinks a bottle of Coke with a straw.

Bodecker nods to the waitress, JUANITA, mid-twenties.

JUANITA

Hey, Lee. Sandy's off.

Bodecker heads toward the dark hall. The Indian rises, puts his hands in his pockets, and blocks Bodecker.

Bodecker slows to step around him. The Indian widens his stance and elbows.

ON THE INDIAN'S FACE: Expressionless. The dark hallway frames his face, the stag's head looms above him.

The jukebox's gears loudly withdraw the EP and re-slot it.

BODECKER

Leroy's private space takes up half
this dump. I'm gonna inspect those
whore rooms.

JUANITA

Lee, ain't nothing there.

BODECKER

(to The Indian)

Let me by.

THE INDIAN

(dry, mocking)

Law. *Man.*

Bodecker moves to shove the Indian who raises his leg, lets
Bodecker stumble and catches Bodecker by the wrist, throws
him to the ground, and pins him by stepping on his arm.

He twists his hand. Bodecker screams. He steps forward,
keeping Bodecker on his knees in front of him.

With wide swings the Indian slaps Bodecker back and forth
across the face. He shoves him to the floor with his boot.

The Indian takes Bodecker's gun and empties its bullets over
his body and lays it on his chest.

THE INDIAN (CONT'D)

(calmly)

When the man who puts extra money in
your pockets asks you why you look red
as a newborn baby tell him who the
whore is.

169

INT. CARL AND SANDY'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

169

Carl enters, eyeing Bodecker's muddy boot print on the front
door.

CARL

What the hell happened here?

SANDY

Lee came sayin' you're pimping me.

CARL

And?

SANDY

And nothin'. He left saying it was
Leroy who was gonna get what he had
coming.

Carl crosses the room with the new camera and puts it on the
kitchen table.

SANDY (CONT'D)

Is that the camera you bought with my
money?

CARL
Our money.
 (beat)
 Better get driving before your brother
 comes back.
 (beat)
 Let's see that shirt.

He feels the fabric of a clean shirt she's changed into.

CARL (CONT'D)
 Make sure you wear them red shorts.

Sandy goes into the bedroom and closes the door.

CARL (CONT'D)
 Where's that gun I bought ye?

SANDY (O.S.)
 Why?

CARL
 Just wanta check it, that's all.

SANDY
 In my purse.

Inside a closet door near the kitchen, he opens her purse and takes out a gun.

Walking to the kitchen window, he empties its bullets and tosses them out the window. He returns to the closet and digs out a box labeled "Blanks" and reloads the gun.

The purse zips, and the bedroom door open almost simultaneously.

Sandy, in red shorts and a blouse knotted under her belly button, poses.

SANDY (CONT'D)
 So?

Carl gives a thumbs up.

172

INT. WHITE COW DINER - NIGHT

172

An unremarkable roadside diner with a stool-lined counter. Wood-slat booths line the windows and rear windowless walls.

BOBO MCDANIELS, Neaderthalish features, and his boss are sitting opposite one another. The boss is TATER BROWN, he fancies himself a cowboy type, dresses in bolo ties, wide laped blazers and snakeskin boots.

Bodecker enters the diner and approaches. He sits, noticing an antique pistol on the table beside McDaniels' hand.

BODECKER
Leroy's peddling my sister's ass out
the back of that shithole.

TATER
And slugging it out with his Indian
fix that?

WAITRESS (O.S.)
What ya having, honey?

McDaniels moves the gun to his lap.

BODECKER
Coffee. Ain't stayin' long.

She leaves and McDaniels pulls the gun back to inspect it.

BODECKER (CONT'D)
You got a new toy?

MCDANIELS
It's an English firearm. Real rare.
Got special bullets.
(sotto voce)
Untraceable.

BODECKER
Untraceable?

Dishes *crash* in the background- Bodecker looks back.

TATER
Word starts going round the sheriff's
got an eye on the girls at Tecumseh
that's gonna cost Leroy money. Leroy
losing money costs me my cut.

BODECKER
It didn't have anything to do with
you.

TATER
Does now. Bobo, you ever go and beat
the shit outta someone I make my money
off?

MCDANIELS
Nope. Never crossed my mind, a thing
like that.

McDaniels moves Tater's plate toward him with a half-eaten
steak and mash potatoes. He cuts a piece of cold steak and
then shovels that and the potatoes in his mouth.

BODECKER
The guy running against me's going
door to door tellin' folk I look the
other way when it comes to Sandy.

Tater snaps his fingers at McDaniels' loaded fork.

TATER

Bobo, put that down. Give over the envelope.

McDaniels searches for and finds a thick envelope. Tater pins a fifty dollar bill to the table with his finger.

TATER (CONT'D)

There's a debt you owe me. What I'm losing at Tecumseh.

BODECKER

Load of shit. You ain't losing nothing there.

TATER

Yeah? And you know that because you're a loaded diaper like everyone else who works for me or because all of Meade knows you're dirty?

Tater takes a quick swig off his flask, swishes it around his mouth. He lets the fifty go and spits on it.

TATER (CONT'D)

That's your weekly earnings till we're square.

BODECKER

We were 'sposed to talk about Dunlap.

TATER

Man who don't make his payments on time?

(beat)

The Dunlap problem is for Bobo to take care of.

(beat)

Now get the fuck out of my diner.

Bodecker stands. After a few moments he peels the wet bill off the table, shakes off the excess liquid and pockets it.

TATER (CONT'D)

Leroy's off limits and so's your whore sister. Ya understand?

Bodecker nods, turns and walks away. The Waitress approaches him with the coffee.

BODECKER

Give it to Tater, sweetheart.

174

INT. CARL AND SANDY'S CAR - LATE MORNING

174

A hitchhiker, 21 with a baby face, strawberry brown hair and freckles slides into the middle of the backseat. Smooths his slacks. This *redheaded* hitchhiker is GARY MATTHEW BRYSON.

SANDY

What's your name, honey?

Sandy, driving, makes eye contact with Bryson in the rearview mirror.

BRYSON
Private Gary Matthew Bryson.

SANDY
Now that's a nice name.

Carl, riding shotgun, turns to face the young man.

CARL
You sound like you're at roll call.
Hell relax, boy.

SANDY
(cheerfully)
Which of them you go by?

BRYSON
Gary. That was my Dad's name, so at home I'm Gary Matthew.

SANDY
That Matthew. He's from the Bible,
ain't he, Carl?

Carl spits out the window.

CARL
Hell. Everything's from the Bible. Ol'
Matt. That's one of the Apostles.
(beat)
Damn, we need some gas. Can you pitch
in?

BRYSON
Shoot. I don't have any money.

SANDY
But you probably knew your name came
outta the Bible. Didn't you?

BRYSON
We didn't go to church much when I was
a kid.

A shadow falls over Sandy's eyes in the mirror.

SANDY
But you been baptized, right?

BRYSON
Well, sure. We ain't heathens. I just
don't know much of the Bible.

SANDY
(relieved)
Good. Lord knows where a person who
ain't saved might end up.

BRYSON
 (jokingly)
 Right now it looks like Vietnam.

Sandy shakes her head.

SANDY
 That's something I don't understand.
 Why is it they sending you over there?

BRYSON
 To fight Communism, that's what they
 tell us anyway.

She reaches back and strokes his knee without looking.

SANDY
 You're very brave.

CARL
 (pointing)
 There's the filling station.
 (to Bryson)
 You sure you can't chip in on the gas?

BRYSON
 Sorry, I'm busted. That's why I'm
 hitchhiking.

CARL
 (feigning forgetfulness)
 That's right! I asked you.

CARL (CONT'D)
 Maybe I grab some food and we fix up
 some sandwiches

SANDY
 Yeah! Why don't we stop and have a
 picnic. What ye say, Gary?

BRYSON
 Well, uh...If you don't mind sharing.

177 EXT. FIELD- CONT.

177

Sandy pulls a bed sheet from a duffle bag full of them.
 Bryson follows. She points at the hills around them and the
 Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance.

SANDY
 Isn't it beautiful?

BRYSON
 Sure is.

She closes her eyes and undoes her hair.

Carl comes from the car with the sack and his camera. He puts
 the sack down and pulls the cap off the camera.

CARL
Take a look at this.

Bryson looks over the camera.

CARL (CONT'D)
That's a Leica brand 35mm camera. Top
of the line. Ain't even on the market
yet.

BRYSON
(not very interested)
Nice.

Carl's smile fades.

CARL
Let's eat.

Carl strides toward Sandy and sits on the grass by the sheet.
He pulls off his shoes and uses them to anchor corners.

CARL (CONT'D)
Private! Could use a pair a shoes to
hold the sheet down.

Bryson uses his boots to anchor the other end. Sandy slowly
spreads the length of her body across it and discretely
undoes the top button of her jean shorts.

SANDY
What's for lunch, babe?

CARL
(opening bag)
Let's see. Got some bologna, got some
bread. Cheese. Can of beans...
(voila- a pint bottle)
Some hooch.

Sandy rolls lazily over toward Carl, reaching for the
sandwiches, and rubs against Bryson.

SANDY
Whatcha ya wanta eat, honey?

BRYSON
Bologna's good.

Sandy starts fixing him a sandwich. Carl uses a Swiss Army
Knife to get into the beans. Carl takes a sip from the pint
of whiskey and tosses it to Sandy. She offers it to Bryson
who shakes his head modestly.

SANDY
You don't drink?

BRYSON
I don't hold it very well. Usually
gets me in trouble.

CARL
Aw, come on. You don't want to have a
drink with a pretty thing like her?

SANDY
Yeah, you're a long way from your
base, baby.

Bryson looks hesitantly from Sandy to Carl.

BRYSON
Ah, what the hell. Pass it over.

Bryson takes a long drink and coughs. Sandy shifts behind him
and loosens her top.

BRYSON (CONT'D)
Wow, that'll wake you up.

SANDY
(soothing)
Go ahead and take you another one.

Carl, watching, scoops beans into his mouth with the blade.

BRYSON
Cheers.

Carl raises his can in response, then is "struck" by an idea.

CARL
Hey, I got an idea. Seeing how we
might not see each other again, we
oughta record this for posterity.
(holding up camera)
What'd ye say?

BRYSON
You mean a picture? Sure, I'm game.

Carl smiles and Sandy claps. Carl begins directing.

CARL
Alright. Lay down on your side.
(thinking)
Hold the bottle that way. Like ya got
one on ya all the time.

Bryson's grip on the pint relaxes. His posture seems to take
a cue: his limbs loosen. Casual, bold almost like an ad.

Behind him, Sandy leans back, her head near his feet. Face to
the sun, she opens her shirt. *Camera snap.*

CARL (CONT'D)
One more.

Sandy sits up behind him. *Camera snap.* Bryson looks back and
sees Sandy's top undone. He sits up.

NOTE: Carl very much obstructs our view of what's going on with Sandy and the hitchhiker. We're focused on Carl and his reactions to the scenario he's capturing with his camera.

CARL (CONT'D)
(nonchalant)
What? You don't like what you see?

BRYSON (O.S.)
Yeah. But I. . .

SANDY (O.S.)
Why don't you help me undo this last button?
(button snap)
That's it.
(beat)
Put your mouth here.

Sandy moans. *Camera snap. Camera snap.*

ON CARL'S LEGS: He crosses the sheet *revealing for a moment* Sandy's fingernails caressing Bryson's bare chest. Carl steps back and crouches for another angle.

SANDY (O.S.) (CONT'D)	CARL
Damn, you're a big boy. You see this, Carl?	I see it.

*

Camera snap. Carl stands over Bryson's pants, tossed onto the grass. He points the camera straight down to grab that image. *Camera snap.* Bryson moans off-screen.

Carl lowers the camera and pulls out a gun that's tucked in the back of his jeans.

Sandy rolls off Bryson who sees Carl, camera in one hand, gun in the other. Carl shoots him in the calf.

NO AUDIO: Bryson's face is twisted. Carl shoots the other calf, sticks the gun in his belt and drops onto Bryson's belly.

AUDIO RESUMES: Bryson howls, reaching for his legs. Carl slaps his hands away and points the camera at Bryson's face. *Camera snap. Camera snap. Camera snap.*

Bryson reaches for the camera.

CARL (CONT'D)
Tut tut! You don't want to be touching my camera, son.
(To Sandy)
Hold his hands over his head.

Sandy, dressed only in her underwear, pulls Bryson's hands over his head and kneels on his wrists. *Camera snap.*

Carl looks at the camera and puts it to the side.

CARL (CONT'D)
I think we got enough of him alive.

BRYSON
Please. . .

Bryson turns to Sandy. Sandy registers the suffering.

SANDY
Carl, maybe we can-

Carl is surprised by Sandy's plea.

CARL
Shut up, goddamn it.

Carl presses the gun against Bryson's head and takes a deep breath.

CARL (CONT'D)
I bet you never thought it was gonna turn out this way, did ye? Yeah, you was just gonna drink my liquor and fuck my wife and go on your merry way, wasn't ye? But no, that's not the way it works, not with Carl Henderson.

BRYSON
I'm sorry. I'm...

CARL
Hush up. You're real close to God now. Or the Devil. Which you think it'll be when this bullet here lets light in your brain?
(beat)
I'll know where I sent ya, 'cause after Sandy plays with you a bit, I'm gonna open you up and see if your insides are black and rotten.

Bryson blubbers.

CARL (CONT'D)
Quit your cryin' and take another look around. It's the last time you're gonna see this world.

Tears and snot cover Bryson's face. He breathes erratically, trying to form a word.

Carl quickly grabs the camera and holds it over Bryson's head.

CARL (CONT'D)
I'm gonna rip off your head and dismantle your soul.

ON CARL: Bryson whimpers. Carl winces in disgust.

CARL (CONT'D)

Last one.

CU: Bryson's face looks up at Carl in fear.

Camera snap.

178

INT. CARL AND SANDY'S CAR - AFTERNOON

178

Carl sings along loudly and out-of-tunely to "*His Hand in Mine*" on the radio.

Sandy lays her head against the window looking at the passing landscapes. Carl slaps her knee. Dangles a finger at the radio.

CARL

You're snoozing through Elvis.

Displeased, Sandy half turns her head and pulls her legs up close to her chest. She waves her hand.

SANDY

I don't like his gospel shit.

CARL

Thought it'd be nice for you to hear something you think's pretty after losin' your pretty boy.

(no response)

He probably was gonna get killed in Vietnam anyway.

(silence from Sandy)

Goddamn it, he wasn't nothing but another model.

SANDY

I told ye, I don't like this anymore. Ain't it fair if I hate the way some of 'em cry?

CARL

Not that you'd know it but tears make a good picture.

NARRATOR

What Sandy didn't understand was that to his way of thinking, this was the one true religion, the thing he'd been searching for all his life. Only in the presence of death could he feel the presence of something like God.

(clears his throat)

The sick fuck.

CARL

Look. I'll tell you what. We'll get us a nice motel room and a couple steaks

(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)
and just relax for a day or so. How's
that sound?

SANDY
I thought we was about broke.

CARL
Not now. Thanks to ol' Private Bryson
we're flush. Had three hundred dollars
and wouldn't even chip in on the gas.

Carl pulls out the money from his shirt pocket and waves it
at Sandy. Sandy shrugs.

CARL (CONT'D)
I ain't never met a redhead wasn't a
fuckin' liar.

Carl switches off the radio, snaps and points at the road
ahead.

CARL (CONT'D)
There.

A MAN IN A DUSTY VEST and slacks turns to face them near a
sign for Crewe, VA. He puts a thumb up.

SANDY
Two in a day? Your rule's. . .

CARL
We got time before sundown. Wanna see
what I get in this light from the
camera.

Carl points at her shirt.

CARL (CONT'D)
Top button.

INT. MOTEL ROOM- NIGHT

CU: Sandy switches the gun's safety off.

WIDE: Sandy stands over Carl holding the gun with both hands.

CU: The gun nozzle is unsteady, inches from Carl's forehead.
Carl opens his eyes and starts to scream.

CUT TO:
Carl snaps awake and Sandy is sleeping next to him. He
catches his breath and kicks his feet off the bed. Sandy
starts to stir.

SANDY
What's going on?

CARL
Had a bad dream.
(deep breath)
(MORE)

CARL (CONT'D)

All your moanin' got in my head I think.

Sandy grumbles.

NARRATOR

Carl knew deep down that he wouldn't find another girl to work with that could be as good as Sandy. And if being on the road was upsetting her this time around, maybe all she needed was a break. He'd gotten some good shots. It was always good to have something to look forward to.

CARL

Maybe it's a sign we should head back.

INT. CARL AND SANDY'S CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Sandy drives as Carl stares out the passenger side window. To the right, the placid Ohio River. To the left, rural West Virginia.

They come to a slow crawl as they approach the traffic out of West Virginia and into Ohio.

CARL

Ah, fuck.

POV ON: Traffic leading up to the Silver Memorial Bridge that borders Southern Ohio and West Virginia.

A sign next to the bridge reads "Ohio Welcomes You!"

Carl spots someone with a thumb out close to the bridge. It's Arvin. Sandy notices Carl staring.

SANDY

Carl. . .

CARL

I see 'im.

SANDY

Number one rule is no one in Ohio.

CARL

We don't even know where he's going yet.

He honks the horn and rolls the window down. Footsteps jog across the road. Arvin steps up to the driver side.

CARL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Where you going?

ARVIN

Meade, Ohio. You heard of it?

Sandy grabs Carl's knee. Carl brushes it off.

CARL
Paper mill town, right? We're going
right through there. Hop in.

Arvin gets in the backseat.

ARVIN
How far is it from here?

CARL
Meade? Oh, a couple hours.

CU: Sandy looks in the rearview mirror back at Arvin.

SANDY
What's your name, handsome?

ARVIN
Arvin.

Sandy smiles revealing her stained teeth.

FROM ABOVE: The car crosses the bridge into OHIO.

183 INT. CARL AND SANDY'S CAR - EVENING

183

CARL
What you going to Meade for?

ARVIN
Just visiting.

SANDY
Got family there?

Arvin notices how Sandy drives stiff-armed with both hands on the wheel and eyes ahead.

ARVIN
No, but I used to live there a long
time ago.

CARL
Probably ain't changed much. Them
little towns never do.

Arvin leans back.

ARVIN
Where is it you all live?

CARL
Chesterfield. We're driving out to
Chicago, Illinois.
(beat)
We like meetin' new people, don't we,
hon?

SANDY

Sure do.

They pass the Ross County line and a sign: "Meade 30 MI."

CARL

Shit, kid. My old billy don't work
like it used to. Gonna have to pull
over so I can take a leak. All right?

ARVIN

Sure.

(beat)

I appreciate the ride.

CARL

Hon, they should be a road up here on
the right.

ARVIN

So you know the area?

CARL

Yeah, we've crossed back and forth
this way lots of times.

(beat)

Here.

The car turns onto a dirt and gravel road.

Sandy passes a big farm just past the corner of the turn and
slows after a mile.

SANDY

Here?

CARL

(dagger eyes, calm tone)

No. Not quite...

Arvin, alert, looks downhill at a stretch without any houses.

Sandy stops just over the crest of the hill by a driveway
leading to a rundown house.

CARL (CONT'D)

This'll work.

Sandy shuts off the engine and pulls the keys out.

He pats her knee. She squeezes his hand.

They open their doors at the same time and the sound of
insects fills the car. Arvin's quietly at attention.

Carl hoists his body out with the help of the roof. He walks
past Arvin's window.

AS IF TIME SLOWED DOWN: Arvin sees the butt of a pistol stuck
in his pants.

Arvin rolls down his window. He shifts slightly and adjusts the Luger tucked in his overalls' pocket.

Sandy slides into the passenger seat to be closer to Arvin and sticks a cigarette in her mouth.

SANDY
Lucky Strike?

ARVIN
Don't smoke, thanks.

Sandy shrugs, pulls a box of matches out of her pocket and strikes one weakly, then too firmly. It snaps.

SANDY
Shoot.

Carl walks back from where he was taking a piss and puts his hands on his hips, surveying the area.

CARL
Damn, this is gonna be a fine sunset.
You gonna have to be patient while I
get some shots, boy.

Carl makes his way to the trunk.

CARL (CONT'D)
Don't worry, we got some hooch and
Sandy's good company.

Sandy smiles back at Arvin.

CU: Second match, struck so quickly it slips off the strip and under the seat.

A third match. She strikes it perfectly and holds it up.

CU: Sandy's finger holding the match. It quivers. Sandy's looking at Arvin anxiously. Something is wrong.

CARL (CONT'D)
(opening door)
Come on out, son!

Arvin draws the Luger as Carl's swings open the door.

Arvin kicks the door into Carl's free hand, knocking Carl back. Arvin kicks it a second time, getting it open.

CARL (CONT'D)
Fuck!

Carl pulls out his gun.

ON ARVIN: Leaning back in the seat as Carl raises his gun, Arvin fires.

Sandy scrambles for her gun in her purse.

Carl's hit. He twists to the side and staggers back. Regaining his footing, he raises his gun again.

CU: Carl's face as Arvin's second shot hits him.

Carl lands on his back in the weeds.

Arvin stands above Carl as he claws at the grass, searching for his dropped gun.

SANDY

Carl!

Arvin kicks Carl's gun into the weeds.

ON SANDY: She inhales deeply. Arvin's back is to her.

ON ARVIN: He turns, gun still raised.

ON SANDY TO ARVIN: One hand palm out pleading, the other hand pointing her gun at Arvin.

SANDY (CONT'D)

Wait! No!

Before he can process her words, Arvin shoots her in the neck.

She fires back at his chest as she falls.

Arvin slumps over. Frozen.

He rises up with a BURST and realizes he's unscathed. He inhales deep, then vomits on the ground.

Arvin regains his composure and surveys the scene- two dead bodies in the middle of nowhere. He approaches Carl's body.

He looks through Carl's coat and finds a wallet. He opens it and finds money. Folded up, in between the cash, Arvin finds a photograph.

ON ARVIN: He's appalled.

NARRATOR

Jim Lacey. New Burlington, Indiana.
Carl never photographed a more symmetrical face. This photo really meant something to Carl. It was their first.

He puts the money back and pockets the photo.

He returns to the car to wipe down everything he touched.

Arvin looks over at Sandy laying in the car. He goes to the open glove box and finds two film rolls. He takes them.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He knew in his gut that he needed to get far away from here, but in this moment, the boy couldn't bear the thought of not seeing his old house again. No matter what else happened, he had to try to set right those things about his father that still ate at his heart.

Arvin feels his undamaged chest. He looks up and surveys the scene. He stands up and makes for the woods.

TITLE CARD OVER BLACK: **BODECKER**

INT. TATER BROWN'S HOUSE- KITCHEN MOMENTS LATER

ON McDANIELS: McDaniels stands by the sink with a towel over his arm and jar of milk in one hand.

Off-screen a door opens.

MCDANIELS

(chipper)

Mornin', Lee!

ON BODECKER: Bodecker takes a quick glance into the tiny kitchen and smiles.

BODECKER

Heya, Bobo. Sorry to come by so early. I was on my way to work an' thought I might chew yer ear. Still thinking of that gun you showed me.

McDaniels welcomes him and shuts the door. He motions to the sofa for Bodecker to sit.

MCDANIELS

I'm just scrambling some eggs. Want some?

BODECKER

Yes.

CU: Empty coffee pot.

BODECKER (CONT'D)

I'd take coffee if you got any.

MCDANIELS

Comin' up.

He opens a cabinet. Bodecker examines the shabby room. A linoleum table with rusted legs covered in cans and junk, a stool its only seat. The kitchen sink was full of pans.

MCDANIELS (CONT'D)

Got this coffee from the diner.

BODECKER

I drink too much of the stuff, but it
does keep me awake.

(beat)

Tater here?

MCDANIELS (O.S.)

Upstairs. That there is the pistol.
Nifty.

Bodecker glances to his left. The gun McDaniels brandished at the diner sits on the table with a small towel loosely wrapped around it.

ON MCDANIELS: Standing at the sink staring blankly at the coffee bag McDaniels for a moment. He laughs as he scoops coffee grounds into the coffee maker.

BODECKER (O.S.)

This is a fine piece. I wonder if
you'd consider selling me it.

MCDANIELS

I just got it! But everything has a
price I guess.

(staring at the coffee)

One thing I can never get is the
scoops and the water. Is it more water
to scoops or scoops to -

A MUFFLED BANG. McDaniels falls to the ground. Bodecker holds the gun wrapped in the towel it was laying on. Smoke rises from where the shot fired.

Bodecker puts his gloves on and puts the coffee back in the cabinet, takes the milk off the counter and puts it in a fridge he has to cover his nose after opening.

He uses the cloth McDaniels had over his arm to wipe down the door knob of prints.

INT. TATER BROWN'S HOUSE- UPSTAIRS

Tater, shirtless in unbuttoned jeans, talks on the bedroom phone.

TATER

He's no problem after this morning.

(listens)

A man of mine.

(listens)

Normally, but I was tellin' your
people this election's erratic.
Attacked some Indian a few days ago,
no idea why. Can't trust a man that's
gettin' . . .

(listens)

My man Bobo on. . .

(listens)

It's a nickname. He's simple. "Bobo,
go there, do this." He goes there.

(MORE)

TATER (CONT'D)

Does it.

(listens)

Sit tight. That Dunlap land's gonna be a fire sale at auction.

(listens)

He'll lose the election and I got shit on him the next sheriff's gonna lap up.

He laughs.

TATER (CONT'D)

Thanks, sir. I should. I don't get far north as Columbus too often, but a Browns game? Tater Brown at a Browns game? That'd be a story.

Laughs.

TATER (CONT'D)

You too.

Tater hangs up the phone and gets an undershirt from a dresser.

He opens the bedroom door and Bodecker shoots him in the stomach.

Tater stumbles back, hits the dresser and falls on his side.

Bodecker walks over and kicks Tater flat on his back.

BODECKER

Bobo's dead. I killed him.

Bodecker shoots Tater in the forehead. Things are quiet.

SOUND OF A WOMAN GASPING comes from behind the bathroom door. Bodecker looks up.

BODECKER (CONT'D)

Fuck.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD- DOWN THE WAY

A voice comes over the radio as Bodecker walks toward his car, looking around to make sure no one is around. He gets into the car and pulls his gloves off.

The voice- filled with urgency- belongs to DEPUTY HOWSER. He takes a breath before answering.

BODECKER

Fuck.

He picks up the radio.

BODECKER (CONT'D)

Bodecker here. Over.

HOWSER
A farmer called in a double homicide
off the five oh six. I need you here.
Over.

BODECKER
Two? Over.

HOWSER
Yes. Confirmed. Over.
(beat)
I repeat. I need you here. Over.

BODECKER
Where on five oh six?

184 EXT. CRIME SCENE - A LITTLE LATER

184

DEPUTY HOWSER approaches Bodecker's parked car and stands
with his hands on his hips looking at the road.

HOWSER
(unusually earnest)
I'm sorry, Lee. This is fucked up.

BODECKER
What'd ye mean?

Bodecker starts walking towards the scene.

HOWSER
It's your sister and her husband.

He sees Carl's body first, then Sandy's feet, one shoeless,
dangling out of the car. Bodecker starts walking fast towards
his sister.

He comes around the car and sees her splayed out.

BODECKER
(voice nearly breaking)
Jesus.
(beat)
Jesus Christ.

Bodecker steps back from Howser, leans on his knees and takes
some long breaths.

HOWSER
Lee.

BODECKER
Give me a couple minutes here alone
with her.

HOWSER
Sure.

Lee looks up at Howser who gives him a sympathetic nod.

Howser walks to where other men stand speaking in low tones.

NARRATOR

She'd always been sort of fucked-up,
but Lee blamed Carl for the way she
gone downhill. Regardless of all that,
she was still his baby sister.

Bodecker studies Sandy closely, the lines in her face, the
bad teeth, the faded bruises on her legs that lead up to her
skimpy short shorts.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He couldn't help but think of himself
for a moment. First, it would just be
that the sheriff had a whore for a
sister, and then eventually someone
would have found out about his
dealings - all the bribes and other
shit that had piled up since he had
first pinned on a badge.

Bodecker squats at the car door over Sandy's feet. He pulls
his handkerchief out and wipes his eyes. The glove
compartment is open. He moves inside the car over her. He
pulls her close, almost like an embrace, and examines the
neck wound. The bullet exited on the back right a little
below the entry.

He sees a 9mm slug buried near the steering wheel in the
dashboard and digs it out with his penknife. Looking at the
slug in his palm, he sees Sandy's .22 pistol on the floor
near the break pedal.

He turns back to where the men are standing.

BODECKER

(shouting)

Was that rear door open when you got
here?

HOWSER

We haven't touched a thing, Lee.

BODECKER

Where's the farmer you say found 'em?

HOWSER

He said he had some hogs to tend to.
But I questioned him pretty good. Says
he didn't touch a thing.

BODECKER

Pictures?

HOWSER

Just got done when you pulled in.

Bodecker backs out of the car and hands Howser the 9mm bullet, then leans back in and picks up the .22 with his handkerchief.

He releases the cylinder.

BODECKER
Fired once.
(beat)
The hell?

He holds a bullet up to Howser.

BODECKER (CONT'D)
These are blanks.

HOWSER
That don't make no sense. Why would
she load up with blanks?

BODECKER
I don't know, but it was a bad
mistake.
(pointing to ground)
Assailant pukes over here.

Bodecker sets the gun on the dashboard and walks to Carl. Flies crawl around the bullet wounds and his open mouth. A .38 is in the road a few feet away.

Bodecker lifts the gun and checks the cartridge.

BODECKER (CONT'D)
And this fucker didn't fire a shot.

He picks up Carl's wallet lying on the ground. The money is still there.

BODECKER (CONT'D)
Wasn't a robbery.

TAYLOR
Any chance Tater Brown's got something
to do with this?

BODECKER
What the hell makes you think that?

TAYLOR
Just throwin' out a thought. Who else
does this shit around here?

BODECKER
This is too out in the open.
(beat)
You call the coroner?

HOWSER
On his way.

Bodecker nods at the rundown house.

BODECKER

See what you find in that hole.

Two officers turn around and head towards the rundown house. Out of sight, Bodecker leans into the passenger's seat. He takes the maps.

Standing, he notices an Esso gas station receipt and takes that as well.

Bodecker pulls out of the car at the sound of footsteps.

Howser jogs back to join them. The coroner, BENNY, a young man with bright eyes, strides to the pair of men.

He looks at Sandy.

BENNY

Good Lord.

BODECKER

Lord's got nothing to do with this.

(to Howser)

Get Willis out here to dust for prints.

BENNY

What happened here?

BODECKER

The way it looks, Carl was outside and got shot by someone who was sittin' in the back. Then Sandy managed to get off a shot with that .22, but she didn't have a chance. The fuckin' thing's loaded with blanks. By that time the shooter was out of the car and standing, I figure, about right here.

Bodecker points to the spot where Arvin was standing.

HOWSER

Any guess how long they've been dead?

Benny kneels and tries to move Carl's arm a little.

BENNY

Yesterday evening, maybe longer.

BODECKER

Benny, you make sure she gets taken care of good, okay?

BENNY

Absolutely.

BODECKER

Tell 'em I'll call over about later about the arrangements.

(MORE)

BODECKER (CONT'D)

(beat)

I'm gonna head back to the office.

BENNY

And the other one?

Bodecker turns and walks away.

BODECKER

(over his shoulder)

Pauper's grave.

185 INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - MIDDAY

185

Bodecker leans back in his chair at his desk.

The map from the glove box is open on his desk with a red pencil line tracking the route Carl and Sandy had planned.

Bodecker walks over to a shelf lined with phone books and taps along until he reaches West Virginia.

The phone rings.

BODECKER

Sheriff's Office.

SHERIFF THOMPSON

I'm on the line to talk with Sheriff Bodecker.

BODECKER

Who's this?

SHERIFF THOMPSON

Sheriff Thompson in Lewisburg, West Virginia. How you all doing up there?

BODECKER

I ain't bragging.

SHERIFF THOMPSON

I'll get to it then. Now it might be nothing, but I'm calling because someone shot a man down here two days back. A preacher.

(beat)

We're suspecting it's a boy used to live in your parts.

BODECKER

That right? How'd he kill the man?

SHERIFF THOMPSON

Couple shots. Pistol, probably a Luger the boy was known to have.

BODECKER

(sits up)

That's a nine millimeter, ain't it?

SHERIFF THOMPSON
That's right.

BODECKER
What'd you say the boy's name was?

SHERIFF THOMPSON
I didn't say, but it's Arvin Russell.
Both his parents died up around there
as I understand it.
(beat)
Father was a suicide. He's been living
here with the grandmother and uncle.

BODECKER
How old?

SHERIFF THOMPSON
Eighteen, nineteen.
(beat)
Listen. He ain't a bad sort, I've
known him for a long time. And from
what I'm hearing, this preacher might
have deserved killing.

BODECKER
This boy driving?

SHERIFF THOMPSON
Could be. He owns an ol' rusted up
Chevy 3100, '54. Don't know if it'd
make it all the way up there.

BODECKER
You got a description?

SHERIFF THOMPSON
Regular build. Dark hair. Not bad
lookin'. Quiet.

BODECKER
Can you get me a picture?

SHERIFF THOMPSON
The grandma's ain't exactly
cooperating but the school'll get me
one.

BODECKER
Send me that picture. I'll get my
people to look back on suicides.

SHERIFF THOMPSON
Can do.

BODECKER
Good luck down there.

He hangs up and looks at the map in front of him.

Bodecker feels in his pocket and pulls out the small black-and-white photo he found days earlier at Sandy's. He studies the image of a topless Sandy feeding a young man grapes.

186 INT. MOTEL ROOM- THE SCIOTO INN- SAME DAY 186

A small, typical motel room. Arvin exits the bathroom wrapped in a towel. He sits on the bed and breathes. He pulls a bottle of whiskey out of his bag and takes a swig. He stares at a picture of Jesus hanging on the wall across from him.

He stands up and pulls it down. Shoves it into a drawer and shuts it.

He lays back on the bed and closes his eyes, but his mind is racing and he can't sleep.

187 INT. THE SCIOTO INN- DAY 187

A CLERK chews gum.

CLERK
Get some rest?

ARVIN
No, can't sleep.

CLERK
Wish I could shut my eyes. My old man owns the Inn so I'm his slave when college is out. Better than getting shipped off to Vietnam though.

ARVIN
Yeah, I expect so. You know if an eating hole in town called The Wooden Spoon is still open?

188 INT. CARL AND SANDY'S APARTMENT - SAME DAY 188

The door is jimmied open. Bodecker enters.

He goes to the back of the couch where he found the photograph and looks under it with a flashlight.

He balks at the smell in the bedroom. Piles of Carl's shirts, underwear and empty bottles of booze ring the bed. He kicks the bottles out of his way and opens a night table drawer.

It's full of receipts: "Tallahassee Rest Pit," "Homosassa Springs Diner," "St. Pete Beach Sand Shack." "Chat N' Chew," Freedom, Indiana. "French Lick Wine & Spirits." "Ackerman's Hunting," Bakersville, Illinois. He puts them in his pocket.

Bodecker stands purposeless, arms akimbo, in the living room. Then he notices the closet.

Peeking in, he sees a red curtain hanging from the ceiling behind winter coats, which he shoves apart and walks through.

Bodecker takes a heavy breath in the dark before the flashlight switches on.

189

INT. CARL'S DARKROOM- CONT.

189

Narrow, with work tables on both walls and a cabinet at the far end. String hangs along the wall to Bodecker's right, with clothespins dangling unused. Empty developing trays lean against the table on the opposite wall. Unlike the rest of the apartment, this space is spotless.

The cabinet at the far end of the room has a top row of drawers almost as small as a library card catalogue's. Unused rolls of film are in one. A funnel and tightly wound hoses in two others.

Envelopes of photo negatives are in the last. No more than one or two strips of negatives in each.

He holds one up to his light, squints. The image shows Roy, shot in the throat, with a naked Sandy straddling him.

NARRATOR

Reverend Roy Laferty. Durham, North Carolina. As any good record keeper, Carl made a point of keeping track of his successes and failures.

Bodecker scrolls down past the rest of the images on the negative. His face horrified.

The envelopes are marked with a place and date. "Estes Park. 1962" and "Tallahassee. 1965".

EXT. ALLEYWAY- EVENING

Lighter fluid is poured over the items pulled from Carl's collection. Bodecker lights a match and drops it. All the evidence goes up in flames.

Bodecker pulls out a pint of whiskey out of a brown bag, opens it and takes a swig.

190

EXT. THE WOODEN SPOON- DAY

190

Arvin stands outside looking in at the lunch crowd. He looks at the bus station across the street.

A bus pulls up. A Young Bus Driver turns to the passengers.

YOUNG BUS DRIVER

(to passengers)

We'll be back on the road in 30 minutes. If you're not here, we're leaving without you.

A dozen people get out, a few in military uniforms.

191 INT. THE WOODEN SPOON- MOMENTS LATER

191

Arvin sits at the counter. A WAITRESS, very pretty in her 20s, approaches.

WAITRESS
What can I get you?

ARVIN
Just a cup of coffee. Thank you.

Arvin smiles. She smiles back.

WAITRESS
Sure thing.

Arvin watches her walk away. He notices a newspaper sitting on the stool between him and another PATRON.

ARVIN
Excuse me, sir. That your paper?

PATRON
It's all yours.

Arvin tenses as he reads the headline "Local Sheriff's Sister, Her Husband Found Murdered" over pictures of Bodecker and Sandy. We catch specific lines as Arvin reads "returning from vacation." "...up for re-election, states there are 'no suspects yet.'" "...whoever committed this heinous act..."

The Waitress returns with his coffee.

WAITRESS
Here you go. Where you from?

Arvin does not know what he should say.

ARVIN
Just outside Cleveland. Passing through.

WAITRESS
That's a shame. Nice to see a friendly face.

She smiles kindly. Arvin watches her walk away.

192 INT. MOTEL ROOM- AFTERNOON

192

Arvin grabs his bag and throws the newspaper in and pulls the Luger out. He shoves it in the back of his pants and covers it with his shirt.

He scans the room one last time. He opens the drawer to find the picture of Jesus. He pulls it out and packs it too.

193 EXT. THE SCIOTO INN- LATER

193

Arvin exits the room and walks in the opposite direction of the front office.

He walks into the woods behind the motel.

194 EXT. MAUDE'S STORE- LATER

194

Hank, who we have not seen for 10 years, stands outside smoking a cigarette and listening to the radio.

He watches a logging truck stop out front. Arvin gets out and heads up a road away from Maude's.

HANK

Howdy.

Arvin turns and nods. Hank notices Arvin's bag.

HANK (CONT'D)

You look like you been traveling.

ARVIN

Yeah.

HANK

Where you headed?

ARVIN

There used to be a house and barn on top of the hill behind here. Some lawyer owned it. You know it?

HANK

Sure, I do. Up in the Mitchell Flats.

ARVIN

Is it still there?

Hank studies him.

HANK

Well, I'll be damned. You're that Russell boy, ain't ye?

Arvin concedes with a nod.

ARVIN

Yeah. I thought being's I was up this way, I'd stop and see the old place again.

HANK

Son, I hate to tell you, but that house burned some years ago. They think some kids did it. Wasn't nobody ever lived there after you and your folks.

ARVIN
(disappointed)
Is there anything left of it?

HANK
Just the foundation mostly. I think
the barn's still there, part of it
anyway.

ARVIN
Well, heck, I come this far, I might
as well walk up there anyway. Is it
still okay to go up through the woods
behind here?

HANK
Yeah, just cut across Clarence's
pasture. He won't say nothing.

ARVIN
I never did get to thank you for that
night my dad died. You was awful good
to me, and I want you to know I ain't
ever forgot it.

Hank smiles wide, revealing two of his bottom teeth are
missing.

HANK
You had that pie smeared all over your
face. Damn Bodecker thought it was
blood. Remember that?

ARVIN
Yeah, I remember everything about that
night.

HANK
He ain't turned out to be the law man
I expected.
(beat)
You come back this evening, we'll sit
out and drink some beer.

ARVIN
I'll do that.

195 EXT. RUSSELL HOUSE- LATER

195

Arvin walks up the road to find one wall of his old home
intact. The barn is a ragged. Arvin walks past the barn and
towards the thick woods leading to the prayer log.

196 EXT. PRAYER LOG- LATER

196

Arvin approaches the clearing. The weeds have overgrown. The
decayed carcasses have fallen from their crosses. Five
crosses still stand.

The cross in the center of the clearing is one of them and
some bones of his dead dog, Jack, still hang from it.

Arvin pushes away weeds, revealing the prayer log underneath.

Arvin takes it all in.

He steps over the log and picks off the dog's bones still nailed to the cross off and collects others he finds at its base.

LATER

He places the bones in a pile. He looks at the dog's skull. A small hole still visible at the center where his father shot him.

ARVIN

You were a good dog, Jack. I'm sorry
it's taken me so long to bury ye.

Arvin begins to tear up looking at his dead dog in this place filled with so many memories.

INT. MAUDE'S STORE- MID DAY

Hank sits listening to the radio in the bright mid-day light. The last few notes of Sonny James's "You're the Only World I know" ends.

Bodecker's cruiser heads up the road and stops in front. Hank sits up. Bodecker steps out. Hank turns down the music.

As Bodecker gets out of the cruiser, his radio starts squawking.

HOWSER (O.S.)

Lee, we got a situation over on Paint
Street. Triple homicide. Tater, Bobo
and an...

Bodecker turns down the volume.

NARRATOR

Lee felt the same way about Hank now
as he did that night he showed up to
find that boy with pie all over his
face. Some people are born to be
buried.

Lee steps and walks out. Hank sits up.

BODECKER

I was hoping you'd still be around.

EXT. PRAYER LOG- DUSK

Arvin digs a shallow hole under the cross and moves the dog's remains into it.

NARRATOR

Arvin thought about the days leading up to his mother's death, how Willard wanted so much for her to live. His dad would have done anything for her; fuck the blood and the stink and the insects and the heat.

Arvin lays his hands on the log where he found his father dead years ago.

ARVIN

Anything.

NARRATOR

Arvin said to himself. And suddenly he realized, standing in his father's church, that Willard had needed to go wherever Charlotte went.

Arvin listens to the soft sounds traveling upward from the holler. A screen door slams, kids yell, a motor droning. Nearby, a branch cracks. His eyes open. Another crack. Someone is approaching.

Crouching close to the ground, Arvin sneaks around a tall thicket of wild roses and up the hill before stopping behind the trunk of a tree. He looks back and sees Bodecker peeking out from the thick line of trees.

In his hand is a shotgun.

BODECKER

Arvin Russell? I know you're down there somewhere. It's Sheriff Bodecker, son. I got some questions to ask you.

Bodecker spits and wipes some sweat out of his eyes. A bird flies up from a bush.

Bodecker turns and FIRES and quickly jacks another shell into the chamber. He starts making his way down to the clearing.

BODECKER (CONT'D)

Damn, boy, I'm sorry about that. Goddamn bird scared me. I ain't here to hurt you. And I know you don't want to hurt me.

(beat)

Come on out so we can have us a talk.

Bodecker stops next to the bag sitting in front of the cross and scans the treeline with his eyes. He clocks the dog's bones in the half-dug grave.

BODECKER (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Crazy bastard.

(projecting loudly)

(MORE)

BODECKER (CONT'D)

I figured this might be where you would come. Remember that night you brought me up here? That was an awful thing your daddy did.

Arvin pulls the gun from the back of his pants. He eases the safety off. He picks up a chunk of dead wood and throws it high through the branches. It lands down by Bodecker and Bodecker fires again. Bits of leaf and bark float through the air where he shot.

Bodecker jacks another pair of shells into the shotgun and crouches by the prayer log.

BODECKER (CONT'D)

Goddamn it, boy, don't fuck with me!

ARVIN

Lay the gun down, Sheriff. I got one pointed right at you.

Bodecker looks down at Arvin's open bag and sees the newspaper with the picture of himself. But the picture's old, and it's a younger, happier Bodecker looking up at him.

BODECKER

I can't do that, son. Hell, that's one of the first rules they teach you in law enforcement. You don't give up your weapon.

ARVIN

Set it on the ground and step away.

Sweat drips down Arvin's brow. He wipes it quickly and ducks into the bushes.

BODECKER

What? So you can kill me like you did my sister and that preacher down in West Virginia?

ON ARVIN: Arvin's hand begins to tremble hearing Bodecker mention Teagardin.

ON BODECKER: Bodecker continues to scan the clearing, looking for Arvin somewhere in the woods.

ARVIN

(shaky)

That preacher wasn't no good! He was a pervert and he hurt my sister. He hurt her so bad, Sheriff! She killed herself. I had no choice.

(beat)

Sheriff, I'm really sorry to be the one to tell you this. Your sister and her husband were no good too. I got a snapshot in my pocket of your sister hugging on some dead guy.

BODECKER
(under his breath)
You little sonofabitch.

ARVIN
You let loose that gun, and I'll show
it to you.

Bodecker perks up. He senses Arvin's position. He readies his gun.

Bodecker raises the shot gun and starts to whirl around. Arvin FIRES. He hits Bodecker and the shotgun goes off and splatters buckshot into a tree next to Arvin's face. Arvin flinches and FIRES again. Bodecker falls forward.

Arvin waits a few seconds, and then slowly approaches.

Bodecker hears Arvin's boots coming towards him and attempts to grab his pistol out, but Arvin grabs it and tosses it.

Bodecker is coughing up blood with every breath he takes. The bullet has pierced a lung.

Arvin turns Bodecker over onto his back. Arvin reaches into the pocket of his jeans and pulls out Carl's wallet snapshot. He holds it front of Bodecker's face. Bodecker looks at Arvin, not the photo.

ARVIN (CONT'D)
I didn't have no choice. They was
gonna kill me. I swear, I begged her
to put the gun down.

Bodecker's eyes shift over to the picture of Sandy.

Arvin sits beside Bodecker, watching him die.

NARRATOR
Though it seemed to Arvin as if hours
went by while he listened to the
sheriff fight to stay alive, it really
took the man only a few minutes to
die.

Arvin remains motionless. The clearing is silent except for Bodecker's last breath.

Arvin stands up and walks to the grave he dug. He lays the Luger in the hole beside the bones and covers the grave, pushing the dirt back with his hands.

He reaches into the bag for the rolls of film he took from Carl and Sandy and shoves them, along with Carl's snapshot of Sandy holding a dead man, into Bodecker's shirt pocket.

He stands up and looks around one last time at the moss-covered log and the rotting gray crosses.

Arvin turns and starts up a deer path towards the top of a hill.

EXT. FIELD- CONT.

Arvin arrives at the end of the path at the top of the hill. He brushes aside a spiderweb and steps out of the dim woods.

The sky is cloudless and a deep blue. The field in front of him appears to go on forever, blazing in the mid-afternoon light.

197

EXT. ROUTE 50- DUSK

197

Arvin walks up the small two lane highway, bag in hand. He looks over his shoulder as cars approach, lifting his hand for a ride.

He walks a while before a fading green Volkswagen Van pulls up.

198

INT. CAR- CONT.

198

The driver is a raggedy, sweet HIPPIE in his late 20s. Probably dodging the draft.

A twangy, soulful British invasion song plays on the radio.

ARVIN

Thank you, mister. Didn't think anyone would pick me up.

HIPPIE

Man, looks like you had a rough day. Where you headed?

ARVIN

I ain't figured that out yet.

The Hippie shrugs as if that answer is as good as any, looks in his rearview, and pulls back onto the road.

ARVIN (CONT'D)

Where are you heading?

HIPPIE

Cincinnati. That okay for you?

ARVIN

Yeah, been meaning to get up there.

HIPPIE

(smiling)

Alright then.

The music fades out and moves into the news.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

News Today: Arriving to make known his new decisions on Vietnam to a highly tense Washington press conference, President Johnson explains the reasons for his actions in these historic words...

Arvin looks back towards where he just left. The distance between him, Bodecker, and the countless other no good sonsofbitches is getting greater every second. But so is the distance between him and his Grandma and Uncle and home.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

"We intend to convince the communists that we cannot be defeated by force of arms. Or by superior power."

He looks away and turns towards the front window.

He focuses on the road ahead, but his eyes want to sleep.

And as he fights to stay awake, his mind starts to slip in and out of the present moment.

A SERIES OF IMAGES MATCHING THE FORWARD MOVEMENT OF THE ROAD AHEAD. IN EACH IMAGE, WE FOLLOW SOMEONE FROM BEHIND:

IMAGE: Deputy Howser approaches Bodecker laying dead and finds the picture of Sandy in his breast pocket.

NARRATOR

Arvin didn't want to fall asleep sitting next to a stranger, but as he fought hard to stay awake, his mind took him places.

IMAGE: Sheriff Thompson walks AWAY from Teagardin's body towards two other victims of Teagardin's- Pamela and Beth-Ann Reaster- crying alongside their mother by the door of the small church surrounded by a curious crowd and police cars outside.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

He started to think maybe the law would recognize he had done good. Maybe he'd be forgiven. Maybe he'd even be able to see Grandma and Uncle Earskell again. Or maybe that was too risky.

IMAGE: A Finger tracks a line on a map moving further and further away from MEADE up and up and up...

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

But, still, maybe he'd meet a girl and start a family like his daddy did.

IMAGE: A BOY running alongside his DOG in a field toward a home. A MAN and a WOMAN await.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
As the thoughts came, he wasn't sure
if he was going backwards or forwards.

IMAGE: The BOY runs INTO the Man's arms. We still don't see anyone's face.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
He knew wherever this was, it felt
nicer than Knockemstiff. No fighting
or screaming or pain.

IMAGE: Moving through thick jungle and landing on the back of a SOLDIER IN A HELMET as he sits in wait for the enemy.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Then the thought of enlisting got into
his brain. And, he wasn't sure if he
was thinking about himself or Willard
anymore.

BACK TO THE PRESENT: Looking out through the windshield onto the road, moving forward down the highway.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
He didn't want to end up in a war like
his father. But, he was good at
fighting and maybe that's where he
belonged.

BACK ON: Arvin starts to give into sleep and his eyes stop finally shut.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Grandma would tell him to pray on it,
and he'd laugh at her, but maybe she
knew something he didn't.
(breath)
Right now, he needed sleep and just
felt lucky someone was giving him a
ride.

The news continues on the radio.

Arvin sleeps peacefully.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END