

THE PAPERBOY

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Based on the Pete Dexter novel

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FADE IN:

1

EXT. RURAL TWO-LANE HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

1

MOAT COUNTY, FLORIDA, 1965

A rain storm. A pick-up truck pulls into a county rest stop between privies. We are on an intersection of a dirt road and a two-lane highway. There is movement inside. Bare flesh presses briefly against the fogged window. Muted sounds.

We make out a hand painted on one of the privies.

MOAT COUNTY EXTENDS A WELCOME HAND TO YANKEES!

A sheriff's car moves slowly through the rain. It drives past the clearing. Stops. Backs up. The cruiser pulls off the highway. The door opens and a large over weight man with white hair gets out. We hear him breath, sense his exertion just getting out of the car. SHERIFF THURMOND CALL.

Call spits tobacco once into a Mason jar he is carrying, then sets it on the car's roof and starts for the truck. He is wearing a uniform and carrying a long, heavy flashlight. As he gets to the truck he turns the flashlight on and shines it in the window.

Glimpses of bodies, through the rain and the steam on the windows. Sheriff Call stands still, watching. He watches a little too long before tapping on the car window.

SHERIFF CALL

Move it.

The sweaty couple fumble with their clothing and drive off. Sheriff Call spits another wad and heads back to his car. From behind his car, we see a hand holding a worn, much-used, fishing knife. A man's voice behind him. A friendly voice.

VOICE

Thurmond?

The sheriff turns, startled, and as he does we see the fishing knife flash once in the dark and then go deep into the sheriff's lower stomach. The sheriff sags, but the knife holds him up.

VOICE (CONT'D)

How's that, Thurmond? That feel about right, does it?

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

CLOSE UP Thermond Call, looking into the face of the man who has killed him.

VOICE (CONT'D)
Just hold on a little bit, Sheriff,
then you and myself, our bid'ness
is all done.

2 EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY -- DAWN 2

The sheriff's car, still standing in the rain. The headlights have yellowed, and the wipers move in spasms across the windshield.

3 EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY -- DAWN 3

Crows.. literally the early birds.. picking at the body.

CUT TO:

4 EXT. LATELY COURTHOUSE -- EARLY MORNING 4

A small-town courthouse in the background. A statue stands on the grass outside, a likeness of Sheriff Call. A crow.. a live one, is perched on the statue's head. We read the inscription:

SHERIFF THURMOND CALL, 1901 - 1965

We hear a WHISTLE, then a voice, a strong European accent:

VOICE
Okay, everyone out now...
(another whistle)
Everyone out.

CUT TO:

5 INT. SWIMMING POOL -- DAY 5

GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA, 1969

SHOT FROM ABOVE: An Olympic-sized swimming pool, with lane markers painted onto the bottom. While a dozen other members of the swim team are coming out of the water, a single swimmer continues what he's doing, moving effortlessly through the water. JACK JAMES.

Jack progresses looking at an alligator along with the words UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA painted on the bottom of the pool.

A whistle blows; the sound echoes through the enclosed building.

VOICE

Okay, I say, everyone out...

Jack touches the side, turns, and heads back across the pool again. The whistle blows, several times now, in quick bursts.

The camera moves to the source of the noise, COACH HIMMLER. A tall, blonde, muscular man wearing a University of Florida baseball cap and a sweat shirt. He blows the whistle again, hard.

Getting no response, he follows Jack from one end of the pool to the other, blowing his whistle in short bursts, again and again, getting more angry as he goes.

CLOSE-UP: Jack's face. A trace of confusion. Water washes over it as he swims.

COACH

(screaming)

James! You cannot hear the damn whistle? You are deaf now, are you?

We hear the narrator, calm and very reasoned.

NARRATOR

At six o'clock in the morning of a cold, February day in 1969, I refused to leave the University of Florida's pool. In doing so, I forfeited my swimming scholarship. Coach Himmler was a German-- the kind Hitler had in mind, I think-- and always on guard against even the suggestion of rebellion.

Whistles, screaming. Other swimmers watching Jack James, alone now in the pool. Himmler is turning beet red blowing his whistle, following Jack alongside the pool, now clearly homicidal. Their eyes meet. Jack smiles.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

I had no excuses. Not for my refusal to leave the pool, and not for the act of vandalism a week later which resulted in my expulsion from the university.

(CONTINUED)

Beat, Jack swims, Himmmler blows his whistle again, although by now realizing it won't do any good.

COACH

(to other swimmers)

You see? He has no commitment to the team. You see?

The swimmers look at each other, enjoying the show, but at the same time afraid of Himmmler.

CLOSE-UP of Jack, swimming.

NARRATOR

All I can tell you is that morning in the pool, the noise began to bounce off the walls and the ceiling in a way I couldn't follow back to the source...How Can I tell you this? I was afraid that somehow I'd been scattered. That I wasn't intact...

Jack walks through the small brick building, its walls lined with PHOTOGRAPHS telling the story of Moat: beauty pageants and car accidents, as well as the James family in the passing years: WORLD WAR appointed to editor of the paper, young Jack holding a large fish, etc. --

A woman in her 30's/40's, neither beautiful nor homely but ambitious as hell, ELLEN GUTHRIE, steps out of the Ladies Room, fixing her skirt. Smiles at Jack as she walks by, then stops, realizing who he is.

ELLEN

You're the son who's not a writer, aren't you?

(shaking his hand)

I'm Ellen Guthrie. I'm new here.

JACK

Jack.

Jack stops right outside his father's office. A PLATE ON THE DOOR READS: "W.W. JAMES -- EDITOR"

VOICES can be heard inside the office. Ellen studies Jack. The heat making her blouse stick to her chest. She blows air down her chest, for Jack's benefit.

ELLEN

Well, if you need me for anything,
I'm down in the copy room.

JACK

I'll come find you.

ELLEN

Okey dokey, then.

She winks and walks off, swinging her hips as she does.

World War, a little grey in his hair. He is a portly, civilized man with wonderful manners. He is the sort of man who asks concerned, polite questions and then never quite listens to the answers. He reads an article from the Miami Times to a pair of REPORTERS:

W.W.

(reading:)

"...All members of the fraternity were cleared of charges in the death of the boy. It was ruled an accidental drowning. These things happen. Whirlpools are dangerous. Fraternity brothers at the University Of Miami are not murderers. But star quarterback Kent De Ponce couldn't sleep for twelve weeks straight. He couldn't erase the image of his hands holding the boy upside down and kicking underwater until all the kicking stopped..."

(looking up)

The fraternity's lawyer got a court order banning Ward from coming within a hundred yards of the house. Ward figured the hundred yards trigonometrically and waited just outside the boundary seven days a week. One night he was attacked by a half dozen of them, took fifteen stitches in the eyelid and went right back two hours later until this quarterback kid got drunk and spilled the whole story...

7 CONTINUED:

The TWO REPORTERS shake their heads and sigh. W.W puts the paper down and we get a good look at the names in the byline:

"BY YARDLEY ACHEMAN AND WARD JAMES"

W.W
(shaking his head)
That boy of mine is gonna get into
some real trouble one of these
days!

He says it full of pride. His expression changes when he notices Jack at the door. The REPORTERS exit as Jack walks in...Closes the door behind them.

8 INT. W.W.'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

8

W.W.
(more disappointed than
authoritative)
No scholarship means no University,
Jack. And this ain't exactly the
least competitive country in the
world.

JACK
I'm aware of that, dad.

W.W.
How the hell did you manage to get
kicked out? What did you do this
time?

JACK
(shrugs)
Nothing.

W.W
Nothing. What am I gonna do with
you?

JACK
I could drive the delivery truck.
Take over the paper route.

This takes W.W. by surprise. He didn't expect Jack to suggest it on his own. Father and son study each other:

JACK (CONT'D)
It's how Ward started, isn't it?

(CONTINUED)

W.W
(nods, careful)
Yessir. And now he's top dog at the
Miami Times. But you're swimmer,
Jack.

JACK
Not anymore. I can't afford it.

W.W watches his son. Sighs. And we

CUT TO:

9 INT. JACK'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT 9

Jack pastes Ward's latest article in a NOTEBOOK, along with all the others (A college frat house expose, an in depth investigation of activist's arrests, etc.)...Neatly catalogued...

He places the notebook inside a SHOE-BOX containing all his precious things: an old fishing hook, a PHOTOGRAPH of himself with his MOTHER, smiling, and (wrapped in an antique cloth) his mother's ENGAGEMENT RING...

10 INT. TRUCK -- DAY 10

Jack driving, slowing for a turn back onto pavement.

11 EXT. ROAD INTERSECTION -- DAY 11

A small park. A baked, treeless circle cut into a stand of pines. Two outhouses with a picnic table set between them, much too close to the outhouses for picnic ambience. A marker indicating the spot where the first school in the county had once stood; the hand-painted sign attached to the men's privy welcoming Yankees to Moat County. The truck slows, coasts through the STOP sign, and then heads out onto the two-lane highway.

NARRATOR
Each morning about ten-thirty, I
passed the now-famous intersection
where Sheriff Call had been
stabbed, and then a mile up the
highway, the spot where he finally
died.

The truck blows past the spot.

12 INT. TRUCK -- DAY

12

Jack looks at his watch, then back at the road.

NARRATOR

How Sheriff Call made his last mile, sixty-four years old and dragging his intestines, and where, for that matter, he thought he was going, was and is an enduring mystery to the citizens of Moat County.

13 EXT. LATELY -- DAY

13

City limits sign:

LATELY -- POP. 5,460

Lately, the county seat. Small buildings, a county courthouse with an American flag flying from the roof, a Florida state flag beneath it. Bars, a couple of churches, a Sinclair gas station on the corner. A set of railroad tracks leads along Moat Street, right through the town's heart, past the Moat Cafe, the roofline of which is supposed to resemble a castle. A small grassy park, with half a dozen statues standing in the sun.

We follow Jack's truck as the narration continues, but pauses on the statues.

NARRATOR

And faced with this mystery, and all its uneasy implications, the citizens of Moat County did what people have done since time began: They built a statue and tried not to think about it anymore.

CLOSE-UP of the statue of Thermond Call, covered with bird shit. The sheriff is dressed in his uniform.

The truck continues down Moat Street, turning finally in front of a building:

THE MOAT COUNTY TRIBUNE

The truck heads down a narrow, bumpy alley and turns into the loading dock of the newspaper.

13 CONTINUED:

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

There was no mystery at all, of course about who had done the killing.

CUT TO:

14 EXT. FLORIDA STATE PRISON -- DAY 14

The prison sits in an open field, surrounded by two fences, 10 yards apart, razor wire at the top. Between these fences roam large bad dogs -- Dobermans, German shepherds, mixed breeds. Dogs with terrible scars and missing ears and eyes.

15 INT. FLORIDA STATE PRISON. DEATH ROW -- DAY 15

HILLARY VAN WETTER, pale and fit, with blond hair and colorless eyes -- lies on his death row cot. Several pages of an unread LETTER by his side. His icy glare scrutinizing every inch of A PHOTOGRAPH In which a woman in her 30's stares back at him. She's vulgar but very sexy. There's a frankness in her face, as if she feared nothing. And this makes her somehow happy.

Hillary presses the photograph against his crotch and closes his eyes, producing a MOAN that is more animal than human...

He leaves the wrinkled picture and brings the letter to the cell bars...Unnerving even when he's calm:

HILLARY

Arthur, you still alive?

16 INT. ARTHUR'S/HILLARY'S CELLS -- SAME 16

ARTHUR, his tall, baby-faced black neighbor, comes up to the bars. Hillary stretches his scarred, muscular arm as far as it will go and hands Arthur the letter.

Arthur smells the pages -- knowing it comes from a woman, even before he begins to read...

HILLARY

What's it say?

ARTHUR

Says...

(reading:)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

"If the warden would allow me, I would suck your shaft as they strap on the electrodes, to hold you in my mouth as you come and go, so that the last thing that you felt would be my lips around your gland."

Arthur looks up and smiles, pressing his face into the bars to catch a glimpse of Hillary --

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Man, I don't think she thought that all the way through.

HILLARY

(unamused)

What else does it say? Letter's four pages long...

Arthur drops the smile. Looks over the rest of the letter...

ARTHUR

(summarizing)

Says she would like it if you wrote her back and wonders what you think of her likeness.

(pleads)

Let me take a look, Hillary.

HILLARY

You write her back and get us another picture, not only can you look at it -- I'll let you come all over it.

A small two-bedroom: a rickety fan, a make-up table with every possible beauty knick knack and a perfectly made bed. The decor is deliciously kitsch.

In the living room, a barefoot CHARLOTTE BLESS sits at the table, sorting her mail. Charlotte is about ten years older than in her photograph, but maintains her shapely figure -- excessive just in the places where excess is attractive.

She's still in her work clothes -- U.S. Post Office uniform, unbuttoned at the top -- the heat is sweltering.

A TV SET keeps her company: "The Avengers" is on...She pours herself a tall iced tea. A letter catches her eye.. the return address reads..

"FLORIDA STATE PRISON, STARKE, FLORIDA"

Charlotte tears it open..

CHARLOTTE

(reading out loud:)

"Dear Miss Charlotte Bless...Thank you for writing to me about my innocents. It pleases me that a girl like yourself has such an opinion of me. Especially when it's true. Would you send a picture that showed me more of yourself so I could see what I'm talking about? Truly, Hillary Van Wetter...339296..."

(to herself, beaming:)

Why, of course you'll have that picture, sweetie...

She walks over to a STACK OF BOXES against the wall. All of them neatly labelled..last names, first names -- personal files for prison inmates each and every one of them.

A dozen labelled "HILLARY VAN WETTER". A picture of him is pinned to the wall. She deposits the letter inside one of the boxes and we catch a glimpse of its contents, not just letters, but also court transcripts, press clippings, etc..

Half a dozen reporters sit in front of typewriters. ELLEN sits behind on them too. She studies something on her desk, marks it.

ELLEN (WITHOUT LOOKING UP)

Copy...

She holds the paper up, looking at the next story in front of her. An old back man, PETE, asleep against a Coke machine in the corner.

ELLEN (LOUDER) (CONT'D)

Copy!

Pete's eyes open; he scrambles to her desk. She glares at him as he comes.

PETE
Sorry, Miss Eleanore..

ELLEN
Ellen..it's Ellen.

Pete smiles, apologetic.

PETE
I know it, I know it. I'm always
getting you crisscrossed with Mrs.
Roos-a-velt..

As he takes the copy from her, Jack enters heading over to a time machine and punches out. Ellen stops him before he leaves. There is now an authoritative quality to her voice, almost mother-like.

ELLEN
Your father wants to see you before
you leave, Jack...

Jack looks at her again, then shrugs and heads over to his office. He knocks once.

Jack sticks his head in. W.W. sits with his feet on his desk, smoking a cigar, reading a copy of the MIAMI TIMES.

W.W looks up at Jack a moment, then motions him in.

W.W.
Have you spoken to your brother
this week?

JACK
(shakes his head NO,
notices paper)
What's he got now?

World War closes the paper.

W.W.
He didn't mention anything to you
about coming here...

JACK
No

W.W.

He and this other fellow -- Yardley something. They want to talk to Hillary Van Wetter.

Jack sits down.

W.W. (CONT'D)

(almost to himself)

I never cared for the idea much, reporters in teams. I suppose the business is changing. You swim today?

Jack shrugs. World War smiles, knowing what he's about to say is an irritation to Jack.

W.W. (CONT'D)

God's gift to us is talent, our gift to God is what we do with it...

Jack nods, having heard that many times before. W.W. glances again at the newspaper, something uneasy in his manner.

W.W. (CONT'D)

What in hell could he want with the Van Watters and all that mess?

JACK

I don't know.

His father studies his cigar.

W.W.

There's some woman tangled up in this, too. I don't know how, but she led them to it I think. Your brother's a hell of a newspaperman, Jack, maybe the best reporter I ever saw...

Jack nods, not bored or jealous, just acknowledging the fact.

W.W. (CONT'D)

But Pulitzer Prize and all, he doesn't know everything yet.

The old man thinks a moment, more uneasy about the situation all the time.

19 CONTINUED: (2)

W.W. (CONT'D)

There's no reason to come up here
stirring the pot over Hillary Van
Wetter...

CUT TO:

20 EXT. DOWNTOWN LATELY -- DAY

20

A sign at the corner of Main and Palmetto. A public drinking fountain, a bench. The TOWN DRUNK sits on the bench watching nothing, everything. A bus pulls to a stop at the corner, the door opens.

DRIVER (O.C.)

Lately...

A moment later, a man steps off the bus. He is tanned, wearing sunglasses, and he is carrying a suitcase and a portable typewriter. Shorts, some sort of anti-Vietnam T-shirt, sandals. His hair is tied into a ponytail. He steps onto the street, looks up one way and then down the other. YARDLEY ACHEMAN. He watches a very young girl -- thirteen or fourteen -- walking away from him, considers her behind.

The town drunk studies him, pulls slightly away.

Another man climbs off. Younger. Graceful. Carrying two heavy-looking suitcases. WARD JAMES. The two scars next to his mouth don't make him any less handsome.

Ward steps onto the cement. The bus door closes behind. The bus pulls away from the curb, blowing diesel smoke into Ward's face. Yardley has spots a horse tied to a parking meter down the street.

YARDLEY

Jesus Christ

Ward smiles, glances up the street, then at his watch.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

Where is everybody?

WARD

It's Sunday. People stay home...

Yardley looks back at the horse, nods as if this all makes sense.

YARDLEY

You sure that's not our ride there?

(CONTINUED)

Ward smiles, and a black Chrysler turns the corner.

WARD

Here we go.

YARDLEY

A Chrysler...That means somebody here found out about the invention of the wheel.

Ward looks at him, doesn't speak.

NARRATOR

My father had owned black Chryslers for as long as I could remember. He bought a Cadillac once, a convertible, after mother ran off to California with a professor from the junior college, but saw right away that it was a mistake. He didn't want his advertisers thinking that he was making too much money.

The car pulls to the curb. Jack gets out, walks around the car to meet his brother.

JACK

Hey, Ward...

Ward breaks into a grin and hugs his brother effusively. He squeezes his biceps, impressed. The grin does wonders for Ward's face. Yardley stands bored.

WARD

Jack, this is Yardley Acheman...

Jack looks at Yardley, instantly dislikes him. Jack nods, Yardley nods back.

YARDLEY

The swimmer, right?

CUT TO:

Jack driving, Ward next to him, Yardley in back, looking out the window.

YARDLEY

Je-sus...

(then, to front seat)

How long do you think this is going
to take?

Ward turns and looks at him quickly then speaks to Jack.

WARD

Mr. Acheman worries about his harem
when he's away from home.Jack nods, he's gonna hate this guy.. Yardley spots a young
black woman walking along the sidewalk. He leans into the
open window, gawking. Yes, Jack is gonna hate this guy.

CUT TO:

Dinner is finished at the James' house.

A black woman comes through the swinging kitchen door,
dressed in a white maid's uniform. ANITA CHESTER. She picks
up World War's plate, then Ellen's -- bumping gently against
Ellen's shoulder. Ellen reacts. Anita doesn't seem to notice.
She stops dead in her tracks and looks at the food still
sitting in front of Jack.

ANITA

You ain't gonna eat that, are you?

Jack looks at his plate.

ANITA (CONT'D)

How are you going to win all them
swimming races, you don't eat?

JACK

I'm retired.

World War looks at his son a moment, then sips again at his
wine.

ANITA

Don't fresh me and you ain't
retired, Jack. You ain't tired
enough to be retired.

WORLD WAR (TO JACK)

A very intelligent woman...

Yardley stares at her in a vaguely sexual way as she disappears back into the kitchen. Jack notices this. World War doesn't. Ellen Guthrie sits close to World War, picks some bit of food off his sleeve. World War is slightly drunk.

W.W.

How is it exactly that you guys work? For instance, that fraternity story, where the boy was drown in his initiation...

The question brings Yardley's attention back to the room.

YARDLEY

Well, I'm the writer...

World War nods as that sinks in. Anita comes back through the door, takes more dishes. Yardley stares at her. Anita gives him a "what are YOU looking at" look back.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

... and Ward's the nuts and bolts.

W.W.

(nods)

When I was a reporter, we had rewrite men who took the stories over the phone.

YARDLEY

Not a rewrite man, I'm a writer. I'm the one who puts the facts into perspective.

W.W.

(nods politely)

Oh..

YARDLEY

It's a different world, Mr. James.

He looks at Ellen and winks. She is somehow flattered by the attention. Jack stares at Yardley, liking him less all the time. Ellen looks at her watch, speaks to W.W.

ELLEN

I got to go, Sugar. I've got staff evaluations early tomorrow.

She leans over and kisses his cheek, then gets up.

22 CONTINUED: (2)

YARDLEY

(suddenly)

You mind dropping me back at the motel? I'm a little tired myself.

She looks at him, smiles.

ELLEN

Sure.

23 EXT. JACK'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

23

Jack and Ward sit alone on the front porch. Through the window, we can see World War asleep in a favorite chair. They drink long-neck beers, looking out over the street.

WARD

That's some chest on W.W.'s friend.

JACK

(beat)

She's awful. The worst one yet.

Ward looks at him, waiting.

JACK (CONT'D)

She practically cuts his fucking meat. And she's fired four people since he made her managing editor.

Ward nods, thinking it over.

JACK (CONT'D)

And those legs...

Beat, Ward looks at him, waiting.

JACK (CONT'D)

You didn't notice her legs?

(he gestures, indicating short, fat legs)

It's like somebody started to build a coffee table, and then changed their mind in the middle and made it a girl.

Ward shakes his head, has a drink of his beer.

WARD

There's no accounting in for taste, Jack.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WARD (CONT'D)
Not in this family...I mean, look
at that geek from the junior
college Mom ran off with.

JACK
(nods)
Another ponytail...

WARD
(smiles)
Yardley's all right, he's just full
of himself since we won the prize.

JACK
I bet he's going down on her right
now, as we speak...

WARD
(considers that, shakes
his head)
No...He wouldn't do that.

JACK
(as if he didn't hear)
I hope she hiccups and snaps his
neck like a fucking pencil.

Ward smiles at that. They both drink; comfortable, happy.

WARD
You know the first person I ever
wanted to fuck?

Jack begins to smile.

WARD (CONT'D)
Dorothy Kilgallen. Dorothy fucking
Kilgallen...

They begin to laugh.

JACK
Bullshit

WARD
I was four or five years old. We
didn't have television yet. Just
the radio. She was a panelist on
"What's My Line", and whenever I
heard her voice, my little pecker
jumped.

He is laughing so hard now he can barely get this out.

WARD (CONT'D)
I didn't even know why.

JACK
(drunk)
Dorothy Kilgallen?

WARD
(nods)
Then we finally got a set, and I
saw that she was a hundred years
old and didn't have a chin.

Ward wipes tears from his eyes. Jack looks at him, surprised.

JACK
Jesus.

WARD
What?

JACK
You're fucked up.

A moment passes and Ward turns vaguely serious.

WARD
Yup.

They laugh, happy and drunk.

WARD (CONT'D)
Shit, I better be getting back to
the motel.

24 INT. HOUSE -- MORNING

24

W.W. And Jack at the breakfast table. W.W.'s hung over.

W.W.
I wonder who this Yardley Acheman
is...

Jack doesn't answer. The old man sips his coffee.

W.W. (CONT'D)
He seems sure of himself.

JACK
(uneasy)
Ward said they he need a driver.

W.W.

A driver?

JACK

(nods)

Somebody to run errands, pick up court documents, stuff like that. They're going to rent a car in Jacksonville.

W.W mulls that over, not liking it. He sighs.

W.W.

You're telling me I have to find somebody else to drive the north route.

Jack nods, without replying. World War studies his youngest son, then leans back into his seat. He eats his grits. He makes a face.

W.W. (CONT'D)

(shouts)

Anita?

She appears in the doorway.

W.W. (CONT'D)

The grits is cold.

CUT TO:

A greasy spoon. The smell of onions permeates the whole area. It's a business day. Citizens of Lately walk past, going about their lives. The town drunk sits on his bench, a farmer driving a load of pigs stops at the light.

On the other side of the cafe, a newspaper delivery truck has double parked. The back doors are open; Jack is sitting in the cab of the truck, watching as Yardley and Ward maneuver a desk through a narrow door.

The men are clumsy at this. It takes them longer than it should to figure out how to turn the desk to get it through.

YARDLEY

Fuck this, man. We should have hired somebody and expensed the paper.

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

Ward bangs his hand into the wall, the skin scrapes off.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
Oh, fuck, man, my back...

26 EXT. PARKED TRUCK/SIDEWALK -- DAY

26

Jack's arm hangs on the side of the truck door. A Four Tops plays song on the radio. He looks away from Yardley and Ward for a moment to see:

CHARLOTTE BLESS

coming around the corner. Made-up, hair combed, smiling.

Outside her home, Charlotte's looks gain considerably. Time stands still long enough for Jack to be mesmerized by her.

She doesn't mind his stare. She likes making an impression on men. Jack only confirms that her efforts at improving her looks have worked like a charm.

This initial silence between the two of them is filled with magic, underscored by Four Tops singing.

CHARLOTTE
I was looking for the office of
Ward James from the Miami Times?

She says it as if she's used to inquiring about such places. Which of course, she isn't. She looks just about perfect in a tight, short summer dress. Her blonde hair caressing her shoulders. Vulgar, sure, but special.

JACK
I work for the Miami Times as well.

CHARLOTTE
You do? I'm Charlotte Bless.

She stretches out her hand. Jack hops off the truck and introduces himself, under her spell:

JACK
Jack James.
(pointing)
The office is right across the
street. We're just getting settled.

CHARLOTTE
You mind walkin' me to my van?

Jack follows her around the corner to her beaten-down VAN...

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You a little young to be a
journalist.

JACK

I'm really just the driver. But I
do write.

CHARLOTTE

Me too... Letters. I'm pretty good.
What do you write?

JACK

All sorts of stuff.

Charlotte opens the van and Jack helps her with THREE
BOXES...Like the archive files we saw in Mobile:

CHARLOTTE

Like what?

JACK

When I'm really upset I try and jot
down how upset I am.

Charlotte gives him an odd look as they head towards the
office building.

CHARLOTTE

(re:the boxes)

These are my files...

Jack walks in with Charlotte's files, followed by the
archivist herself. Despite the heavy load, Jack is happy.
Yardley drinks a beer. His exhaustion evaporates at the sight
of her. Ward also gets a good look at her. He keeps his
distance:

JACK

This here is Miss Charlotte Bless.

CHARLOTTE

Won't be "Miss" much longer. I'm
engaged to Hillary. We're getting
married.

WARD

I'm Ward.
(surprised)
You didn't mention your engagement
in the letters.

Because this might have changed things.

CHARLOTTE

It only just happened.

YARDLEY

I'm Yardley Acheman. We thought
Hillary and you hadn't met?

CHARLOTTE

Only through pictures. We've been
writing each other several months
now. We understand ourselves just
perfect.

JACK

(tired of waiting)
Anywhere in particular I should put
Charlotte's files?

The office is spacious, with two large windows facing the
street.

YARDLEY

"Files"?

CHARLOTTE

Anything you need to know about
Hillary Van Wetter that's been in
the papers you'll find there.
Includin' our exciting
correspondence.

YARDLEY

My desk.

Jack does as told. Charlotte takes one look at Yardley,
knowing she's already got him on her side.

CHARLOTTE

(to Ward:)
Mr. James, I wanted to thank you
for replyin' to my letters and
helping me get Hillary out of that
hellhole.

WARD

(smiling polite:)

I wouldn't book the honeymoon just yet, but we're going to fight his sentence and the way it came about.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you so much.

WARD

Nobody deserves the death penalty...Not even Hillary Van Wetter.

CHARLOTTE

(disconcerted:)

Surely you mean "Especially not" instead of "not even"...

Ward doesn't correct himself.

Much improved in appearance. The furniture is arranged one desk on each side. Yardley and Ward efficiently sort through Charlotte's massive paper trail. Yardley reads a letter.

YARDLEY

She's a nasty little nutjob. Maybe we took her a little too seriously...

WARD

(not looking up:)

You sure get bored quick.

Yardley grabs the phone and dials. Ward keeps going through the letters...

YARDLEY

(while he dials:)

I'm not gonna get laid too often around here--

(into phone)

Hi sexy, it's me...We got settled in...

Ward finds what he was looking for in the letter he's reading:

WARD

This is interesting...Just like she said, Hillary tells her the knife and bloodied shirt the deputies claim to have found in his house somehow got lost before the trial...

(looking up:)

Let's go over the transcripts of the trial. No judge in his right mind would allow a conviction based on evidence that didn't even exist.

Yardley whispers sweet nothings into the phone. Ward finds a LARGE BOOK in his drawer and tosses it over to Yardley.

YARDLEY

(into phone; sultry:)

Of course I miss you...Especially that...How soon can you come visit?

(flipping through the book:)

Four hundred pages! Am I supposed to read all of them?

(into phone:)

I gotta go.

Jack behind the wheel. Charlotte on the passenger side. The Bee Gees play on the radio. She rolls up her window to avoid messing up her hair. Her tank top offers an inviting view of her cleavage. Jack is acutely aware. Charlotte not only inspires trust in him, she clearly turns him on --

CHARLOTTE

So how come your not in college?

JACK

I was...But something happened.

CHARLOTTE

And what was that?

Jack thinks through. It's not easy to explain:

JACK

I forgot where I was.

CHARLOTTE

You went to college and got lost?

JACK

I didn't get lost. I just forgot where I was.

CHARLOTTE

Same thing.

JACK

No. It isn't...

(decides to tell her:)

I was a swimmer, you see...

CHARLOTTE

Seriously? Me too! I swim like a mermaid. If it wasn't for my damn hair. I just can't stand curly hair. Straight hair gives me class.

Jack watches her, charmed. He knows nothing about hair, but nods all the same. Charlotte lights a cigarette with the dashboard lighter.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

And where'd you lost yourself? Was it a pool or the ocean?

JACK

In the pool at the University of Florida.

(warming up to her attention:)

We had two practices every day, so I was in the water all the time -- and at night I'd dream about it.

CHARLOTTE

Makes sense to me.

Charlotte smokes, listening to his tale. Jack feels compelled to open up to her.

JACK

I'd wake up every day at five in order to be in the pool by six. Somehow my dreams started bleeding into my days -- always swimming -- until I didn't know where I was, if I was still in bed or in the pool.

CHARLOTTE

And they kicked you out because of that?

JACK

Not exactly. This one time I lost my temper so I decided to empty the pool. Which is not as easy as it sounds-- and they called it vandalism.

CHARLOTTE

I don't blame them. Do you often lose your temper?

JACK

Just once in a while.

Charlotte finally sees the PRISON in the distance.

CHARLOTTE

(filled with feeling:)

That place there is full of boys just like you who lost their temper one day.

The car pulls up to gate. A GUARD steps out of the guard shack and leans in:

GUARD

What do you want?

CHARLOTTE

We just wanted to sit in your parking lot for a little while.

GATE GUARD

What for?

CHARLOTTE

(sincere)

Just...

(looking at the prison:)

We wanted to send good vibrations to your prisoners...

As crazy the comment sounds, Charlotte says it with the utmost sincerity. The GUARD assumes she's a loon. He stares at her very promising chest.

GUARD

Sorry ma'am. You can't park here.

30 CONTINUED:

Jack studies an OLDER MAN walking out of the prison. Blond and tough-looking. He seems to be a visitor, but might as well be a prisoner. Later we'll come to know him as TYREE VAN WETTER.

Jack maneuvers the car out of the entrance.

31 I/E. CHRYSLER CAR -- MOVING -- EVENING

31

The prison is behind them two hundred yards away. Charlotte motions for Jack to pull over. She is bent on filling her senses with the vibrations of this place. Jack parks. She stares intensely at the prison, smoking her cigarette:

CHARLOTTE

You know where they keep the death row inmates?

JACK

It all seems like death row to me.

CHARLOTTE

(points:)

At the far end of the right wing over there. Lights are kept on day and night.

(turns to him)

Those boys have the opposite problem you have. In there you can never forget where you are. You can never get lost.

Silence follows. Charlotte watches the prison for a beat.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I bet he knows I'm here.

Another beat of silence. And when she speaks again, there's a romantic tone to her voice. Innocent-like. A tone of seduction, but that's just part of her personality. She feels insecure unless she feels like a seductress.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

People who fall in love outside a normal relationship develop telepathic powers.

She shuts her eyes, as if exercising those powers.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I'm getting horny just bein' this close.

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

Jack observes her. He could almost touch her and she wouldn't stop him, because her eyes are closed. He feels an erection rising between his legs.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

He must be awful horny too, don't you think?

JACK

(speaking for himself)

Yes.

Charlotte opens her eyes. Startled. She wasn't expecting a response.

She looks Jack in the eye, then down to his crotch (we see her reactions) which makes her smile -- clicks her tongue and shakes her head as if saying "This kid!"

CHARLOTTE

Let's go.

He starts the car and they're off.

32 EXT. LATELY -- DAY

32

A large, old building across the street from the county courthouse, and from the statue of Sheriff Thurman Call. Someone has painted a wound across the sheriff's stomach. County prisoners dressed in white prison outfits are out there now scrubbing it off. A plaque at the front of the office reads:

WELDON PINE, ESQ.

33 INT. WELDON PINE'S OFFICE -- DAY

33

WELDON PINE, 70, his white hair shaved half an inch above the ears -- sits behind the desk of his small, yet elegant office. He is the most prominent attorney in the County. An AC unit drops against the window. Charlotte inspects the volume-heavy book shelves while the others sit. Weldon Pine folds his large hands and smiles serenely, surveying his visitors.

PINE

She would be the photographer?

WARD

This is Charlotte Bless, Mr. Pine.
She wrote you that she was coming.

(CONTINUED)

WELDON PINE
(covering, embarrassed)
Of course, of course...

He leans back, closes his eyes a moment, gathers thoughts.

PINE
The best place to start is the
beginning.
(beat, everyone waits)
I was born in this county in 1897
of proud but poor....

YARDLEY
Mr. Pine?

The old man looks up, almost startled.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
You think we could skip 65 years
here, save everybody some time?

Pine doesn't seem to understand.

WARD
Nineteen sixty-five...Hillary Van
Wetter.

PINE
(beat)
I can't agree to speak about that
matter without my client's
permission. He's entitled to his
privacy, like anybody else.

WARD
(quietly, strong)
You have his permission.

Pine turns to face Yardley, then Jack, then back to Ward.
He's fighting off a pack of dogs.

WARD (CONT'D)
(more politely than
Yardley)
He wrote you. A copy of that letter
was enclosed in the envelope you
received from us.

PINE
(nervous, defensive)
I'd have to check that.

WARD

The letter would be in your files.

Jack, watching his brother work.

PINE

That's what you say, but I've got a client to protect...

YARDLEY

(suddenly)

Mr. Pine, if we've got to bring a lawyer of our own up here to get this done, then as long as he's here, we're going to have him look into every aspect of Mr. Van Wetter's case, including the competency of his defense.

The old man sits still, his throat working.

PINE

There's nothing wrong with the defense Hillary Van Wetter got in court.

YARDLEY

(friendlier)

You've got nothing to worry about from us. We just want to talk to him, then we're out of your life.

A look between Yardley and Ward.

PINE

I took that case pro bono. I didn't make a cent off that man.

Charlotte opens her purse, takes out a cigarette and lights it. The old man looks up, watching her.

PINE (CONT'D)

You sent me your picture.

CHARLOTTE

(nods draws deeply)

I'm the fiancee.

WARD

Mr. Pine? You'll arrange the meeting?

PINE

(formally)

I will not accompany you personally, I'll tell you that right now..I have no desire to see Mr. Van Wetter again in this lifetime...that man has took as much of me as I intend to give him.

CUT TO:

EXT. LATELY, CHARLOTTE'S PLACE -- DAY

A large, white house that has been converted into a rooming house. A sign outside:

ROOMS TO RENT

The Rental Car is parked against curb outside the house. Jack is behind the wheel; Ward in the front seat next to him, Yardley in back.

INT. CHRYSLER -- DAY

Yardley sits up looking at his watch.

YARDLEY

(to Ward)

You better have Jack go knock on the door again.

Jack looks at Yardley quickly, something unpleasant between them growing all the time.

Just then the door opens. Charlotte emerges in a yellow dress which does nothing but good things for her body, with modest heels. She's spent a lot of time on her make-up and hair.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

Well, lookit Daisy May.

Jack reacts to that. She walks from the apartment to the car. Ward gets out, holds his door open, climbs in the back with Yardley. Charlotte gets in carefully, not wanting to muss her hair or run a stocking.

Jack watches her, mesmerized. She rolls up her window.

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
(to Jack)
Would you mind? I don't want to
muss my hair...

36 INT. CHRYSLER -- DAY 36

Jack, sweating, driving the road to the prison.

Charlotte suddenly reaches across the seat, turns the rearview mirror so that she can check herself. She smooths some of the make-up on her neck.

YARDLEY
Listen, we got to open a fucking
window back here..

He opens the window about half way. Charlotte turns, her hair blowing slightly in the breeze, and fixes him with a stare. He shakes his head, rolls the window back up.

37 EXT. FLORIDA STATE PRISON -- DAY 37

The Rental pulls into the gravel driveway, stops at the guard's station, then heads off toward the buildings.

38 INT. VISITING ROOM. PRISON -- DAY 38

The group waits in a small room. Clothes damp with sweat. Charlotte, more nervous by the minute -- keeps retouching her hair, make up, etc. She uses Yardley's shades as a mirror, since there isn't one in the room.

Jack can't help but feel jealous at Charlotte's proximity to Yardley. It's a new sensation for Jack..one he's about to start feeling a lot.

The door opens and Hillary appears, handcuffed and shackled. A GUARD holds onto the chain that wraps around his waist and attaches to the handcuffs. It seems as if the room is too small for these two characters -- their exhibition seems more appropriate for a circus arena. The guard points Hillary to a metal chair, alone at the center of the room.

Hillary doesn't take his eyes off Charlotte as he walks to the chair and the guard shoves him onto it.

DEATH ROW GUARD
Fifteen minutes. No physical
contact of any kind.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED:

DEATH ROW GUARD (CONT'D)

No tape recorders, no objects may
be passed to the prisoner.
(he looks at each visitor)
I'll be right outside.

Hillary ignores the guard. From here on he only has eyes for his fiancée. The guard points at the door, with its small window which allows him to look in at any time. Ward makes a quick note of some of these impressions as the guard lets himself out.

39 INT. VISITING ROOM -- DAY

39

Ward waits until the guard is out of the room to speak. Charlotte sits in front of Hillary.

WARD

Mr. Van Wetter, my name is Ward
James. This is my associate,
Yardley Acheman.

Hillary doesn't look at either one. Jack looks at everyone in silence, not wanting to miss a thing. Hillary devours Charlotte with his eyes. Jack feels the jealousy rising again.

HILLARY

(to Charlotte)
You look like your pitcher.

Charlotte smiles, smooths her dress.

CHARLOTTE

(coy)
Thank you, I think...

HILLARY

Do you know them?

Charlotte nods timidly -- like a child.

HILLARY (CONT'D)

And what are they gonna do for us?

CHARLOTTE

(more sure of herself)
They're gonna save you.

Hillary studies the others. Notices the scars on Ward's face.

HILLARY

They can't save themselves.

(CONTINUED)

He turns his attention back to Charlotte. They gaze into each other's eyes as if they were completely alone. Ward starts to say something, but stops at the sight of the raging hard-on bulging in Hillary's pants.

YARDLEY

Mr. Van Wetter...?

HILLARY

(without looking at him)

Shut up. Can't you see I'm busy?

Very busy, indeed. Ward doesn't say a word.

HILLARY (CONT'D)

(to Charlotte)

Will you do something for me?

CHARLOTTE

I wish I could.

Their stare gets more intense now. Jack looks back and forth between the two.

HILLARY

Spread your legs a little bit.

She does as told.

HILLARY (CONT'D)

Now open your mouth...And picture what you wrote me in your letters.

Charlotte's lips part slightly and she wets her lower lip with her tongue. He nods slowly, pushing his hips forward -- pretending to have sex with her mouth, all the while staring at her open legs and open mouth. His pelvic thrusts are short and precise. She responds to his thrusts accordingly with her open mouth --

Jack, Yardley and Ward watch the scene in total silence.

Hillary shuts his eyes, lets his head fall to the side of the chair and shivers. A sharp MOAN follows and then a quick spasm. Charlotte grins, satisfied.

Suddenly the guard rushes in --

DEATH ROW GUARD

(upset)

What's going on here?

He glances around the room and doesn't like the looks of it. The others look back and forth between the guard and Hillary. Charlotte's legs are still spread apart, a dazed expression on her face. The guard notices the wet spot on Hillary's crotch. He doesn't understand what's happened but whatever it is, it's not good.

DEATH ROW GUARD (CONT'D)

I warned you! No physical contact allowed!

CHARLOTTE

The contact wasn't physical, officer. It was telepathic.

DEATH ROW GUARD

That's not allowed either!
(to Hillary)

Let's go, Hillary. I warned you all. This visit's over.

Charlotte sobs against the passenger window, hair blowing in the wind..not caring if it gets messed up anymore. Jack glances at her baffled, hurt. Yardley sits in the back seat looking amused. Ward remains silent.

CHARLOTTE

I hope this clears any doubts regarding our togetherness.

Ward goes over the trial transcripts. Yardley talks to one of his girlfriends on the phone, beer in hand. Jack reads "Lolita" on the floor by the window.

Ward finds what he's looking for.. motions to Jack..

YARDLEY

(into phone, suave:)
Maybe you could come up this weekend, remind me what I'm missin'.

Ward and Jack get ready to leave.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

(covering the mouthpiece)
Where you going?

41 CONTINUED:

WARD
County courthouse. What Hillary
said was true, the judge admitted
the missing knife and shirt as
evidence.

YARDLEY
(into phone)
I'll call you back, sweetie.
(hangs up)
Pine could've pushed for a mistrial
right there. You want me to come
along?

Ward is walking out the door, Jack holds it open for him.

WARD
I got it. But it wouldn't hurt if
you read the goddamn transcripts.

The door shuts behind them. Yardley is left to feel like an
idiot.

CUT TO:

42 INT. COUNTY COURTHOUSE -- DAY 42

Jack and Ward walk up the hall and then into a door marked:
SAM ELLISON, PUBLIC INFORMATION

43 INT. ELLISON'S OFFICE -- DAY 43

Ellison is a white-haired man in his 60s. He sits behind his
desk, looks at Ward's business card.

ELLISON
The Times...

WARD
Yessir.

ELLISON (LOOKS UP)
You're World War's boy?

WARD
Yessir.

(CONTINUED)

ELLISON

(smiles)

The most contrary man in Moat
County...What may I do for you
gentlemen today?

WARD

It's about Sheriff Call.

Ellison nods, waiting.

WARD (CONT'D)

I understand that some physical
evidence relating to the case was
lost.

ELLISON

(pleasant)

Yessir, I believe there was.

WARD

We were wondering what sort of
explanation the department might
have.

Beat, Ellison looks at Jack.

ELLISON

I don't believe I caught your name.

JACK

Jack James.

ELLISON

The swimmer...You going into the
family business too? World War must
be a very proud man.

Ellison smiles, Ward smiles too. Jack doesn't.

WARD

(pleasant, determined)

Mr. Ellison, what happened to the
shirt and the knife?

ELLISON

I wish I knew.

(beat)

Mr. Van Wetter once cut off a
deputy's thumb, did you know that?

(beat, he looks at one,
then the other)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ELLISON (CONT'D)
Over a traffic ticket, as I
remember.

Ellison looks at his own hand, then drops the thumb until it
is pressed against the palm.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
You can't do much without your
thumb. It's what separates us from
the primates.

Ellison stares at his hand, working the fingers.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
A little thing like holding your
wife's titty...

Beat, he looks up suddenly, directly at Ward.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
Your not married yet, Mr. James are
ya?

Ward shakes his head no, something in this vaguely unsettling
to him.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
(looks at hand)
A little thing like that, and you
can't do it.

WARD
Maybe I could talk to somebody who
was there.

ELLISON
You can talk to whoever you want,
as long as they'll talk to you. But
they won't. You got to keep in mind
what Hillary done.

He puts his hand on his chest and tries to cup his own breast
through the shirt.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
You can poke a titty...
(beat, He looks directly
at Ward again)
but they don't like that, you know.
They like to have them held. You go
poking around all the time, before
long they won't have you to touch
them at all.

43 CONTINUED: (3)

Ellison looks up and smiles at Ward.

ELLISON (CONT'D)
Then where would we be?

Something going on; Ward is uncomfortable with this, trying not to show it.

CUT TO:

44 INT. VISITING ROOM. PRISON -- DAY

44

Charlotte, Yardley, Ward and Jack wait to see Hillary. Charlotte wears tight jeans and smokes.

The same safety measures as last time follow, but quicker now, until Hillary is let inside the room, handcuffed and shackled.

DEATH ROW GUARD
(not wanting to waste any spit:)
You all know the drill.

Hillary stares at Charlotte head to toe and hesitates. The Guard SHOVES him onto the chair. As if Hillary wasn't sure of wanting to sit down.

WARD
Mr. Van Wetter, if you don't mind, I'd like to call your attention to the night Sheriff Call was murdered...

HILLARY
(to Charlotte:)
Where's your dress?

She is surprised by the comment.

CHARLOTTE
(insecure)
You don't like me like this?

Ward raises his voice slightly, insisting:

WARD
Mr. Van Wetter, we don't have a lot of time here.

(CONTINUED)

HILLARY

Don't talk to me about time. I'm the one locked up.

(to Charlotte:)

Everybody in here wears pants, how am I supposed to tell you apart from them?

CHARLOTTE

(softly)

I'm sorry.

WARD

Can we move on now, Mr. Van Wetter?

HILLARY

Seems to me one way or another you're gonna move on. You're the type who won't give up until you get your way, aren't you Ward? Have many people stood in your way before? Is that how you got them scars on your face maybe?

Silence follows. Hillary seems to shut down. Jack can't understand why everyone takes so much from Hillary. How can this prisoner wield such power over them?

WARD

You told Charlotte in your letters that you were working with your uncle Tyree the night of the murder. This never came up during the trial, why?

HILLARY

My credibility wasn't so hot at the time.

WARD

What kind of work were you doing?

HILLARY

Lawn work.

YARDLEY

As in grass? You were mowing lawns at night?

HILLARY

Something like that. We've been known to pick up a little extra work here and there.

44 CONTINUED: (2)

He stands up now, staring at Charlotte:

HILLARY (CONT'D)
You wear a dress next time, hear?
Or else don't bother coming...

CHARLOTTE
(humiliated)
All right.

Hillary drags his feet to the door, like a man whose trousers have dropped around his ankles.

He knocks on the door and the guard comes in, surprised.

DEATH ROW GUARD
You're entitled to another seven
minutes, Hillary.

HILLARY
You can have 'em.

Hillary turns one last time to study Ward. Ward looks right back at him, saying nothing -- but making it very clear that the truce is over.

46 INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

46

Anita serves dinner. Jack and his father and Ellen sit at the table, Jack only playing with his food.

W.W.
So how is Mr. Van Wetter today?

JACK
(shrugs)
It's hard to say with him.

W.W.
Still innocent?

Jack shakes his head; World Ward waits. Finally...

JACK
If he is, it doesn't look like he
got any help proving it. Not from
Weldon Pine, anyway.

Ellen looks up sharply. Jack considers his dinner. World War thoughtfully chews a bite of food, glances at Ellen.

(CONTINUED)

W.W.

(to Jack)

Weldon Pine is a respected and beloved man in this county. You do not earn that overnight.

(beat, Ellen nods)

It could be said, you know, that I didn't do anything either, that I didn't even employ Mr. Van Wetter's death sentence to offer my customary railings against capital punishment.

The kitchen door opens and Anita Chester comes through, carrying a pitcher of iced tea. She looks at Jack's plate, then at him.

ANITA

You going to eat that or torture it?

JACK

(smiles)

Not hungry.

ANITA

(chuckles)

You love sick. I know who you sniffin around.

ELLEN

Anita, please stop teasing him.

Jack rolls his eyes, embarrassed. Anita picks up his plate, and in doing so spills a glass of iced tea onto Ellen Guthrie's lap. She jumps, furious. Anita wipes at it with a napkin.

ANITA

(calmly)

I'm sorry, ma'am.

(beat, she wipes at the spill)

It's just ice-tea it won't stain.

Ellen takes the napkin away from Anita, wipes herself. Anita picks up Jack's plate and goes back into the kitchen. Ellen watches her, still angry. World War looks at Ellen. He smiles.

W.W.

She's a fine woman.

46 CONTINUED: (2)

ELLEN
I'm sure she is.

World War turns back to Jack.

W.W.
What were we talking about?

CUT TO:

47 INT. OFFICE -- DAY

47

Ward going over documents, deep in thought. Yardley on the phone with a girlfriend in Miami. An open beer on the desk in front of him.

YARDLEY
Why don't you come on up for the weekend, then?

Jack sits on floor by the window reading a copy of LOLITA.

VIEW OUT THE WINDOW: Charlotte arriving in her van.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
I would, but I can't get out of here right now. I'm right at the crucial stage of the story.

Yardley looks up, sees Jack watching him. Yardley winks.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
No, but I can barely concentrate on it thinking of you.

The door opens, Charlotte comes in. She is brisk, full of energy. Wearing a new dress.

Jack's in love.

Yardley -- annoyed with the girlfriend who won't come up. Ward continues to study. She goes to his desk, looks over his shoulder.

CHARLOTTE
Anything new?

YARDLEY
Okay, well, try..
(beat, he listens)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

I've got to go now, something's
come up...I'll call you later
tonight.

Yardley hangs up the phone. Ward smiles up at Charlotte in a
polite way, but not liking the intrusion. She leans down,
touches a paper on his desk.

WARD

(to Charlotte)

You mean did the governor call with
the pardon?

CHARLOTTE

We've got to hurry this up. Every
night Hillary lies in that prison
is a night off his life.

YARDLEY

Maybe you ought to forget saving
killers and just write country
western songs.

She turns and stares at him. He laughs.

CHARLOTTE

Everybody in the world isn't
stupid, Yardley. And even if they
were, it wouldn't make them any
smarter, working for the Miami
Times.

Yardley laughs even harder.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I'll tell you something else. I
don't think you laid half the girls
you pretend to.

Yardley stops laughing.

YARDLEY

Why don't you have Jack take Mrs.
Van Wetter here swimming or
something so get some work done.

CHARLOTTE

You didn't even know who Hillary
Van Wetter was until I wrote you.

Yardley nods having heard all this before. She stares at him,
disgusted, and then at Jack.

47 CONTINUED: (2)

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Well?

CUT TO:

48 EXT. ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH -- DAY

48

Noon. The sun shines bright. Charlotte lies face down on a towel, chin resting on her hands. A hat protects her from the sun rays. Jack lies next to her, trying to read his book, but contemplating her body instead. A little ways off, a group of young women sit around a cooler, drinking beer.

CHARLOTTE

(into the sand)

You know, I don't believe I like newspaper people very much.

Jack looks at her, doesn't answer. She lifts her head. Charlotte unhooks her bikini top, letting her breasts move freely in their cups. Jack can't help but stare.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

(whiles she's unhooking)

Excuse me, but they are so ignorant.

Jack stares at what he can see of her breasts.

JACK (CONFUSED)

Who?

CHARLOTTE

Strap marks. They look like white trash.

Jack accepts this without further comment. She studies him a moment.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

(grabbing the book)

"Lolita"? Porno, I suppose.

Jack smiles and shakes his head. She returns the book and studies the girls drinking beer. She feels Jack's stare on her body. But it doesn't bother her. Her tone when she speaks is friendly, almost maternal:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Jack, you need a girlfriend.

She smiles, beneath her hat.

(CONTINUED)

Charlotte shifts her body, propping herself up on her elbows. From this angle Jack can almost see her nipples. Charlotte has terrific breasts for her age. Jack is transfixed, getting more and more aroused. She turns again, and catches him staring. She looks at the girls drinking beer.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You ought to go over there and introduce yourself.

Jack looks quickly at the girls. One of them notices him, stares back. She says something, another of them laughs. Jack shakes his head no.

JACK

I'd rather stay right here.

CHARLOTTE

You want me to suck you off don't you?

(not giving him time to answer:)

You don't have to answer, I know you do. Don't hold your breath kid. I'm not about to let a friendship go to hell over a blowjob.

Charlotte lowers her sunglasses to her nose. She looks the girls over again.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Go over there. Pick out one that bites her nails, she'll blow you. I promise.

JACK

I don't want somebody like that blowing me.

CHARLOTTE

It's a good thing you're not in prison. You wouldn't have any choice in there.

JACK

I can take care of myself.

Jack stands up, angry, and heads off into the water. She turns and watches him dive into a wave.

49 EXT. BEACH/OCEAN 49

Jack disappears into the first wave that crashes, as if he wanted to vanish from the world. The ocean swallows him for some time before coming to the surface.

50 EXT. BEACH -- CONTINUOUS 50

The girls drink their beer, gossiping and laughing. Charlotte keeps tanning herself, her back to the ocean.

51 EXT. OCEAN -- LATER 51

The girls watch Jack quickly swim farther and farther into the sea until he's way in there.

Suddenly Jack stops. Something is wrong. He feels something wrapped around his neck and pulls it off. It's a JELLYFISH TENTACLE...He looks at his arms, covered with them. Jack desperately treads water, finding himself completely surrounded by translucent Jellyfish.

JACK
(panicked)
Oh My God.

Frightened, he dives under the surface and starts to swim as fast as he can towards the shore. Despite his state, he shows what a great swimmer he is.

We hear Jack's BREATHING, speeding up as the effort becomes more pronounced. By the time he reaches the shore he can barely breathe.. as if in the middle of a full fledged Asthma attack.

He walks down the shallow end, all the while staring at Charlotte who's facing away from him. He staggers towards her weakly, like a drunk.

52 EXT. BEACH/THE GIRL'S GROUP -- CONTINUOUS 52

The girl who was biting her nails looks up from the drunken group...At least two dozen empty beer bottles around them...She studies Jack.. realizes something isn't right.

53 EXT. BEACH -- MOMENTS LATER

53

Jack staggers like a zombie towards Charlotte. This is the image that best describes how he feels about the dynamic of their relationship. She still can't see him. Jack can't bear the thought of dying before seeing her. And before seeing those magnificent breasts.

His entire body is covered in translucent tentacles, wrapped around his neck, legs and arms. His skin is swollen and bright red. He reaches a point where he can't walk any further. Stops. Waivers. And topples face-down on the sand.

54 EXT. BEACH -- CONTINUOUS

54

Led by the nail biter, the group runs over to Jack. Nail biter kneels next to him and turns him over, her attitude not just curious but somehow professional. Realizing what's happening to him, she brings her hands to her face, horrified (we'll get a good look at the bitten nails here).

NAIL BITER

(to the group)

He's having an allergic reaction!

(to one of them)

Call an ambulance!

The girl rushes off as nail biter leans into Jack:

NAIL BITER (CONT'D)

(into his ear)

You're having an allergic reaction.

Can you hear me? An ambulance is on its way.

The commotion makes Charlotte stir in her sleep. She looks over to see what's happening, groggily, and fumbles with her bikini straps.

One of the girls rubs sand on Jack's legs, another one massages his arms.

NAIL BITER (CONT'D)

I know it hurts. I'm a nurse.

JACK'S POV -- the girl, her bitten nails her beer breath...Everything spins around him.

Charlotte rushes over, alarmed, her face still puffy from sleep and her breasts spilling out of her top:

(CONTINUED)

CHARLOTTE

What have you done to him?

NAIL BITER

We didn't do anything. He got stung
by a jellyfish.

GIRL 2

Not one, a million of them, he's
stung all over.

NAIL BITER

(all business:)
Name?

CHARLOTTE

(frightened)
Charlotte Bless.

NAIL BITER

Not yours -- HIS!

CHARLOTTE

Listen, girlie -- No need to talk
to me like that. His name is Jack.

Nail biter takes one look at Jack and then Charlotte, hooks
her thumbs into her bikini bottom and pulls it aside.

NAIL BITER

Listen Jack. We're gonna have to do
something a little embarrassing
here. So you gotta hang in there.

Jack nods lightly, his eyes swollen shut. Nail biter crouches
over him and starts peeing over his body --

CHARLOTTE

What do you think you're doing you
pig?

NAIL BITER

He's poisoned. The uric acid will
help

(to the others)

C'mon girls. The way y'all been
going, you gotta be just about
ready to burst.

The GIRLS find this amusing, one of them laughs, nervously.
They're all much too young for Charlotte to like them.

CHARLOTTE

(assertive)

Look here, I can see he's poisoned,
but you don't take a piss on
somebody when a snake bites them.

Several GIRLS have joined the piss party.

NAIL BITER

Lady, urine is full of uric acid
and that's exactly what he needs.
And for your information, jellyfish
are not reptiles.

(to Jack:)

Honey, I have to do this on your
face, it's very swollen.

CHARLOTTE

(getting ready)

I'll take care of that! He doesn't
like strangers peeing on his face.

Charlotte pulls her bikini bottom aside and crouches over
Jack's face. An AMBULANCE SIREN can be heard in the distance.

Jack wakes up in a dark room. An IV DRIP hooked up to his arm
A HEART MONITOR keeps track of his progress.

ANITA CHESTER

(concerned)

Jack?

Jack turns to see Anita seated beside him. Ward sleeps in a
nearby chair lightly snoring.

JACK

Anita, what are you doing here?

ANITA CHESTER

What do you think I'm doing here?
Shut up and lay back down.

JACK

I smell awful.

ANITA CHESTER

Yeah, well.....

Jack shivers, cold --

55 CONTINUED:

JACK
And I'm freezing...(louder to wake
his brother) Ward?

Anita leans into the bed and covers him with a blanket.

ANITA CHESTER
And stop screaming. He's been here
the whole night. Let him be. You
scared the mess out of us.

56 INT. OFFICE -- MORNING

56

Jack walks into the office. Charlotte, Yardley and Ward are already there. Ward going over transcripts, Yardley having a beer. Charlotte is dressed in a pretty new dress and is checking herself in a compact mirror.

Yardley smiles at him when he comes in.

YARDLEY
Congratulations, man, you made the
paper.
(reads)
"Fast Action Saves Lately Man at
Beach..."

Jack nods, doesn't respond. Yardley reads:

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
"The nursing students apparently
saved Mr. James's life by urinating
over the many areas of his body
which were attacked. A companion of
the victim, Miss Charlotte Bless of
Mobile, Alabama, said that the
victim's arms and legs were covered
with stings, as well as his back
and chest, buttocks, genitals and
face."

Jack looks at Charlotte, betrayed.

CHARLOTTE
(apologetic)
It seemed germaine...

Yardley laughs. Jack turns and looks at him, a vague warning that Yardley doesn't pick up.

(CONTINUED)

YARDLEY

It made the A.P. Wire...You're famous all over the country.

He hands Jack the Moat County Tribune.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

Home remedy.

Jack takes the paper, sees a picture of himself taken after he'd won a swimming meet sitting next to a story which does in fact have the headline: HOME REMEDY.

Jack turns to Ward.

JACK

Jesus, what's World War trying to do to me?

YARDLEY

It's called the newspaper business.

Jack absorbs that for a moment, still looking at his brother then turns and throws the paper in Yardley's face.

Yardley, furious, stands up and comes around his desk, pointing his finger at Jack.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

You little bastard.

Jack doesn't say a word. He waits until Yardley is close enough, then grabs him in a headlock and wrestles him to the ground. Yardley is helpless. Jack is very strong. Yardley makes pitiful noises. Jack squeezes as hard as he can, his face going red.

Charlotte: looking slightly bored.

WARD (O.C.)

Jack, c'mon, that's enough. You're going to hurt him.

Jack looks up and finds his brother standing over him.

WARD (CONT'D)

Jack? Let him go.

He looks at his brother a moment longer, then lets go of Yardley's head. He sits back against the wall, exhausted, more emotionally than physically.

Yardley gets to his feet. Furious now, but also afraid.

YARDLEY

(pointing)

You are fucking crazy.

(then, to Ward)

I want him out of here.

Jack looks at Ward; Ward doesn't answer.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

He's a time bomb. The next thing,
he'll be in here with a shotgun.

CHARLOTTE

All he needs is to get laid.

YARDLEY

All he needs is a fucking
straightjacket.

CHARLOTTE

He's sexually repressed.

YARDLEY

No, sexually repressed is a 40-year
old woman who starts this whole
crusade to free prisoners so she
can give the entire prison
population of North America a hard-
on.

A sudden, chilling silence.

WARD

C'mon...let's all calm down.

YARDLEY

Fuck calm down, I want him out of
here.

Ward looks at Yardley a long moment.

WARD

He stays.

The confrontation passes, and in this moment we see clearly
who is in charge.

WARD (CONT'D)

Jack, let's go to the prison.

Yardley and Charlotte begin getting ready to go.

WARD (CONT'D)
 (to Yardley and
 Charlotte:)
 You both can stay and keep arguing.
 This time I'm talking to Hillary by
 myself.

CHARLOTTE
 If I'm not there with a pretty
 dress, he won't even look at you.

WARD
 Too bad for him, then. The waiting
 is over.

Yardley and Charlotte are a little baffled by this. Jack follows Ward out the door, not happy about leaving Charlotte there with Yardley.

CUT TO:

57 EXT. PRISON PARKING LOT -- DAY

57

Jack sits in the parked rental car. Waiting. Gets a glimpse of prison life: the INMATES in their recreation hour...ARMED GUARDS watching their every move...And over by the fences, the pack of dogs pacing back and forth. All of it scary in its seeming routine.

58 INT. VISITING ROOM. PRISON -- DAY

58

Hillary, cuffed and shackled as usual, talks to Ward. Part of his trademark swagger is gone. Ward is clearly the one in charge of this particular conversation:

WARD
 According to the forensic report,
 Sheriff Call was stabbed between
 two and three a.m. that night...

HILLARY
 Like I told you, me and my uncle
 were doing lawnwork in Ormond Beach
 at the time.

WARD
 "Lawnwork" meaning stealing?

HILLARY
 Yessir, stealing sod off a gold
 course.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HILLARY (CONT'D)

Developers pay through the teeth for that. We sold it and didn't even make it back to the river till sunrise.

WARD

What kind of developers?

HILLARY

Condos.

WARD

You got a name, an address? You gotta give me something here.

HILLARY

We don't keep books on that kind of stuff.

WARD

The deputies found the sheriff's body around six a.m. The way he was killed makes everyone assume it was you.

HILLARY

Yeah, well.. we ain't the only ones carry machetes around here.

WARD

(checking his notes)

First they went to Tyree's house and he told them he'd been home all night in bed. He's got a whole bunch of family members there to confirm it. Then they go to your house and find the bloodstained shirt and knife.

HILLARY

Every knife and shirt I own is stained in blood. It's what I do for a livin'.. gutting alligators for their skin. I was a bachelor..I had nobody to do my laundry. They never matched the blood to the Sheriff's, did they?

WARD

No. They say they lost them. But things do get lost sometimes.

HILLARY

You say so.

WARD

If you didn't kill the Sheriff, who do you think did?

HILLARY

Your guess is good as mine. The son of a bitch wasn't liked by nobody in Moat County.

WARD

(nodding:)

You have to tell me how to find Tyree.

HILLARY

I don't think he'll talk to you. He denied everything back when it happened.

WARD

Why is that?

HILLARY

Shit, he's scared of being in here. He's a mammal, that's all.

WARD

Just tell me how to find him.

HILLARY

Where's my woman?

WARD

Next time she'll come by herself.

HILLARY

That's more like it. To find Tyree you got to drive up Honeymoon Lane...

Sizzling heat. The pavement is boiling hot. Yardley loads a suitcase and a beer cooler into Charlotte's van. Charlotte waits behind the wheel. Yardley climbs in the passenger side.

60 EXT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

60

Jack watches Yardley and Charlotte through the window. He speaks to Ward without taking his eyes off them.

JACK
(bothered)
I still don't understand why both
of them have to go. After the way
he talked to her.

Ward studies a COUNTY MAP laid out on his desk, tracing Hillary's directions.

WARD
Charlotte isn't one to hold a
grudge. She'll be his driver.

JACK
But why?

WARD
We both got our license suspended.

JACK
What for?

Ward grabs a can of INSECT REPELLENT and tosses it at Jack:

WARD
Spray this all over yourself, that
place has gotta be full of bugs.

Jack does as told.

WARD (CONT'D)
We'd finished this one article one
night and celebrated a little more
than we should've...This cop pulled
us over and we were drunk as
skunks.

JACK
I didn't even know you drank.

WARD
A lot of things you don't know.

61 EXT. HIGHWAY -- DAY

61

The rental car zooms past the familiar intersection from the opening of the story, with its hand painted sign reading:

(CONTINUED)

61 CONTINUED:

"MOAT COUNTY EXTENDS A WELCOME HAND TO YANKEES!"

With its picnic area and so forth..The site of the murder..

The rental car keeps going down the two-lane highway until it reaches an old rad sign, dented and full of holes from shotgun pellet:.

It reads: "HONEYMOON LANE".

62 E/I. RENTAL CAR/DIRT ROAD - MOVING -- CONTINUOUS

62

They turn onto the narrow dirt road..hitting bumps and holes...MARSH WEEDS at window level...the car constantly bouncing up and down. Ward looks out the window and checks the map.

JACK

No one can live back here.

WARD

It's the way Hillary said to go.

JACK

And you fell for it..

Ward gives him a look. The road suddenly dead-ends against a large pond. A PATH leads towards a row of trees.

JACK (CONT'D)

End of the line.

He shuts off the engine. Ward climbs out. Heads for the trees. Jack follows.

63 EXT. WETLANDS -- DAY

63

The moss-covered trees tower around them. Their overgrown roots rising above the eroded soil. As Ward ventures in deeper, Jack pauses to take in the sights. A little further in, the ground beneath their feet is flooded in water. A CLOUD OF MOSQUITOES hover. Jack sprays himself some more, but they immediately stick to him like a halo --

JACK

(re: repellent)

It's like they like the shit.

Ward barely grunts as he forges ahead, a dozen mosquitoes on his face. He doesn't even seem to notice.

(CONTINUED)

63 CONTINUED:

JACK (CONT'D)
Still better than jellyfish, I'll
hand you that.

Ward climbs over the trunk of a fallen tree and stops. Beyond him all is water for about fifty feet or so, where a small ISLAND PATCH lies. Two choices here: wade across or head back. Jack jumps over the same trunk as Ward did. A MOCCASIN slithers just above the waterline. Jack stares at the snake.

Ward sees something beyond the island:

WARD
That must be it.

64 EXT. WETLANDS/SWAMP -- CONTINUOUS

64

Jack looks at him and notices he's sunk all the way to his ankles in the mud. He fights off the mosquitoes around him and follows Ward's stare to the house. Spots a TV ANTENNA. A CROW calls out.

JACK
Ward, you're sinking.

Ward studies his feet for a moment and slowly pulls them out. One of his shoes is gone. He reaches into the mud to retrieve it but doesn't find it.

WARD
It's what I figured.
(looking around:)
This whole thing is probably just
floating.

Ward lifts one foot, then the other, and pulls off his socks. Sticks them in his pockets and starts wading across the water. Jack shuts his eyes and does the same. A few yards later Ward is waist-deep in it. Jack watches out for snakes and soon dips into the same hole Ward is in.

65 EXT. WETLANDS/SMALL ISLAND -- MOMENTS LATER

65

They make it to the other side and Ward easily jumps to shore. A moment later Jack is at his side. The clearing they stand on is just about big enough for the two of them.

JACK
You think we ought to go back?

(CONTINUED)

65 CONTINUED:

WARD
What's the point of that?

66 EXT. WETLANDS -- LATER

66

Ward pushes into the thick underbrush, full of purpose. Doesn't even flinch when he scrapes his barefoot toe. A broken branch catches his sleeve and rips it. Yanking himself away from it, another branch scrapes him in the eye. He covers it for a moment, his eye has begun to tear. It's as if his body was immune to pain. The lack of this warning mechanism makes him lack any sense of physical risk.

JACK
Let me lead for a while.

Jack takes the lead before Ward can answer. They walk quietly for a while. The silence is filled with sounds. The water, the mud, the mosquitoes, the branches, the air.. all making sounds. Jack holds branches aside and points at rocks to step on. Ward uses a handkerchief to wipe blood from one of the cuts on his face. Mosquitoes fly off him while he wipes, but settle right back on his face as soon as he's done. Jack slaps viciously at the back of his neck, stunning himself.

JACK (CONT'D)
I'm beating the shit out of myself
here...

67 EXT. WETLANDS/TYREE'S HOUSE -- DAY

67

Ward and Jack emerge from the underbrush onto a clearing among the trees: a vision of apocalyptic beauty.

At the far end of the clearing, a CEMENT HOUSE sits on concrete blocks. Several CHICKENS run around looking for bits of food. A ROOSTER sits on a pile of shingles.

Beyond the shingles is a NYLON LINE which stretches out from the corner of the house to a tree in the patio. A dozen large ALLIGATOR SKINS hang from it.

The front half of the house sports aluminum siding, while the other half is covered with shingles. An outboard Evinrude lies on a blanket in the garage, dismantled. The tools used to dismantle it still lie beside it, completely disordered.

Near the nylon line with the skins, TYREE VAN WETTER works on an alligator. He's 60 years old, but in great shape. He resembles Hillary.

(CONTINUED)

Next to him is a tree stump with an AXE and a MACHETE stuck in it. Tyree takes one look at the visitors then goes right back to his dead alligator.

WARD

Good afternoon. We're here on behalf of your nephew Hillary.

Tyree sticks the knife into the alligator's throat and in a swift downward stroke guts the animal all the way to its hind legs.

He looks at Ward for a beat. This is exactly how the Sheriff was murdered. Ward makes a mental note of all this.

TYREE

You lost your shoes.

WARD

Just one.

Tyree reaches inside the animal and takes out its innards.

TYREE

Lucky it was just the one. Snakes everywhere round here.

As the GUTS continue to fall to the ground, it's amazing to think that they could all belong to a single alligator. The chicken rush over and feast themselves.

WARD

Mr. Van Wetter, we need to talk about Hillary.

TYREE

Isn't it a little late?

It's not clear whether he means the time of day, or the time Hillary has been in prison. The old man grabs the alligator from both ends and splits it open with his bare hands. A crackling noise follows. Jack stares at the animal split in half. He's both fascinated and terrified at the sight. While in Van Wetter territory, Jack is all eyes.

WARD

Hillary's gonna be strapped down to a chair and electrocuted.

TYREE

If you came all this way just to tell me that, you coulda saved yourself the trip.

WARD

Hillary says he was with you the night the Sheriff was killed. Stealing sod which you later sold..

TYREE

Let's hope nobody believes him. Stealing's against the law, ain't it?

They hear sound of a OUTBOARD MOTOR behind the house, the side facing the St. John's river --

TYREE (CONT'D)

That must be Eugene.

(severe:)

I don't care much for you coming to my home to call me a thief.

He gives them a threatening glare and walks over to the house.

At the doorway appear the other members of Tyree's family: A NAKED WOMAN with a NEWBORN CHILD against her hips and a TEENAGE BOY. At the sight of the visitors, the woman scurries back inside the house.

EUGENE comes from behind the house, maybe 30, as brutal-looking as the rest of the family. There's an air of sameness about them. He brings a COOLER in his hands.

Everybody gathers around the cooler as if it was a bonfire on a winter night. The WOMAN, now dressed in rags, hands Tyree a SPOON. The scene possesses the qualities of a ritual.

Tyree opens the cooler and pulls out a CARTON OF VANILLA ICE CREAM. Takes a big scoop. The rest of the family watch him, waiting their turn, like bona fide addicts. Tyree eats ice cream until the carton starts to drip. Nobody looks at the visitors. The ice cream is all that matters.

WARD

(insisting:)

If you were together that night, it's vital for Hillary that you admit it.

TYREE

The only vital thing for Hillary is his own life, friend -- and you yourself said they're gonna take that away soon. What can I do to help that?

WARD

Hillary isn't sentenced to die over stealing sod.

TYREE

Once you're in the pokey, makes no difference what it's for.

WARD

For stealing sod he'd be out in the street by now.

Tyree BELCHES abruptly. Hands Eugene the dripping carton. Eugene greedily snatches it, sick of waiting.

TYREE

(as if he's just made up his mind:)
Yeah, I was with him.

WARD

Where?

TYREE

A golf club in Ormond Beach. We stole the sod and sold it to this one condo developer. Didn't even make it back till the next morning, at sunrise.

WARD

How far from here does Hillary live?

TYREE

(motions with his head)
Up that way a while...

Ward looks over. Catches a glimpse of another construction...

WARD

Do you remember the person you sold the sod to? Did you keep some sort of receipt?

TYREE

(ironic:)

Receipt? What the hell is that?

WARD

Do you remember what time you sold it?

TYREE

It was around four in the morning.

WARD

(changing the subject:)

During the trial did anyone talk to you about that night?

TYREE

I denied everything to Weldon Pine.

WARD

He didn't tell you it could save your nephew's life?

TYREE

Nobody liked Hillary, not even his lawyer. My testimony wouldn't have done nothin' but land me in the pokey.

WARD

So why are you telling me now?

TYREE

After all this time, seems like you're the only person thinks Hillary's innocent.

WARD

I didn't say he was. I still need more details.

The sky grows darker by the second and Jack has the feeling he's the only one who notices.

TYREE

I'll give you a detail: it's getting dark out and your boy is shittin' bricks over there.

JACK

(looking at the sky:)

Let's go, Ward.

TYREE
(final:)
I think you'd better.

The brothers begin to walk back the way they came. The family returns to their ice cream. Ward turns back one last time.

WARD
Has it been a while since you've
seen your nephew?

Tyree rises, upset -- Eugene grabs a BASEBALL BAT, ready to fight.

TYREE
I'm sick of your questions.

WARD
Do you ever visit him in prison?

Eugene takes two steps forward, bat ready. The stance could seem comical, but it's no joke to Eugene.

Ward and Jack head back the way they came. In the dark, every part of the process is worse. Branches whip at their faces.

JACK
The first day I drove Charlotte to
the prison we didn't even go in.
She just wanted to look at it. I
saw Tyree coming out.

WARD
You think they were putting their
story together?

JACK
I dunno.

WARD
They aren't as dumb as they look.
They could be playing us.

They reach the small island and look at the water beyond them, apprehensive.

70

INT. WARD'S OFFICE -- DAY

70

Ward's face is covered with mosquito bites. He works at his desk. Jack stocks the fridge with Miller beer.

Charlotte and Yardley come in. His hand on her back; friendlier than when they left. Jack stares at them, jealous. Yardley, in turn, notices Jack's shirt.

YARDLEY

(to Ward)

What's he doing in my shirt?

WARD

The car broke down. We had to walk into town and he stayed at the motel.

YARDLEY

But what's he doing in my shirt?

Jack looks from Yardley to Charlotte. Something has gone on between them. He opens the shirt, ripping off the buttons. He balls it up and throws it at Yardley's head. Yardley takes a step back, afraid. Jack kicks off his shoes..still frosted in mud.. he steps out of Yardley's pants, and throws them at him too. He stands there, breathing hard, furious, in his Jockey shorts and his socks.

CHARLOTTE

Jack?

No acknowledgement.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Yardley found the golf course.

Ward: surprised. Yardley looks at him, nods.

YARDLEY

Ormond beach...

(beat, he takes out a notepad and reads)

August 20th, 1965, six thirty-five a.m, The grounds superintendent phones the Ormond Beach Police Department to report that four of his greens have been stripped in the night.

Charlotte beams, as if something has been proved. As if Yardley has done something wonderful.

(CONTINUED)

WARD

You talked to superintendent?

Jack walks out of the room.

WARD (CONT'D)

Jack, wait a second.

Yardley watches him go, then returns his attention to his notepad.

YARDLEY

(shakes his head)

He died, but I found another guy. He remembered the club asked the governor to declare them a disaster area so they could get federal funds to replace the greens.

CHARLOTTE

A bunch of old men walking around in plaid pants, still furious that somebody took their grass.

Ward starts to say something, Yardley interrupts him.

YARDLEY

Gets better. I found the builder too. The guy who bought the sod. He remembered them. Hillary and Tyree.

(looks at his notes)

They showed up at six in the morning in a truck. He said he looked at the two of them and what they had and thought they'd stolen it from a cemetery.

Charlotte looks at him, surprised. Ward catches the look.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

Of course, he doesn't want to be connected to this in any way.

Ward studies him, suddenly wary.

WARD

Who is he?

YARDLEY

(sheepish)

The only way the guy would talk to me is if I promised to keep him anonymous.

WARD
(nods)
What's his name?

YARDLEY
It's completely anonymous. I gave
him my word. He's in a position to
get some work for the state.

WARD
(nods)
How did you find him?

YARDLEY
(shrugs)
Building permits...

Ward stands still a moment longer, looks at Charlotte, who is
smiling happily. She turns and looks out the window. Her
expression changes.

CHARLOTTE
Jesus Christ..

Jack's in his underwear. He sits on the elevated bumper of a
four-wheel drive pick-up. Charlotte comes out of the doorway.

CHARLOTTE
Jack?

He stares at her. She moves in closer. She smiles, touches
his arm. Citizens of Lately stare as they pass.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
(quietly)
What are you doing?

JACK
(quietly)
I don't know.

CHARLOTTE
You don't have any clothes on.

Jack's silent. A prim-looking woman stares as she passes.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
(angrily, to the woman)
What are you looking at?
(beat)
(MORE)

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Is this like what happened at
college? Are you lost?

JACK
Something like that.

They look at each other a moment. People are staring.

CHARLOTTE
Jack? Could we go back in now?

She takes his arm and leads him toward the office.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
You aren't the only one who ever
got lost, you know.
(beat, no answer)
It could run in the family.

JACK
(half laughs)
Shit.

CHARLOTTE
For the record I'm not apologizing.
I just can't stand to see you like
this.

Try as he may, he can't ignore her.

JACK
Did you sleep with Yardley?

CHARLOTTE
(dry)
That's my business.

JACK
And Hillary's, I would think.

Because he can't very well say it's his business.

CHARLOTTE
With people like Yardley, it's
better to get them on your side.

JACK
And you fucked him for that!?

CHARLOTTE
(down playing it)
Fucking a man is the most natural
thing in the world, especially if
you end up spending the whole night
together.

JACK
How will you explain it to Hillary?

CHARLOTTE
No need for him to know. Everything
I'm doing is for his sake.

JACK
(sincere:)
He'll get it out of you. He reads
minds Charlotte.

Jack jots something down in his notebook. Clearly Ward's
influence is rubbing off on him. We catch a glimpse:

"Inbred people with baseball bats who only seem to care about
ice cream. Will Charlotte join these savages?"

He opens his SHOE BOX and looks for the ENGAGEMENT RING.
Doesn't find it. Disturbed, Jack tosses the notebook in his
BACK-PACK along with underwear, a toothbrush and his book.
Anita knocks on the door.

ANITA
(peeking in)
Let me make up your room.

JACK
Sure.

She walks in and starts the bed.

JACK (CONT'D)
I can't find Mom's engagement ring.

ANITA
Well, let's look for it.

JACK
I thought I had it in here. Shit.
Has anybody been in here?

ANITA

Not that I know of honey.
(then))
Do you miss her?

JACK

Not anymore.

ANITA

A dis-damn-grace the way she left.

JACK

I'm going to Daytona with Ward.

She nods, covering the fact she's clearly very upset.. as if this is goodbye. She starts to look for the ring.

JACK (CONT'D)

Don't worry about it, I'll find it.

Ward listens on the telephone. Yardley catches quick glimpses, then looks back at his work. Jack sits in the window, watching, drinking a beer.

VOICE ON TELEPHONE

What's left to do? You've been up here a month and a half.

WARD

I'm not comfortable with it, John.

VOICE ON TELEPHONE

That's cause you're a good reporter; it means you're cautious Ward. But from that Yardley's told me, it sounds like things have turned up pretty clear.

Ward stares at Yardley. Yardley is suddenly immersed in the stuff on his desk.

VOICE ON TELEPHONE (CONT'D)

The thing is, you could stay up here the rest of your life and never be sure of every little detail. That isn't our job. Our job...

Ward hangs up the telephone. Yardley looks up, uncomfortable.

YARDLEY

I just thought we needed a fresh perspective. I didn't know he was going to start telling us what to do.

Ward starts up, takes all the stuff on his desk, walks it across the room and drops it on Yardley's desk. He turns and walks out the door.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)

(to Jack)

It had to be done.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Jack, Ward, World War and Ellen sit on the porch drinking wine. We hear the vacuum cleaner running inside.

W.W.

(in his cup)

Your a damn good newspaperman Ward, but you know everything.

Ward looks up at World War. He's irritated as he drinks his wine.

JACK

He knows what he's doing.

W.W.

Shut up. I'm not talkin' to you. He knows how to get stories, but what he doesn't fully appreciate is that the stories go out into a community. They resonate.

The sound of the vacuum stops. World War looks in the direction of the house.

W.W. (CONT'D)

(quietly)

You notice Antia's been acting mighty bossy recently?

JACK

Dad, she's always been that way.

He smiles, reaches for the glass, tips it over. It shatters. He leans over, stares at the glass, then picks up the bottle. Ellen begins to help, he stops her.

W.W.

You'll cut yourself. Let Anita do it.

(beat, to Jack)

She have children? I can't remember...

WARD

Unbelievable. Yes two boys.

He holds the bottle up to the light.

W.W.

Oh yes, that's right.

Anita comes through the screen door a moment later, hurrying, carrying her purse and her work shoes. She is wearing sneakers.

ANITA

Good evening, Mr. James

W.W.

Good evening...

She starts for the steps, but he stops her.

W.W. (CONT'D)

Anita, would you mind taking an extra minute. I smashed a wine glass over here.

She stops in her tracks for a long moment, then turns without a word and goes back into the house for a broom. Ellen watches this, enjoying it. Tired, Ward gives a suggestive look at Jack to leave.

JACK

We're going to Daytona.

Ellen and W.W look at each other. Jack and Ward get up to leave. Ellen nudges W.W.:

ELLEN

Just come right out and tell them.

They look at their father, expectant:

JACK

What is it?.

W.W.

I've named Ellen Editor-in-Chief.

ELLEN

(adds)

And we're getting married.

She holds up the ENGAGEMENT RING to show the boys. Jack, stunned, comes closer to get a better look. Ellen almost thinks he's going to kiss her hand. Jack, in the gentlest of ways, grabs her hand and slides the ring off.

And stares at it.

ELLEN (CONT'D)

(proud)

It's an antique.

W.W

(awkward)

Jack give it back, please.

JACK

(to Ellen)

I know it is. It belonged to our mother.

Ellen is surprised. Ward turns to leave in disgust. W.W clearly didn't tell her. Jack glares at his father. Ellen also looks at her husband-to-be.

W.W

It was a gift from me. Please give it back.

JACK

I'm sorry, dad -- this is all I have of hers. I'm sorry, Ellen.

W.W

Jack, please -- don't make a scene.

ELLEN

I can't accept it. Thank you, Jack.

Jack looks at them both and turns to leave --

JACK

I gotta go...Ward wait up.
(very awkward)
Congratulations.

The bar is packed and noisy. Charlotte, Ward and Jack have drinks at a table.

WARD
(to Charlotte)
Do you remember the builder's
address?

CHARLOTTE
What builder?

WARD
The one that Yardley says bought
the sod?

Jack glances at Charlotte:

CHARLOTTE
Yardley went by himself. I would've
gone with him. I went to the
hairdresser's. The air's so god
damned humid here my hair looked
just Angela Davis.

Ward knocks his drink back. Studies a pair of SAILORS seated across the room. A MIDDLE-AGED MAN is buying them drinks. They seem to be teasing the man, but he doesn't seem to mind. All three very drunk. We can't make out what they're saying, but Ward studies them intensely.

A WAITRESS in a mini skirt comes over to grab the empty glasses. It's clear Ward has drank most of them.

WAITRESS
You thirsty, huh?

Ward doesn't reply. Hands her \$20 and keeps on staring at the sailors as she makes change. One of the sailors catches Ward's stare and stares right back.

CHARLOTTE
(noticing)
You keep staring like that and
we're gonna have a problem.

Ward keeps staring and keeps drinking.

JACK
Maybe we should go someplace else.

77 CONTINUED:

WARD
(calming him down, drunk)
There's no problem, relax.

Suddenly Ward rises, staggers a bit -- and heads for the bathroom. Charlotte watches him walk past the sailors.

78 INT. HOTEL BAR. DAYTONA BEACH -- MOMENTS LATER

78

CHARLOTTE
Your brother's acting strange
tonight.

JACK
He isn't used to drinking like
this.

One of the sailors stands up, comes over to the table. He leans over Charlotte, looking down her blouse.

SAILOR #1
Your friend got a problem with us,
momma?

He smiles, a front tooth is missing. She doesn't answer. He looks suddenly at Jack, then back at her.

SAILOR #1 (CONT'D)
Maybe they got a problem with each
other...They look like a couple
dick suckers to me. We got one over
at our table too, we ought to work
out a trade.

CHARLOTTE
Maybe you could trade bad breath
for more pimples.

The sailor continues to smile.

SAILOR #1
My friend and I got a bet, are you
over fifty?

He laughs at that, and then turns suddenly, putting his face a few inches from Jack's.

SAILOR #1 (CONT'D)
You don't say much.

He turns back to Charlotte.

(CONTINUED)

SAILOR #1 (CONT'D)
You're a lucky old broad, ain't
you?

And with that he struts off.

CHARLOTTE
(shakes her head)
Where's Hilary when you need him?

JACK
Why is Ward doing this? We have
fifty places to visit tomorrow
morning... archives galore to look
over.

CHARLOTTE
(gives him a look:)
Tomorrow morning? It ain't gonna
happen sugar...

Jack pulls something out of his pocket. He holds out his
fist, turns it over and opens the palm. A gift without
wrapping: the ring.

Charlotte studies it.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
It's beautiful.
(realizing)
It's for me?

JACK
I've been meaning to give you a
present for a while.

CHARLOTTE
(awkward)
Jack...

JACK
(pleads)
Please don't turn it down.

She doesn't know what to say. She looks at him as she slides
it on her finger.

CHARLOTTE
Whenever you want it back, just let
me know...
(studying it)
It's beautiful.

79

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

79

Jack asleep in bed. Pounding at the door. He opens his eyes, listens.

CHARLOTTE (O.C.)

Jack get up.

Naked, Jack stumbles to the door in the dark. Opens it, squints into the light. Charlotte is on the other side in a robe, upset.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Something's wrong in Ward's room.

Understanding instantly, Jack grabs a hotel robe. He heads past her and down the hall, half running. She runs after him.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I think it's those sailors.

Jack's foot hits a tray of dirty dishes, set outside someone's room. Glasses and French fries scatter across the floor. He starts to run in earnest, the doors a blur as he passes them.

He stops outside 334. Listens. He hears the sound of a slow, methodical, beating.

Jack throws himself into the door; it holds. The spot where he hit it splinters. He backs up to try again. A noise inside, not a moan or a cry, more like someone trying to talk. Jack hits the door again. It cracks...then opens.

80

INT. WARD' ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

80

One of the sailors stands in the opening, holding a bottle. Blood all over the front of his T-shirt. Behind him, on the floor, is Ward. He is naked and is hobbled in some way and can't get up when he tries. The OTHER SAILOR washes his face and hands in the bathroom sink.

Jack freezes, staring at his brother. Jack and the sailor look at each other. The sailor smiles. He swings the bottle and hits Jack squarely in the forehead.

Jack staggers against the wall. Charlotte comes into the room, all teeth and nails, and rakes one of the sailors across the face.

SAILOR 1

Let's go!

(CONTINUED)

80 CONTINUED:

The sailors start out the door. Jack grabs the second one wrestling him to the floor. They struggle, sliding in Ward's blood.

81 INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- NIGHT 81

The other sailor runs down the corridor. Charlotte chases. People open their doors, look out quickly and shut them again. Charlotte picks up a plate left for room service and throws it, hitting the sailor. She sees a fire alarm and pulls the lever.

82 INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT 82

The fire alarm blares. Jack and the sailor are locked in battle. The sailor brings his knee up, trying to get to Jack's groin, but Jack is stronger and holds on. His arm encircles the sailor's neck, he squeezes. The sailor flails away at him, glancing blows bounce off Jack's face and shoulders. Jack holds on.

CLOSE UP: The sailor's face turning red. One moment he is fighting and the next moment he is limp.

Jack holds on, staring now at his brother, who is looking back at him through his one good eye. His head rests almost peacefully against the floor.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

Jack...

Jack continues to stare at Ward.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Jack I think you're killing him.

Jack seems to hear her now. He looks up. Charlotte is standing in the doorway, breathing hard, scared.

Jack looks down, seems almost surprised to find the sailor there, trapped in a headlock. He stares at him a long moment.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Let go Jack.

Jack lets go. The sailor's head drops like a spilled melon and bounces against the carpet. Jack looks up at Charlotte, then over at Ward. Sirens in the background.

Jack gets to his feet, and moves to Ward. He puts an arm under his chest and lifts him off the floor and carries him, face-down, to the bed. Blood splatters against Jack's foot.

Jack sets Ward on the bed. He unties the tethers made of torn sheets that are tight around Ward's feet. Ward coughs, tries to speak. Jack can't understand.

Jack takes in his brother. Sheared teeth, the cartilage of Ward's nose is flattened and moved sideways until it lies under one of his eyes. His other eye is strangely out of place. There are red marks all over his body, some of them -- where he was stomped. Jack sways.

JACK

What the hell happened?

CHARLOTTE

(gentle)

I don't know. I heard noises through the wall. One of them was laughing. Ward was begging them...

JACK

(surprised)

Begging? He was begging at them?

CHARLOTTE

(beat)

.. to stop...

Jack looks at Ward, tears streaming from his eyes..he rips a curtain from the window and uses it to cover him up.

The room is a disaster: busted furniture and lamps, bloodied carpets, torn bedspreads.

Jack

(quietly)

I'll be right back.

He walks into the bathroom and vomits in the sink. He looks at himself in the mirror. There is a large swelling on his forehead where he was hit with the bottle. He takes a towel and holds it under the water.

84 INT. WARD'S ROOM -- NIGHT

84

Charlotte is sitting on the bed, holding Ward's hand when Jack returns. The sailor has begun to move on the floor. He pushes himself to his knees, holding his throat. He looks up at Jack.

SAILOR #1
I can't breath...

Jack nods, as if that is what he expected. He takes the towel to Charlotte, who uses it to wipe away some of the blood.

The sailor gets up to his knees, still holding his throat. Jack turns suddenly and kicks the sailor in the face. He looks back at Charlotte and Ward.

85 INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT-LATER

85

The room is now crowded. AMBULANCE ATTENDANTS, TWO POLICEMEN and between them the other sailor, whose hands are cuffed. A cop walks toward the bed where Ward is. He is covered with a sheet.

COP #1
(gently)
Mr. James?

CHARLOTTE
(to Cop #2)
They followed him out of the bar.

The sailor between the cops looks at her.

SAILOR #2
That's a fuckin' lie.

The cop standing with him hits him behind the ear with the butt end of his nightstick. The sailor drops to his knees. Charlotte looks at the sailor without pity.

SAILOR #2 (CONT'D)
We didn't follow the faggot
anywhere. He invited us to his
room.

The policeman by the bed looks at Jack in a sad way, then turns back to Ward.

COP #1
Is that true, Mr. James?

(CONTINUED)

JACK
(looking at the sailor)
He's no faggot.

COP #2
Who are you again?

SAILOR #2
Another one.

Jack looks at him strangely.

JACK
I'm his brother.

COP #2
(indicating Ward)
So what's he doing naked?

JACK
It's his room, Maybe he was taking
a shower. Maybe he was in bed..

One of the ambulance attendants speaks. Something clearly effeminate in his voice.

ATTENDANT
I hate this...

Everyone looks at him, but that's apparently all he wants to say. The other attendant stands near Ward, looking at him.

The cop motions Jack to a spot near the door. Jack follows.

COP #2
(quietly)
You know you've got a problem here,
right?
(he looks towards the bed)
What I'd suggest.. it's easier on
everybody if your brother had a few
drinks tonight and went for a walk
down by the beach. Things like this
happen down there.

Jack thinks about it.

ATTENDANT #2
If you don't need us, we got a head-
on out on the highway...

The attendant looks quickly at Ward, then at the cop.

ATTENDANT #2 (CONT'D)
He's all right. He just got beat
up.

CHARLOTTE
(to Attendant)
What's your name?

The attendant is intimidated.

ATTENDANT
I'm only saying, we've got a
possible fatality out on the
highway.

COP #2
(to Jack)
It could have happened at the
beach, the only thing is, in that
case, we didn't catch the
perpetrators.

Jack glances again at Sailor #2, who is scared now..bleeding
and his jaw is swollen beneath his ear.

JACK
They were going to beat him to
death.

COP #2
These things happen down at the
beach...I'm telling you what to do.

Jack looks again in the room.

JACK
What about the assholes that did
this?

COP #2
(shrugs)
Even if we set him free tonight,
sooner or later, somebody will take
care of them.

SAILOR #2
(overhearing, scared)
Lookit, maybe we got a little
carried away. He wanted it.

Jack looks at him, then back at the cop, what is going on?

86 INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

86

Over black we hear:

DOCTOR'S VOICE

His spleen is ruptured. We had to
remove it.

CHARLOTTE

Let's go back to the hotel and rest
for a little while.

JACK

(to doctor)

When can I see him?

DOCTOR

Tomorrow. We have to perform
reconstructive surgery on his face.

JACK

What?!

DOCTOR

87 The best thing for you to do is get
some rest. Go home.

87

87 INT. HOTEL HALLWAY/CHARLOTTE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

87

TWO HOUSEKEEPERS clean up the mess in Ward's room: One of
them carrying a pile of bloodied towels, the other one
cleaning the carpet. The busted door leans on the wall, off
its hinges.

Jack and Charlotte have to walk past this scene in order to
enter Charlotte's room (it is right next to Ward's).

88 INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOTEL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

88

Uncomfortable-looking furniture, a bed, a pair of chairs.
Jack's is in a daze (the bump on his head, the extreme
tension, the traumatic sight of his naked, bloodied brother,
and the proximity to death). Once inside the room, he stops
in his tracks. Lost.

CHARLOTTE

Jack? Are you alright?

He looks at her and smiles. He's got caked blood in his hair,
clothes and his fingertips.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

We should've had the doctor take a look at you.

JACK

I'm tired.

He heads to the foot of the bed and falls on it. He covers his head with his hands. Charlotte leans in and kisses his cheek.

CHARLOTTE

(sweetly)

He'll be fine.

Jack nods with a lost look.

Charlotte comes out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel. Wet hair, no make up. Like all women her age, she looks much younger like this. There is little light in the room.

Jack is still asleep at the foot of the bed, curled up in a fetal position. He's in his underwear, sports a lone sock. The rest of his clothes lie nearby. She leans in, protective.

CHARLOTTE

(gently)

C'mon, sweetie, you don't have to sleep all the way down here.

Charlotte lies in bed covered in her towel. Jack hugs her legs, in the exact position he was hugging the pillow when she woke him up earlier this evening. He shuffles up to her chest level, half asleep. They embrace each other:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Go back to sleep.

JACK

Last night when you knocked on my door.. I was dreaming of you just like this.

She thinks that without this show of tenderness, the balance of the day would be much too bleak.

CHARLOTTE

All right, Jack. Just this once, you understand?.... I don't want you obsessed over me.

89 CONTINUED:

JACK
It's too late for that.

CHARLOTTE
(resigned)
You'll hate me later.

FADE TO WHITE;

90 INT. CHARLOTTE'S HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

90

Jack, freshly showered, in his underwear eats breakfast. His face has recovered some of its color, his eyes have lost their fright. Charlotte comes out of the bathroom in jeans and a T-shirt. She wears very little makeup, her hair pulled up. She wears the ring Jack gave her. He loves the gesture.

CHARLOTTE
It's urgent I go to the
hairdresser's. Don't even look at
me.

She sits beside him and serves herself coffee. He seems almost happy.

JACK
Thanks, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE
(reaches for the toast)
The day didn't turn out so bad
after all, now did it?

She says it with absolute simplicity, full of her basic charm.

JACK
(serious, trying to
understand)
I can't understand what the fuck
you're doing with Hillary.

CHARLOTTE
Here we go...

JACK
You don't love him.

CHARLOTTE
How do you know that, Jack?

He is at a loss for words.

(CONTINUED)

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

How do you know anything? You're twenty years old.

JACK

You're not that much older.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah, I am. Look, whatever you're thinking, it isn't practical.

JACK

I'm not as practical as a convicted murderer.

CHARLOTTE

He's not guilty, Jack. That's the whole point.

JACK

That's not the point. That's not the damn point.

She looks at him, getting angry.

CHARLOTTE

For Christ's sake boy.

JACK

What?

CHARLOTTE

Hillary isn't so bad. And I'm not so good either.

JACK

(sincere)

You are wonderful.

He's not trying to flatter her. It's simply what he feels.

CHARLOTTE

The thing is, you bring out the best in me. But there's another side to me. A side you wouldn't like but that I can't deny..and that side gets along extremely well with Hillary.

Charlotte tries to explain her traits in the most accessible manner.

JACK

What is this nonsense of splitting
yourself into sides?

CHARLOTTE

Your brother would understand.

JACK

(awkward)

What does Ward have to do with
this?

CHARLOTTE

He also has his dark side. And I
don't mean just him being a fag...

His furious interruption is frightens her.

JACK

Don't ever talk about him like
that!

CHARLOTTE

(apologetic)

I have nothing against fags. I'm
very liberal.

JACK

Just drop the fuckin' subject.

Jack gets up and finishes dressing.

CHARLOTTE

What are you doing?

Jack looks at her, distant and disappointed

JACK

Going to the hospital.

Jack enters to find his father sitting by Ward's bed. World
War is uncomfortable in this situation, not knowing how to
behave. He has a long look at Ward, assessing the damage.
Ward turns suddenly and catches him staring.

W.W.

(recovering himself)

I tried to call your mother.

Ward nods. Jack looks out the window.

W.W. (CONT'D)
(to Jack)
Did they catch them?

Beat, it takes Jack a moment to lie.

JACK
(shakes head)
No. The police said there's been a
lot of it down by the beach.

The room is quiet again.

W.W.
(to Ward, false optimism)
How long before they let you go?

Ward shakes his head.

JACK
They'll do some surgery the day
after tomorrow, and they'll have a
better idea then.

W.W.
I can tell you the Times is
worried. I talked to my friend
Larson there, and they're wondering
what they'll do for stories while
you're laid up.

Ward's eyes are closed and he seems to have fallen asleep.
World War reaches out and pats his son's hand.

W.W. (CONT'D)
(quietly)
I'll see you tomorrow.

Jack watches him stand to leave. Neither say good bye.

Jack is seated where WORLD WAR was. He watches his brother
sleep. Jack leans into his face and caresses his cheek with
his lips. Not wanting to wake him. Ward's eye is bandaged:

JACK
(whispers)
Listen to me Ward... I don't care
what the cops think or what
Charlotte or those sailors say. The
only thing I care about is you...
(MORE)

92 CONTINUED:

JACK (CONT'D)
Get better. You're all I care
about.

Ward wakes up slowly. He watches him attentively through the slit in the eye that isn't bandaged. He blinks and tears roll down his cheek. Jack watches him in silence.

93 INT. HOSPITAL, HALLWAY -- NIGHT

93

JACK
(eager)
Hi...

Charlotte is not as accessible as she was earlier. A fence has been built. She nods.

CHARLOTTE
Hi...

Jack suddenly not knowing what to do or say, looks in the direction of Ward's room.

JACK
He seems to be doing better.

CHARLOTTE
Good.

A long beat. Then:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Look, Jack, I've got to go.

JACK
Go where?

She doesn't answer.

JACK (CONT'D)
You don't have to go anywhere you
don't want to.

CHARLOTTE
(smiles, friendlier)
That's not the way it works.

JACK
Why do you have to?

CHARLOTTE
Because I do.

He looks at her, trying to figure out what to say next. She looks quickly at the open door, and when she speaks again her voice is lower.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Yardley called me at the hotel.

This stops Jack in his tracks.

JACK
(suddenly worried)
What did you tell him?

CHARLOTTE
I told him Ward took a walk out on the beach. That the police said it happens all the time.

JACK
(worried)
That's all?
(beat, she shrugs)
And what did he say?

CHARLOTTE
Not much. He asked if Ward was going to make it. When I told him it wasn't that serious, he sorta lost interest.

JACK
I don't think Ward's going to be much help for a while.

CHARLOTTE
Didn't sound like he needed any help.

JACK
What?...Yardley doesn't know it well enough to write it alone...

CHARLOTTE
(shrugs)
I guess we'll see.

JACK
He can't just go off and write it himself.

CHARLOTTE
You know, it isn't just about a newspaper story, Jack.
(MORE)

93 CONTINUED: (2)

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
It's about a person's life. Nobody
seems to remember that. It's about
someone's life.

CUT TO:

94 INT. OFFICE -- DAY

94

Yardley at his typewriter, typing away. A Miami GIRLFRIEND
sprawled on the couch, reads VOGUE. Yardley isn't surprised
by Jack's appearance.

YARDLEY
(without looking up)
How's your brother doing?

JACK
He's been trying to get a hold of
you since yesterday.

YARDLEY
He can't be doing so badly, then.

Jack notices both TELEPHONES are off the hook.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
I didn't want any distractions so I
unplugged them.

Jack looks at the girl --

JACK
Is she unplugged too?

YARDLEY
Tell Ward that other than you,
everything's under control.

JACK
He wants to read what you're
writing.

YARDLEY
As soon as I'm done, He'll be the
first to read it. As always.

JACK
(crystal clear)
He wants to read it before it's
published.

(CONTINUED)

YARDLEY
(frustrated)
Certainly.

JACK
Ward thinks you shouldn't write it yet. There's still details to work out. You haven't discussed tone, implications--

YARDLEY
I knew something like this was bound to happen to your brother sooner or later.. You mind letting me work?

Jack doesn't budge.

YARDLEY (CONT'D)
(whispers)
I got drunk and let him suck my dick once. He was pretty good.

Jack just stares at him. Yardley goes back to typing. Never looking up.

JACK
I promised Ward I wouldn't bust your fuckin head open.

Jack marches to the door, under the steady gaze of the Miami girlfriend.

95 INT. HOSPITAL, WARD'S ROOM -- DAY

95

Ward read's Yardley's story in the Sunday paper. Jack sits in a chair watching.

WARD
He's gonna get off. They are gonna let that man free because of this.

Ward closes his eyes, drops the paper on the floor.

96 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- NIGHT

96

The phone rings. Jack picks it up.

JACK
Hello?

YARDLEY (O.C.)
Jack? Put him on, will you?

Jack looks at Ward, who shakes his head.

JACK
He doesn't want to talk to you.

YARDLEY (O.C.)
(happy)
Tell him that the governor has
ordered an investigation into the
Moat County court system.

Jack moves the phone away from his ear and speaks to his
brother.

JACK
The governor has ordered an
investigation.

No response.

YARDLEY (O.C.)
Ward? Are you on the phone, man?
Goddamnit, Jack, put him on the
phone.

WARD
(stumbles)
He shouldn't have signed my name on
it.

JACK
(into phone)
Did you hear that?

YARDLEY
No. Tell him to get on the phone..

JACK
You had no right to sign his name
you fuck!

Jack slams the phone down.

Charlotte pulls up in her rattling van. Parks. She stares at
the prison, the barbed wire, the fierce dogs. She is overcome
with a sense of impotence and doubt. She looks at her watch
and makes up her mind.

98 CONTINUED:

She's been debating this the entire day. She starts up the van and drives away. The Gate Guard watches all of her actions until her car disappears.

99 EXT. PRISON. STARKE -- MOMENTS LATER

99

Hillary walks out of the prison building. The immense green surface stretching out forever. He walks a few steps past the gate, not wanting the guard to see him wait, glances impatiently in every direction. Waits. He hears the sound of a car zoom by way in the distance.

GATE GUARD

She came, but she left.

Hillary ignores the comment.

GATE GUARD (CONT'D)

Blonde woman, no spring chicken,
but a great set of knockers!

Hillary turns back and gives the guard the worst of his bad stares. He figures the guard is teasing him, jealous.

HILLARY

The fuck are you talking about?

GATE GUARD

Fifteen minutes ago this woman pulled up in her van. It ain't the first time she's been here. She waited a bit, but I think she had second thoughts and took off in a hurry.

The guard can't avoid a sarcastic LAUGH --

HILLARY

And what's any of that got to do with me?

GATE GUARD

I don't know..

Hillary walks towards the guard --

GATE GUARD (CONT'D)

She booked out of here like a bat out of hell!

99 CONTINUED:

99

The guard BURSTS OUT laughing. Hillary is livid. He seems to be about to kill him, like he can't help it -- but PUNCHES the guard shack wall instead -- wrecking the knuckles of his right hand. The Guard's laugh stops abruptly.

101 EXT. JACK'S HOUSE- DAY

101

Jack, shirtless and barefoot, wearing a bathing suit is pushing a lawn mower over the yard. It's a hand mower, no power, and Jack is sweating. The mower catches on specks of dirt or rock, or patches of weeds, and Jack has to stop, back the thing up to free the blade.

The Chrysler pulls into the driveway. World War climbs out one side, Ellen Guthrie out the other.

ELLEN

(smiles in a perfunctory way)

Jack...

Jack nods, not liking her. World War picks up a cooler from the back seat and walks toward the house without closing the car's back door.

JACK

Any luck today?

World War and Ellen give each other a cute look.

W.W

A few bites, you could say...

Jack, mildly nauseated.

102 INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

102

W.W Is no longer as light-hearted as he seemed earlier. He and Jack sit at the kitchen table. He has laid a pumice stone in front of himself, and is sharpening the blade of his pocket knife. Ellen has gone home. Jack reads a newspaper.

W.W

Didn't think it'd be this bad.
First Woolworth's...now that
goddamned Dodge dealership
cancelling their advertising....all
cause of that article... could put
me under.

(CONTINUED)

World War is mad at the world. He wants to be mad at Ward but can't.

W.W (CONT'D)

You know, I heard something...Was there something else that happened in Daytona?

Jack, waiting.

W.W (CONT'D)

There's a story going around..

JACK

There are always stories when something happens.

Jack looks at the knife and the pumice stone again and sees that his father is bleeding.

JACK (CONT'D)

You've cut yourself.

W.W

I heard there was something.. That the police cleaned up the mess.

JACK

Why would they do that? Nobody over there cares who we are.

W.W

I don't know. It's just a story I heard.

JACK

(angry)

From your fiancée?

(beat, no answer)

I don't think you should pay attention to stories about your own family.

World War picks up a napkin and wraps the cut finger.

W.W

It was nothing malicious.

JACK

What did she say?

W.W

Nothing specific..She isn't a
malicious person.

JACK

Then she shouldn't be out repeating
rumors.

W.W

Are they rumors, Jack?

Jack and his father stare at each other, furious. Anita
Chester comes through the swinging door, and begins to clear
plates. When she leaves the room, World War has regained his
composure.

WARD

You know, Jack, I've been meaning
to talk to you about Ellen.

Jack stares directly at him, waiting. World War smiles,
wilting a little under his son's look.

W.W

Nothing big, but there's going to
be a few changes around the
house...

Jack looks away, rolling his eyes.

CUT TO:

Charlotte walks in carrying a bag of her dirty work clothes.
She looks sadder and is heavier now. She pulls out her
WAITRESS' UNIFORM from the bag and throws it in the wash with
a few other garments. The place is dirty and neglected. She
lights a cigarette. Before she's done with the first drag,
hears a KNOCK on the door. She walks over to it,
unenthusiastic and opens it.

It's Hillary.

They watch each other intensely for a moment. Not speaking a
word. His right hand is in a cast.

CHARLOTTE

What happened to your hand?

HILLARY

I punched the guard shack when you
weren't there waiting for me.
Busted all my knuckles.

Charlotte is touched by the information. Hillary shuts the
door behind him. They look at each other. He's extremely
serious. She smiles:

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. I meant to write you a
letter.

HILLARY

If I can have you, I don't need
your letters.

They stare at each other the way they did that first day in
prison. Except now there is nothing to stop them from being
with each other. Hillary devours her lips as his hands run
down her spine and settle on her butt, pressing her against
his body with both his healthy hand and the one in the cast.

CHARLOTTE

I really oughta shower, I'm all
greasy from work...

HILLARY

(overcome with desire)
I don't mind grease.

Hillary tears her clothes off --

They finish having sex for the third or fourth time. They are
drenched in sweat, their skins flush with color. Both are
exhausted and satisfied:

CHARLOTTE

(breathless)
You always fuck this way, like it
was the last time?

HILLARY

It's from death bein' so close for
so long..

105

INT. CHARLOTTE'S APARTMENT. DINING AREA -- NIGHT

105

They're done with dinner. Both half dressed at the table.
Hillary drinks his wine in a hurry:

HILLARY

Grab your things and let's go.

A beat.

CHARLOTTE

Hillary, I'm a city girl. I don't
think I'm gonna like living in the
swamp.

HILLARY

This isn't exactly a palace.

CHARLOTTE

But at least it's dry. I can't
stand humidity.

HILLARY

(lethal)

And I can't stand being lied to.
And you've already done that once!

His words sound threatening --

CHARLOTTE

I wanted to be certain.

Hillary looks at her as if he didn't understand her:

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Why don't we find somewhere else to
live? America is a big place...

HILLARY

Not for us. This dump and that
piece of land by the St. John River
is all we got. All you know is how
to screw and all I know is how to
kill alligators. And that's what
we're gonna do for the rest of our
lives. Together.

In its own way, it's a declaration of love. And that's how
Charlotte understands it.

CHARLOTTE

I suppose you're right...

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED:

HILLARY

Pack your stuff and pack light.

CHARLOTTE

All the same, you should at least think about it. About livin' someplace else.

HILLARY

Don't start repeating yourself so soon, Charlotte!

106 EXT. MIAMI SKYLINE -- DAY 106

Palm trees, the ocean, bridges. An old Ford station wagon drives into town from the north, following U.S. 1.

107 INT. CAR -- DAY 107

Jack behind the wheel, looking around. Palm trees, bathing suits, traffic.

108 INT. MIAMI TIMES -- DAY 108

Ward, sitting alone in an office with two desks. He is wearing a white shirt, buttoned to the wrists and a tie. A patch covers one of his eyes, a scar runs through his lips, down his chin. He is studying the trial documents from Moat County. He looks up suddenly and Jack is standing in the door. Ward beams.

WARD

World War said you might show up.

Jack and Ward stare at each other, Jack taking in the damage done to his brother's face.

WARD (CONT'D)

He's worried.

JACK

I left him a note.

Ward gestures toward the other desk, and the chair behind it.

WARD

Sit down...

Jacks looks at the seat, undecided.

(CONTINUED)

WARD (CONT'D)
Yardley's gone.

JACK
He quit?

WARD
No, he's in New York, signing some
book deal, a hero of the new
journalism.

A moment passes, uncomfortably. Ward smiles again, but there
is something wrong with it, due to the damage to his face.

WARD (CONT'D)
So World War moved Ellen into the
house.

JACK
Whatever.

WARD
Well, as long as he's happy.

JACK
(shrugs)
He spends so much time pretending
to be happy, you can't always tell.

Ward thinks about that. Absently, he fingers the patch around
his dead eye.

WARD
Let's get outta here. I'm tired.

110 INT. WARD'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

110

A dark room, the only light comes in from the street. The
place is a mess. Pieces of the Hillary Van Wetter trial
transcript are all over the floor.

CLOSE-UP: Moat County Court legal documents with Hillary's
name on them. Bits of testimony.

An empty vodka bottle in a corner, empty ice trays left in
the living room.

The door opens, throwing light across the room.

Ward and Jack come in, both of them drunk. Ward more so. They
stop inside the door and Jack finds the light switch. He
surveys the mess.

(CONTINUED)

Ward goes to the couch, sits down heavily. A piece of the transcript catches his eye and he picks it up, begins reading. Jack sits down too, and watches his brother.

WARD

I keep thinking that I missed something. That there was something in all this that I was supposed to see, and I missed it.

JACK

Like what?

WARD

The point of it, I think..

Jack considers that, shakes his head.

JACK

It doesn't matter.
(beat. Ward drinks)
Things got out of hand for a little while. You got hurt and Yardley got his book contract and Hillary's got Charlotte and gone back to the swamp. It's over. Everything's over.

WARD

But what if we didn't get it right?

JACK

It doesn't change a thing. It is what it is.

WARD

(smiles)
You haven't seen it when you get it exactly right, Jack. When you get things down just the way they were.

JACK

You're going back to see Hilary again aren't you?

WARD

(shrugs)
We've got to go up for the wedding anyway..You ever hear from her?

No answer. Jack is still in love, and disturbed by the question.

110 CONTINUED: (2)

WARD (CONT'D)

I wonder what she thinks of him now... can't see her waiting with her spoon for the men to pass the ice cream carton.

Jack stares at his brother. The thought is unimaginable.

CUT TO:

112 INT. COUNTRY CLUB -- DAY

112

A large room, filled now with people. Champagne, hors d'oeuvres, a band. A storm rages outside, but inside the air is humid and warm, and people are sweating. World War walks around the room as he shakes hands, smiles, kisses guests. Happy, drunk. His new wife watches him from a corner, smiling politely.

WORLD WAR

This is the happiest day in my life...My wife, my friends, my dear, my sons...

He looks around for his sons, find Ward and hugs him.

WORLD WAR (CONT'D)

(loud)

Where's Jack? Where's the kid?

Jack sits near the punch bowl, drinking with both hands. He sits next Ellen's father, a worried man who looks at his daughter, across the room.

ELLEN'S FATHER

(drinking)

I suppose she knows what she's doing.

JACK

I suppose she does.

ELLEN'S FATHER

But still it's hard on a father, letting your little girl go...

JACK

(nods, sardonic)

Imagine, how we feel...

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED:

Weldon Pine comes past, walking now on a cane. He has aged in the last months. He stares at Jack, passes into the crowd. Jack watches until he has disappeared.

The camera moves to Ward, drinking champagne. He is getting drunk, and the drinks spills down over the scar and drips off his chin.

Jack glimpses a black woman in a white cook's uniform going into the kitchen. He sits up.

ELLEN'S FATHER

She was always a good girl, head-
strong but good...

Jack leaves him talking to himself.

113 INT. COUNTRY CLUB KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

113

Hot and busy. An enormous WILD BOAR, tonight's main course, sits on a silver tray, in the process of being basted by two COOKS. One of them is Anita Chester. She looks up and notices Jack across the room, and quickly goes back to her work. Jack makes his way through the bustling WAITERS, SERVERS, etc. Until he reaches her --

JACK

(smiles)

Hey. I brought you this.

He hands her the champagne glass. Anita quickly sets it on the table.

ANITA

You're not supposed to be here.
You're gonna get me in trouble.

Jack follows her glance to the KITCHEN SUPERVISOR, a burly man with no sense of humor. Anita tries to walk away from Jack but he blocks her path.

JACK

You work here now?

ANITA

(isn't it obvious)
Unless you get me fired.

Anita goes back to her work. Jack doesn't understand why she's acting this way --

JACK

I figured you'd be happy to see me.

ANITA

(softening up)

Of course I'm happy. Just gone on now. Go back outside.

JACK

I'm going to tell your boss you're a friend of the family.

ANITA

(pleading)

Don't ..please.... And anyway all I did was cook and clean for you boys.. Now I do this.

JACK

Ward's outside. Come say hi.. Please.

Anita looks around nervous.

ANITA

What are you...trying to get me fired? Get your skinny white ass outta here.

This makes Jack smile. This is the Anita he remembers.

JACK

I miss you Anita.

He watches her go back to fixing the boar, watches her intently until she looks at him again. His eyes welling with tears. He notices the Kitchen Supervisor coming towards him -- stops him before he speaks:

JACK (CONT'D)

(official)

I'm Jack James. The groom's son. My father wanted to know what exactly is taking dinner so long?

KITCHEN SUPERVISOR

(put in his place)

It will be ready any minute, sir

Tears roll down Anita's face as she tends her boar.

CUT TO:

114

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - MAIN ROOM -- LATER

114

The band breaks into a rousing tune. The remains of wild boar scattered in plates on tables. The guests dance and talk.

Ellen keeps Ward at her table while she finishes her cake -- They're alone. She gives his arm a meaningful squeeze.

ELLEN

(confidential)

Ward, I understand exactly what you've gone through...

(off Ward's surprised look:)

Because it happened to me.

WARD

What happened to you?

ELLEN

I was raped by two men. Same as you in Daytona.

Ward looks at her. She's too much. Ellen's grows more "understanding" by the second:

ELLEN (CONT'D)

And you want to know how I got through it? By talking about it. It's good to talk about this, otherwise you end up traumatized..You lose faith in yourself. And that -- is worse than rape itself.

WARD

I'm sorry to break the news, Ellen, but I was never raped..

ELLEN

(feeling for him)

There's no need to be ashamed, Ward..

WARD

(matter of fact)

My hands and feet were tied up..

ELLEN

My Lord!

(picturing it)

Naked?

(CONTINUED)

WARD
Head to toe naked.

ELLEN
(scandalized)
Oh...

The WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER suddenly appears before them, camera ready:

WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHER
How about one like this? Mother and son?

Ward and Ellen are forced to pose for an awkward moment... The FLASH blinding them both... The photographer walks off...

ELLEN
(picking up where he left off)
So your hands and feet were bound... And you were completely naked, of course...

WARD
(matter of fact)
Yes. Then I was beaten. But there was no sex involved.

ELLEN
But all of Lately thought..?

WARD
Maybe they planned on raping me afterwards, I don't know. Charlotte and my Jack got there before anything else could happen. So there you have it: just a pure, simple, all-American beating.

Ellen takes all of this in. At a loss for words. Her entire approach has been thrown for a loop. Still, she has to add:

ELLEN
You poor thing. Don't you feel a little better already?

WARD
Ellen, I have to go now. I'm gonna find dad and say goodbye --

114 CONTINUED: (2)

ELLEN
(dropping all politeness)
Where the hell is he!?

115 INT. COUNTRY CLUB - MEN'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS 115

Champagne glasses on top of the urinals, Jack takes a leak while Ernie zips up his pants at the urinals. Father and son wash their hands in the sink. Jack looks pale and clammy.. They are alone in bathroom. This heart to heart might not have happened if not for World Wars's drinks.

W.W
(tipsier than before)
I know you felt a certain way about Ellen early on.. And part of me feels like I stole her from you..

JACK
Are you serious?..--

W.W.
You're young. You'll meet thousands of girls, equal to.. if not even better than her..

JACK
(not vengeful)
No doubt dad.

W.W.
Speaking of which..

He pulls out an ENVELOPE from his tux pocket. Awkward:

W.W. (CONT'D)
(hands it to him)
This came to the office a few weeks back. It's for you.

THE ENVELOPE

is addressed to the "MOAT COUNTY TRIBUNE/ATTENTION: JACK JAMES"... The return address has only the initials: "C.B."

Jack's heart sinks. The letter has been opened and re-glued shut. Jack tears it open.. His eyes dash straight to the signature: "Sweetly yours, Charlotte."

W.W. (CONT'D)
Ellen didn't want me to give it to you.

(CONTINUED)

INSERT: THE LETTER

We hear it in Charlotte's voice as Jack reads it:

CHARLOTTE V-O

"Dear Jack.. I can't believe I'm finally writing you this letter. Or if it will get to you or whether you will even read it. Jack, I think I've really messed up this time. Don't misunderstand me. Hillary loves me in his way. It's me that isn't made for this place, for this lifestyle. I hope I can make it to your father's wedding so I can hear you tell me "I told you so". I never thought a reproach from your lips could give me so much hope. Take care for now... Sweetly, Charlotte."

Jack's face pales even more.. His mind reeling:

W.W.

Are you alright?

Jack doesn't answer:

W.W. (CONT'D)

Please don't mention this to Ellen. She was afraid you'd bring that woman here tonight..

Jack STARES at his father, then turns and exits the bathroom. Leaving W.W. alone, destroyed, he's betrayed both his son and his wife.

SMASH CUT TO:

Jack bolts out of the party..Takes a SWIG from a whiskey bottle.. On a mission.. A moment later, Ward follows him out.

WARD

You're not leaving without me, are you?

JACK

Come on, I'll drive you to the motel -- But then I got somewhere else to go..

WARD
What's wrong?

Jack answers by handing over the bottle. Ward takes a swig and walks with Jack towards the car -- expectant... Jack takes another drink. Jack still not saying anything...

WARD (CONT'D)
You mind me asking where you're going afterwards?

JACK
I'm going to Charlotte's.

WARD
In the wetlands?

JACK
I need to get her out of there!

WARD
And it's gotta' be tonight?

JACK
The sooner the better.

WARD
Charlotte is there out of her own free will.

JACK
Don't matter. Somebody's gotta save her.

They reach their car. Jack sets the whiskey bottle on the car hood and clumsily searches for his keys --

WARD
(reasoning)
I gotta talk to the Van Wetters anyway. Can't this wait till then?

JACK
NO!

WARD
It'll be dark out before you reach the river.

Jack finds his keys and opens the car door --

116 CONTINUED: (2)

JACK
(mumbles)
It's all the same to me.

WARD
I can't let you go there in this
state!

JACK
(daring him)
And what the fuck are you gonna do
about it?

The brothers stare at each other. A meaningful look. Ward knows what this will entail.. Accepting his fate. A long, intense beat... Then:

WARD
If you were planning a field trip,
you should've brought more booze.

Jack climbs inside the car --

117 EXT. ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- NIGHT

117

The swamps stretch all around them. The hurricane winds have slowed down to a steady rustle. The small boat glides under the setting sun. Jack steering, drinking from the bottle and passing it back to Ward.

WARD
Why do you take after the worst in
me?

Jack looks at his brother. Eyes glazed in a drunk stupor. He breaks into a big grin and hugs his him --

JACK
Because your my brother you fag.

Ward laughs. HARD. Jack plants drunken kisses all over his scarred face.

118 EXT. RIVER BANK/BOAT -- DUSK

118

The boat pulls into a bank. Ward hops off. Jack ties the boat to a tree. The sky grows darker around them.

119 EXT. WETLANDS -- MOMENTS LATER

119

Damp and no sunlight here. Jack and Ward make their way through the thick bushes. A HUMMING NOISE grows louder in the distance. Neither seems sure about which direction to go.

WARD

Do you hear that?

Jack stops, listens. They walk further into the swamp. Ward trips on an overgrown root. He loses his balance. He reaches out to hold onto something. There's a sudden POPPING NOISE. Like an exploding light bulb. And just like that, Ward DROPS TO THE GROUND.

Jack runs up to him -- notices the THIN ELECTRIC WIRE fastened to the tree ahead with an insulator --

Ward tries to get up but fails back down. His body still in shock. Like a newborn struggling with its coordination.

JACK

(pulling him up)

Are you alright?

Ward is too stunned to answer. He finds it difficult to just stay upright.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's an electric fence.

WARD

It felt like being sucked into a hole.

Jack looks beyond the fence to see a cement house in a clearing. They duck under the fence and go towards it.

120 EXT. WETLANDS/HILLARY'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

120

Wood plants form a bridge over a creek running across the property. The house itself is similar to Tyree's, but with a large HUMMING GENERATOR behind it. Jack and Ward make their way past a TREE STUMP with a AXE laying on it... Clearly it's used as a chopping block.

Over on the other side are a series of POLES with WIRELINES running across. Gutted alligators are hung there. Also a CLOTHESLINE where Charlotte's bra and panties hang.

(CONTINUED)

120 CONTINUED:

JACK
(under his breath)
I can't believe she lives here...

Ward is thinking the same. It's also hitting him just how dumb an idea it was to come here.

Jack suddenly YELLS out:

JACK (CONT'D)
CHARLOTTE!!

No reply from inside the house. There's a light on. Ward keeps his eyes on the axe.

WARD
(to himself)
This is all wrong.

121 INT. HILLARY'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS 121

Charlotte lies, perfectly still, propped up against the wall. She wears the same dress she wore that first day she came to Lately. The dress she met Jack with. A suitcase sits at her feet. Her dress is torn to shreds, covered in mud and blood. She has a knife wound in her gut. She's dead.

Hillary watches her, torn. Perhaps. This is how he faces problems and pain. His clothes are also ripped. His arms and shirt covered in mud and blood. He lifts his head at the sound of Charlotte's name outside. Stands up sliding the machete into his belt sling.

122 EXT. WETLANDS/HILLARY'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS 122

Hillary comes out of the house. In the dark evening: his appearance seems chiseled purely to provoke fear.

HILLARY
What is it you want with my wife?

JACK
I came back to town.. I just wanted
to say hello..

Ward can't believe the words coming out of his brother's mouth.

HILLARY
A quick hello and a quick poke
while you're at it?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HILLARY (CONT'D)
(to Ward)
How about you? What are you up to?

Ward has made his way next to the chopping block with the axe. He stops and says nothing.

JACK
Where is she? I won't leave until I see her!

HILLARY
She's not here. She's gone.

WARD
Jack, let's go..

JACK
Where?

HILLARY
How should I know?

Hillary seems nearly ashamed. As fierce as always, but without the showy toughness...as if a deep sorrow had obliterated his natural arrogance. The brothers notice this change, especially Ward.

HILLARY (CONT'D)
The last thing she told me was she was going to your father's wedding.

JACK
That's a lie. We've just come from there.

HILLARY
And that's where you should go back to.

Ward comes over to his brother, grabs his arm--

WARD
(to Jack)
Hillary's right. Let's go.

JACK
He's lying!

WARD
That's enough, Jack! We're going. You said everything you needed to say and we heard everything we needed to hear!

Jack breaks free from Ward ..faces Hillary:

JACK
And what about that blood on your
shirt? Whose blood is it?

HILLARY
Stop provoking me and do as your
brother tells you.

Ward grabs Jack's arm and pulls him away. Hillary observes
them argue and whisper..

JACK
(losing it)
He killed her, Ward! The son of a
bitch..

WARD
(sotto; pleading)
Goddamnit.. not here. Let's go to
the boat...

Jack can't help himself. He's reached his breaking point:

JACK
(to Hillary:)
You worthless piece of shit. She
gave you everything and you thank
he by killing her. That's all
you're good for. Killing.

And like milk, Hillary turns, storms straight at them, with
only one thing in mind.. After all, Charlotte would be alive
if it wasn't for Jack...

Ward grabs the AXE --

WARD
(to Jack)
Run! NOW!

Hillary heads straight for Ward.. Ward raises the axe.. Less
afraid than he should be.. Prepared to sacrifice himself for
Jack..

Hillary SWINGS his machete. Ward narrowly avoids it and
starts to circle Hillary.

ON JACK as he grabs one of the alligator POLES (with the
wires) and pulls it out of the ground -- Adrenaline rushing
full tilt. He runs over to Hillary and SMASHES THE POLE
against the back of his knees.

Hillary falls on the mud. Ward takes the opportunity to come at him with the axe. Hillary is in infinitely better shape and rolls over, avoiding the hit. He Jumps back to his feet.

Jack smartly comes at Hillary from the other side and takes another swing with his pole, hitting Hillary in the ribs... outnumbered, but clearly in his element.

Ward watches the axe stuck in the ground and moves to retrieve it -- And that's when Hillary makes his move -- He PULLS Ward toward him, stepping up behind, bringing the machete to his throat.

Jack stops. There's something sexual in the brutal embrace.

Gleeful now, Hillary presses the machete against Ward's throat.. the skin about to give... Ward struggles with his last words:

WARD (CONT'D)
(pleading)
Jack.. Save yourself..

When Hillary draws a thick red line across Ward's throat -- All for Jack's benefit ..And holds up Ward by his hair. Ward's frozen stare looking straight into Jack's eyes. Pleading: "Go."

A moment later, Hillary lets the body drop to the mud with a THUD!

The pole slides from Jack's trembling hands and falls in front of him. His eyes rest on Ward's body. The grotesque pool of blood around his neck seeps into the dark ground, becoming one with it.

Jack turns and runs.

Hillary watches him run into the darkness, in the direction of the river.

HILLARY
(calm)
Where you going Paperboy? There's
no way out of this.

Jack ducks under some low-hanging branches as he runs for his life. The muddy ground slowing him down. Heartbeat bursting through his chest. The thick brush makes it hard to see his next step but he never stops.

123 CONTINUED:

His feet now step into a puddle which turns into the beginning of the river... Beyond him under the moonlight...

Jack runs into the water until he's knee-deep in the river. He dives in and begins to swim.

A moment later Hillary appears in the spot Jack stood in. Stands still. Watching Jack swim.

124 EXT. ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- NIGHT 124

Jack in his element. One with the water. Swimming like he's never swam before. We hear the SOUND OF HIS BREATHING... And now, faintly, the sound of an OUTBOARD MOTOR growing louder.

JACK'S POV: Hillary's boat comes toward him. A lantern at the front, the kind used to spot alligators.

Jack submerges himself back into the water and keeps swimming.

125 I/E. BOAT/RIVER -- CONTINUOUS 125

Hillary at the motor, steering, surveying the water. A SHOTGUN across his lap. A pair of RED EYES appear and disappear at water level.

The boat moves slowly through the alligator-infested waters, A relentless Hillary searching every inch of the surface.

126 EXT. ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- MOMENTS LATER 126

Jack stops. See's the boat gaining on him. Freezing his blood. Jack makes a decision: Submerges himself just below the surface and swims towards the boat.

Sensing him, Hillary cuts the engine and drifts...

When Jack comes up for air, he's on the other side of the boat. The side closest to the shore. And for a very tense minute here, hunter and hunted are but a few yards away from each other in the still of the night.

Hillary doesn't see him...

127 EXT. BOAT/MUDDY BANK -- DAWN 127

One hour later.

127 CONTINUED:

The moon and the sun coincide in the sky. The first few rays of sunlight streak the sky as Hillary pulls the boat onto dry land. Takes one last look at the river and walks through the bushes..

128 E/I. WETLANDS/HILLARY'S HOUSE -- DAWN 128

Hillary walks past the planks and chopping block towards his house. Exhausted and undone by the night's events.

At first glance, everything is just how he left it.

But not quite. Ward's corpse isn't there.

Hillary rushes inside his house. It only takes him two steps to realize Charlotte and her suitcase are gone.

129 EXT. BOAT/ST. JOHN'S RIVER -- DAWN 129

The boat scratches the smooth surface of the river, with Jack and the two people he loved most in his life in it, the people who initiated him into the mysteries of life and love.

The dim light of the early morning, the thick trees in the background and the river, serene as can be -- create an atmosphere that is full of peace.

The sight of Charlotte and Ward isn't grotesque, but rather sedate and almost unreal. When Jack looks at them, it is with profound sadness, but his eyes also reveal the consciousness and depth of an adult:

We FREEZE FRAME on that beautiful image of the boat in the river.

As MUSIC rises, the following TITLES appear superimposed on the screen:

HILLARY VAN WETTER WAS TRIED AND CONVICTED FOR THE MURDERS OF CHARLOTTE BLESS AND WARD JAMES. JACK JAMES WAS THE MAIN WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION.

HILLARY DIED IN THE ELECTRIC CHAIR OF THE FLORIDA STATE PRISON.

JACK PICKED UP WARD'S STORY WHERE HE LEFT OFF. DUE TO ITS LENGTH, IT WAS PUBLISHED AS A NOVEL. BOTH BROTHERS WERE CREDITED AS AUTHORS.

THE BOOK RECEIVED THE PULITZER PRIZE FOR JOURNALISM.

FADE TO BLACK