

THE SHAVE

Written by

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OVER BLACK

A few ticks of silence to read...

"Halfway through the journey of our
life, I came to myself in a dark
wood, for the straight way was
lost." -- *Dante's Inferno*.

Then -- BANG!

A GUN SHOT smashes it.

Animal ROAR from human lungs.

HARD OPEN ON

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Pay close attention.

"Apartment" is generous. A room. A decrepit room.

Gutted walls. A barred window. Torn up linoleum floors. A
stick with deep teeth marks next to a recently fired pistol.

And splayed out at the center --

A MAN DYING. One hand cuffed to a toppled-over chair.

Pool of crimson expanding around him, draining from his
thigh. He sinks his teeth into his undershirt and rips a
swath. Fashions a makeshift tourniquet around his thigh and --

SQUEEZES!

Suppressed MOANS of agony...
This is not a man who shows weakness.
Not even when alone.

PUSH IN towards him. Slowly. His bloodied fingers shake a
cellphone free from his pocket.

Suddenly, an omniscient VOICE: MALE, rugged, introspective --

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
You believe in omens?
(beat)
The past foretelling the future?

A SECOND MAN'S VOICE. Tired, quiet, but with conviction --

SECOND MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

I do.

Keep PUSHING. The Man dials three numbers.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Back in Kandahar, ten minutes before hell broke loose, I did a final sweep of that bomb-makers hut and found his kid hiding under the kitchen in a little panic room...

MOS, the Man mumbles into the phone...

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

He had pieces of dirty cloth jammed into his ears and he was flipping through a picture book of Aesop's Fables...

The phone slips through his wet-with-red fingers...

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

He looked so focused. Like he was willing the whole fuckin world to just... disappear.

It hits the ground.
So does his face.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

When I sat down next to him he was stopped at a fable called, *The Wolf and the Crane*. You know it?

Beat.

SECOND MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Tell it to me.

OFF SCREEN -- the metal CLINK of a zippo opened. A flame HISSES and CRACKLES at the end of a cigarette.

EXHALE...

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

An insatiable wolf scours the forest day and night. Eats anything with a heartbeat...

Look at him for a moment. The face loosening. The eyes glazing. The pain becoming more abstract than real --

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Scum of the earth dive bar.
We're in the farthest back corner where --

Two MALE FIGURES, undefined in shadow, SPEAK at a table.

MAN'S VOICE

Then one day, half-way through a
feast of little does, he gets a
thighbone lodged deep in his throat
and starts choking to death.

Big drag. The BURNING CHERRY an ember eye.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

So he stumbles through the forest
begging for help, and offers a
handsome reward to whoever can
dislodge the bone.

(beat)

Nobody obliges him, of course. The
other animals wanna see him burn.

The BURNING CHERRY floats at us through the dark as the
Figure speaking leans forward. A strip of dirty orange bar
light catches his face and we're looking at --

The same Man from the opener: VIRGIL MARX, early 40's, clean
shaven, eyes full of a certain brutal and hardened wisdom.

He takes another drag.

Exhales...

VIRGIL

At last, a brave Crane takes up the
challenge. He opens the Wolf's jaw,
sinks his neck down his throat as
far as it'll go and digs around
with his beak... Moments later and--

Virgil TAPS his Zippo against a shot glass twice --

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

-- he finds the bone and wrenches
it out. Naturally, the Crane asks
for his promised reward. And you
know what the Wolf says? The
duplicitous fucker.

(beat)

(MORE)

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
*"You've stuck your head down a
Wolf's mouth and taken it out
again, Crane. Isn't that reward
enough?"*

Long beat. Then, the Second Voice again --

SECOND MAN (O.S.)
What was the moral?

Beat.

VIRGIL
I didn't get a chance to find out.

SECOND MAN (O.S.)
Guess.

Virgil almost smiles. Considers...

VIRGIL
Depends, I suppose.

SECOND MAN (O.S.)
On what?

A long suck from his cigarette.

VIRGIL
On whether you think the Crane's
trying to save the Wolf...
(beat)
... Or the bone.

Second Man, still in shadow, moves a bulging envelope across
the table. It catches the dirty light. Packed with bills.

Virgil cashes his cigarette. Then flips through the bill-
edges with his thumb. Covetously.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Either way, it's usually just about
a large pile of money, isn't it.

He pockets the envelope. Pounds the shot glass and stands.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Second the jaws open, I stick my
neck down as far as it'll go.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL RUNDOWN HOUSE - DAY

Bad part of town. Dense, metal-grey sky. Lightening makes blue gashes in the distance. Low growl of THUNDER.

Virgil walks aggressively up an unkempt lawn. In the light of day he looks like the kind of man who has the capacity for good and evil in equal measure. In one fluid motion --

CRACK! He kicks open the door and draws a GUN to find --

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A haze of smoke. Two BLACK MEN (20's) sit on a couch passing a pipe. All eyes look up: red, frantic, high as kites. Notice three PLAGUE DOCTOR MASKS strewn across the coffee table.

POP! -- Virgil FIRES a round into the ceiling. O.S BARKING erupts. He scans his aim around the room.

VIRGIL
Where is he?!

Guy 1 lunges at Virgil, who SLUGS him hard. Drops like lead.

BARKING builds...

Here comes THE DOG. A Pit Bull. Mouth gnashing. Tearing down the hallway. It lunges just as --

Virgil turns. Sends a bullet into its belly.

Canine SHRIEK. It whimpers into a ball.

Virgil catches his breath. Eyes insane now.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
WHERE THE FUCK IS HE?!

A scared finger points. Virgil dashes down a dark hallway.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Pines?!
(beat)
Pines?!

He stops at a closed door. Listens...

FRANTIC COMMOTION. A GLASS SHATTERS.

Virgil KICKS it in to find --

DOUGLAS PINES (18, black, tatted-up, short dreads) halfway out the window. A young WOMAN lies in bed, sheets shielding her naked body.

Virgil beelines it for Douglas and wrenches him back inside. SLUGS him hard across the face. Woman SCREAMS.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
I've been looking for you, Pines.

Another SLUG. Blood drains freely from a subsequent gash on his forehead.

Guy 2 appears in the doorway. Virgil hears him and swivels.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
(gun aimed)
Back the fuck up!

Back to Douglas, who spits a wad of blood in his face. Virgil's eyes widen. Pure, uncut rage.

Virgil wipes the red spit from his face, clutches Douglas' shirt collars and leans in close. Notice the DOG TAGS that drop through his collar and dangle around his neck.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
You think you can fuck with Sueños
Norteenos and go on breathing?

GUY 1 (O.S.)
He's working for the spicks!

Virgil swivels.

VIRGIL
They pay more than you cheap-ass
mother fuckers. Back up!

Back to Douglas. He pulls out a POLICE BADGE. Like a knife.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
(sotto, vicious)
You see this? Do you know what this
means, you little non contributing
zero? It means that I'm God and
you're my creation. You live and
die at the mercy of my whim. You
understand me?

Douglas' eyes struggle to focus.

A beat. Then Virgil shakes Douglas to the fucking core --

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
YOU UNDERSTAND ME?!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. VIRGIL'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

VIRGIL JOLTS AWAKE IN BED

Sweat-drenched. Trembling. Back from some terrible place.

And months have passed...

Evidenced by the large, grey-peppered beard masking his face.

The room is bleak and practically empty.

Several panting breathes, then Virgil drags himself to the edge of bed. Wipes his hands down his face.

MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON a fifth of whiskey poured into a glass. Next to it --

A PHOTOGRAPH of a stoic-looking middle-aged WOMAN.
Next to her: a smiling BOY.

With his left foot dragging slightly against the floor,
Virgil limps with his drink to the --

BATHROOM

-- Where he runs a shower. Steps in. Sips his drink and
silently implores the warm water to clean away bad dreams.

Impressive scars mark his thigh and stomach.

BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Virgil puts on a nice suit, but his disheveled face cancels
any elegance. Finished, he bores into his reflection in a
full length mirror. The thousand-yard stare of a war vet.

LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Virgil limps to the front door. This room, too, is empty.
Leaning beside it -- a cane, which he takes.

EXT. FRONT YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Virgil makes his slow, three-legged way down the cement path that cuts his abandoned lawn in half...

AT HIS CAR, he abruptly stops. Goes ashen. **ANGLE ON --**

THE WINDSHIELD, where a **PLAGUE DOCTOR MASK** is leaning against the glass, its ghoulish, beaked-face staring vacantly at him.

He picks it up and looks around... honest-to-God fear... privy to some warning the mask implies.

CRACK. He snaps it in half. It breaks easily. He limps to the curb-side garbage can and tosses the pieces in.

INT. OLD BEAT-UP STATION WAGGON - MOMENTS LATER

Packed with boxes. A life on the move. Virgil gently places the **PHOTOGRAPH** of Sarah and The Boy on the passenger seat.

He takes the wheel. Squeezes. Knuckles white. A beat.

The old engine **COUGHS** to life and we **CUT TO --**

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Packed, sweaty, closing in on us.

Benches creaking, hushed chatter, paper rustling. Every sound vivid and crisp between these chamber walls.

Virgil stands with his lawyer, blank, unreadable. That thousand-yard stare. And then --

The **HEAD JUROR** (female, 40) stands. Clears her throat.

HEAD JUROR

In the matter of the people of the
State of California vs. Detective
Virgil Jon Marx...

Huge silence. You could drop a world through it. Virgil turns his head slightly to the right. In the background --

A GRIEVING FATHER

GEORGE PINES. 50. A stoic look masking impossible pain.

HEAD JUROR (CONT'D)

... We the jury, in the above and
titled action...

The two men lock onto each other. Electric and inscrutable.

HEAD JUROR (CONT'D)
... Find the defendant...

Virgil turns away. Closes his eyes.

HEAD JUROR (CONT'D)
... NOT GUILTY of the crime of
murder upon Douglas Luther Pines.

He re-opens them. Long beat. See his face. Is that disappointment there? Or something like it.

And in the background --

The Father is gone.

CUT TO:

INT. GEORGE'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON

The dead man's father. Indomitable. His presence fills up any room he occupies.

He's at the dining room table. Spine arched. Elbows planted. Fingers linked. The head held low.

We find him mid-prayer --

GEORGE
(sotto)
... Thou art the living fountain of
hope. So great and so availest,
that whoso would have grace and has
not recourse to thee, would have
his desire fly without wings...

Tired beat. Prayers don't come so easily anymore...

GEORGE (CONT'D)
In Thy name, we gather around the
table for this meal.

He unlinks his fingers and --

CUT WIDE

To reveal that the table is set for two. George on the right. An absence on the left. He's even prepared two plates.

George eats in silence. Occasionally looks up at the empty seat... the plate of untouched food... the person not there.

He almost says something... stops. *That would make it real.*
He stands, clears both plates and walks back to the --

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Where he places them beside the sink and --

Freezes.

He grips the counter and bows his head.
Douglas is everywhere and nowhere.

If George were a different sort of man, this would be his cue to cry. But he's not a different sort of man.

George doesn't get sad. He gets angry --

And -- CRASH! -- as he sweeps his arms across the counter and sends the plates SHATTERING against the wall.

Beat.

He grips the counter again... chest rolling...

Then, slowly, regains control of his breath.

EXT. BARBERSHOP - NEXT MORNING

George slowly approaching.

It's old school. Spinning candy cane Barber's pole and all.
Above the entrance, a SIGN:

"PARADISO CUTS"

He opens a padlock and the outer gate CLANGS upward.

INSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Lights stutter to life and George prepares his shop --

Smocks folded over chairs.
Combs, buzzers, brushes, straight-edge razors lined up on the counter. Sterilizing disinfectants poured into small jars.
A leather blade sharpener unfolded.
Latherizing machine stocked and turned on.
He brews a pot of coffee and pours himself a cup.

Finished, he walks to the front window.

Turns the blinds and a sharp morning light enters the store.
Prison-bar shadows on his face. See him.

Long beat. He sips his coffee.

Then turns around and gets back to the project of living.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A LOCAL FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR

Talking at us. That mildly heroic tone they have --

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR

After two months of dramatic twists
and turns...

B-ROLL FOOTAGE of Virgil wading through manic REPORTERS down
the courthouse steps...

FEMALE NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

... in one of the most convoluted
murder cases in recent history...

We slowly PULL OUT of a TV, on which Virgil steps into his
car, camera desperately trying for a decent shot of his face.

PULL OUT further -- the TV is mounted on the wall of a DINER.
The Anchor's VOICE dissolves into the white noise.

We PAN 180 degrees to find --

INT. MA AND PA DINER - CONTINUOUS

A place where everyone knows your name.

Virgil sits at a booth. A leper in the room. Everyone in the
diner is hyper conscious of his presence.

Feeling it, Virgil takes a final sip of coffee, drops a ten
spot and stands. Looks around.

Beat.

Then, to them all --

VIRGIL

Anybody feel like sharing?

The place freezes. Patrons and Waiters. Only kitchen sounds.

Radio silence.

Then he turns away and all eyes trace him as he leaves.

The door DINGS louder than ever.

INT. BEAT-UP STATION WAGON - AFTERNOON

Virgil. Implacable stare. Drives through a beat-up neighborhood. STREET SCENES pass through his window as if in slow motion:

A FAMILY on a front porch.

KIDS drawing figure-8's with hand-me-down bikes.

A group of YOUNG MEN gathered on a street corner.

EXT. BARBER SHOP - MINUTES LATER

Virgil's car parks across the street from "PARADISO CUTS."

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

He looks at the Barber Shop through the passenger side window. Runs his fingers through his long and dense beard.

Beat.

He lites up a cigarette and --

Watches...

Thinks...

Braces himself for something...

CUT TO:

INT. BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

TWELVE PLUS PEOPLE chatting boisterously, some waiting for a cut, others just there to socialize.

Some inane DAY TIME TALK SHOW plays on a TV in the background. Here we find --

GEORGE AT WORK

Giving VINCE (huge build, 20's) a haircut.

Suddenly, the talk show cuts to commercial and our Local Female News Anchor returns...

NEWS ANCHOR'S VOICE
 In an exclusive interview with
 Channel 7 News last night, Marx's
 mother...

At which point everyone shuts up and turns to the TV, on
 which a sickly OLD WOMAN with a gnarly scar over her larynx
 speaks (MOD) with an ELECTRIC BUZZER to her throat.

NEWS ACHOR'S VOICE
 ...showed her continued support for
 her son's claim of innocence --

But George is already at the TV and --

ZAP she's gone.

CLOSE ON the SCREEN as George turns it off.

The front door suddenly DINGS...

Now, reflected in the blank TV glass, is Virgil Marx.

George turns. Slowly. Head first. Then body.

A palpable HUSH. Then --

Vince is on his feet and moving hard at Virgil...

VINCE
 You must be outta your god damn
 mind.

Virgil doesn't budge.

VINCE (CONT'D)
 You better get the fuck out of here
 before something bad happens to
 you, boy.

Virgil meets Vince's eyes. Their noses almost touching.

GEORGE
 (fatherly)
 Sit down, Vince.

A beat. Every muscle in Vince's body straining against
 physical retribution.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 I said, sit your ass down, Vincent!

Vince holds a moment, then tears the smock from around his
 neck and throws it at the empty chair.

VINCE
(shaking his head)
This is some BULL SHIT right here.

He flips out his cell phone and bumps Virgil's shoulder on the way out. Sharp DING.

As the door shuts behind him, we faintly hear --

VINCE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You're not gonna fuckin believe
what just happened...

-- until he's out of ear shot.

The remaining Twelve Customers sit frozen, barely able to comprehend the situation.

Virgil and George stare at each other. The twenty feet between them seems to buzz with electricity. George barely keeping primal instinct at bay. Finally --

GEORGE
Can I help you with something, boy?

A beat that feels eternal. Then --
Virgil's voice. Surprisingly quiet. Almost feeble --

VIRGIL
I'd like a shave.

GEORGE
I'm sorry, boy, you're gonna have
to speak up!

Virgil breaks eye contact. Moves his gaze. We follow it --

ANGLE ON: A PHOTOGRAPH ON THE COUNTER

Douglas and George beaming. In front of the Barbershop. Arms around each other. Next to the photo are flowers and a cross.

Virgil looks back at George. That thousand-yard stare.

What the fuck is this man doing here? Louder now --

VIRGIL
I said, I'd like a shave.

The Twelve Person audience watches in awe. George is a damn about to break. Long beat. Then --

He finds his better angels.

GEORGE

Sit down.

The Barbershop audience can't fucking believe it. A young man, LOGAN, stands abruptly.

LOGAN

Mr. Pines, you can't be --

GEORGE

Shut your mouth, Logan.

Logan sits.

George walks to the counter and begins to sharpen his razor on a leather strip. Face just as inscrutable as Virgil's.

CLOSE ON the razor sliding back and forth in the frame. The goose bump scrape of a weapon being primed.

Virgil leaves his cane at the entry way and limps to the high chair and sits.

George prepares shaving soap, more meticulously than normal. Cuts slices from a soap bar. Drops them into a container.

He mixes in a bit of warm water and stirs the contents with a shaving brush...

The foam begins to rise.

George pulls out a sheet and ties it around Virgil's neck. The silence of the shop is visceral. The calm before a storm.

George begins to gently apply the warm lather to Virgil's face and throat, careful not to catch his eyes.

Several beats.

He finishes. Retrieves his razor. Briefly thumbs its edge.

Quickly wipes it across his apron and --

BEGINS THE SHAVE

George works his way down Virgil's right cheek. Slowly, meticulously, missing nothing... every hair follicle ripped from every pore. Every scrape loud, crisp, vivid.

All the while, Virgil is quiet. Deferential. Bending to the will of the Barber's hands.

George lifts the dirtied razor from Virgil's face and turns away. Wipes collected foam and hair across his apron.

Beat. Knuckles white on the razor's polished wooden hand.

He stares deep into the now glistening blade and --

CLOSE ON THE RAZOR

Both a tool and a weapon.

Reflected back is a sliver of George's face...

Nose to forehead. And his eyes are beginning to well.

He stifles them. Remember, this is not a man who cries.

Finally --

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Why are you here?

All of Virgil seems to falter. No trace left of the brazen cowboy from earlier. He swallows hard. Choosing his words...

VIRGIL

I need to understand.

George, back still turned, looks up and locks eyes with Virgil in the mirror.

GEORGE

Understand what?

Beat. Virgil's sight turns inward...

VIRGIL

(sotto)

What I've done.

Palpable silence. You could slice it. Every set of eyes glued to the two men. Then --

George begins to re-sharpen his razor on the leather strip...

GEORGE

Logan. Lock the door...

We're closing early today.

Apprehensively, Logan does as he's told. Walks slowly to the door, bolts it, CLICK, flips OPEN SIGN to CLOSED. Then sits.

George guides the blade gracefully along the leather. Up... down... up again...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Why don't I tell you a story,
Detective, about a good kid who
didn't deserve to die.

Beat. Sharpening...

GEORGE (CONT'D)
And when I'm done, you'll tell me a
story, about a badge that
disagreed.

Beat. Sharpening...

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Then we'll decide.

VIRGIL
Decide what?

GEORGE
Your verdict.

ANGLE ON the Twelve Customer Audience. Our *De facto* jury.

Finished sharpening, George thumbs the blade.

Perfect.

Then pivots and returns it to the right side of Virgil's
face. He flicks a patch of hair from his jaw.

See the razor for a moment. Just the razor...

AND THEN THE YARN --

GEORGE (CONT'D)
It's the same story every time,
isn't it. A good kid who falls in
with the wrong crowd.

And down the razor SCRAPES.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
A real pity, too.
(beat)
I've been told his father raised
him the best a single father could.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

An inner city public school. The kind that middle class
America only knows about from 60 MINUTES.

Douglas, sharp, clean cut, a far cry from how we saw him at the beginning, sits in a sea of students taking an exam. He's wholly focused.

GEORGE (V.O.)

Forced him to hit the books like it was God ordained. Become a man of letters. Of Deep. Fuckin. Thoughts. After all, there's only so far a kid can crawl out of the hood if he doesn't wake up in the morning with big questions.

(beat)

Wasn't a half-bad line backer, either...

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Bright stadium lights. Cheering fans. Commands. Banter.

Two rival schools go toe-to-toe.

We enter JUST AS Douglas intercepts a pass and dodges his way into the opposing end zone. Spikes the ball.

Fellow players run up. Jubilant. Bumping chests.

Douglas trots back to the sideline where his COACH slaps him on the helmet. A smile behind his face guard.

GEORGE (V.O.)

Had a sweet little adoring thing, too. They called her Beatrice...

ANGLE ON a black girl in the stands. This is BEATRICE (17, bookish, smart-pretty), a letterman jacket wrapped tightly around her. She only has eyes for Douglas.

GEORGE (V.O.)

Looked like a young Maya Angelou. Everyone said so. Had the very same look in her eye. Like an old lady rocking on a porch trapped in a teenage body...

CLOSER ON Beatrice. George is right. She's an old soul.

GEORGE (V.O.)

Maybe the boy was an old soul, too...

Douglas walks up to Beatrice after the game, takes off his helmet. Two young-love smiles...

GEORGE (V.O.)
Just didn't have the mind yet to
keep up with it.
(beat)
But Beatrice made sure and did
something about that...

SERIES OF SHOTS

Beatrice and Douglas studying in a LIBRARY. She's the boss.

In her BEDROOM, Douglas keeps making advances, but she playfully swats him away. Not until their homework's done.

Up against a LOCKER, the couple holds one another. A small but very real kiss.

GEORGE (V.O.)
The boy's father set aside half of
his nightly prayers just to thank
the Almighty she took a liking to
him...

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Where George's razor stops at the edge of Virgil's jaw line, a swath of clean skin in its wake.

GEORGE
But the streets...

Razor still perched. Barbershop audience dead quiet.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Well, they have a way of catching
up with a brother, don't they? And
when they do...
(sotto)
... it's like quicksand.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Douglas snakes through a rundown, two-story house. Packed to capacity. Thirty plus TEENS drinking and smoking.

A concerned look. And growing by the second. He's searching for someone...

He approaches a small group.

DOUGLAS
Any of you seen Beatrice?

They haven't. He approaches another group. Gets the same answer. His look rapidly evolving from concern to panic.

He steps into the **BACKYARD**. Tons more PEOPLE --

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
B?!

Nothing.

BACK INSIDE

He tours the KITCHEN, LIVING ROOM, DOWNSTAIRS BEDROOMS. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Now he's freaked.

He makes his way upstairs. Party SOUNDS diffuse. Steps CREAK. Suddenly -- A LOUD SCREAM!

Douglas goes full sprint. Stops at the landing and listens. Where did it come from?

Another SCREAM! But cut off half-way through, as if a strong hand caught it in the air.

He chases the noise source. MUFFLED MOANS grow from behind a bedroom door. He tries to open it. Locked.

He shakes the knob. Slams his shoulder against the door.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
B?! B?!

OFF SCREEN, a terrified and strangled SHRIEK.

BEATRICE (O.S.)
DOUGLA --

With all of his might, Douglas kicks the door. CRACK.

It flies open. Quickly, Douglas's face goes from shock to fear and finally to rage. This is what we find --

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Beatrice pinned to a bed by a slender but muscular MAN (early 20's). She's down to her bra and he's half-way through ripping off her pants. The Man looks up just as --

CRACK! Douglas SLUGS him across the face --

Then wrenches him off Beatrice and throws him hard against the wall. Paintings fall to the ground and picture frames topple from a beat-up armoire and shatter.

Despite the Man's build, he's no match for the fury surging through Douglas' veins.

SLUG after SLUG. The Man's nose bleeds freely now. Beatrice rushes Douglas and tries to pull him back --

BEATRICE
Stop, Dougie! Stop!

Not gonna happen.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
Douglas! You're going to kill him!

But Douglas is possessed. Suddenly --

Two new MEN appear in the busted doorway. Tall. Built. And vibrating. They're unmistakably gangbangers. Beatrice turns. Terrified. She knows what's going to happen next --

But wait, reader, we know these two men. They were in the living room at the beginning when Virgil busted in.

They RUSH Douglas full throttle and --

BAM! As Man 1 yanks Douglas by the shirt collar, Man 2 punches him in the stomach. The two then proceed to mercilessly kick his ass. Beatrice erupts --

BEATRICE (CONT'D)
No! Please! Please stop!

But stop they won't. CUT TO --

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Battered and bloody, Douglas is dragged out the front door, Beatrice yelling in his wake.

Down the lawn they take him. Then toss him like a rag doll onto the sidewalk. Barely conscious, Douglas is a limp tangle on the cement.

The entire party has gathered outside to watch the violence.

Beatrice slaps and claws at Man 1. Her nails suddenly tear skin from just beneath his eye and --

He whips around and back-hands her to the ground.

A beat.

CLOSE ON her face... tears cut down flushed cheeks, ruffled hair, a look of dead-end desperation.

Man 1 drags Douglas to the edge of the curb. Kneels. Clutches the back of his neck. In a vicious, sotto voice --

MAN 1
I was thinkin about lettin you off
with a good beating.

He wipes blood from the gash beneath his eye. Examines it.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)
But your bitch just changed my
mind.

He starts to moved Douglas' face closer to the curb edge.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)
Time to bite the curb, nigga.

BEATRICE
NOOOO!!

Beatrice leaps to her feat. But Man 2 catches her around the waist and holds her writhing body.

The entire party watches as Douglas, too broken to put up a fight, allows Man 1 to open his mouth and clamp it around the curb. As Beatrice SCREAMS in Man 2's arms --

Man 1 steps back.

Everyone in the crowd is too scared of these men to protest.

DEAD SILENCE.
An eternity.
Then --

Man 1 lifts his foot, and is JUST about to stomp when --

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
LUCKY!

The Man known as LUCKY turns, foot hanging in the air.

The crowd parts as Beatrice's assailant from upstairs saunters to the curb. He's physically smaller than the other two but far grander in presence. The ring leader.

LUCKY
Let me end this fool, Wolf.

WOLF

Back the fuck off, Lucky.
(uncannily kind)
Can't you see this boy is
terrified.

Lucky steps aside for Wolf, who kneels down and turns Douglas onto his back, head against the curb. He wipes blood from his own mouth, compliments of Douglas' fist.

WOLF (CONT'D)

If it isn't little Dougie Pines.
Beatrice's pet project.
(pause)
She's trying to make you into a
brainy nigga, ain't she?

Beatrice has stopped squirming.

WOLF (CONT'D)

Well let me tell you something
about brainy nigga's...

He leans in real close...

WOLF (CONT'D)

... They're always the first ones
to die.

Douglas blinks heavily. Eyes red and watery. Nostrils and teeth smeared in blood.

WOLF (CONT'D)

But you know what? I'm feelin
strangely generous today. I don't
know what it is. Maybe it's your
face. You've got a nice face to
look at, Dougie. Anyone ever told
you that?

Douglas neither confirms nor denies.

WOLF (CONT'D)

What do you think of my face,
Dougie? You like my face? My mama
always said I looked mean.

Wolf turns to Lucky.

WOLF (CONT'D)

You think I have a mean face,
Lucky? Be honest.

LUCKY
You look like a fuckin angel.

Wolf emits a quiet laugh. Then back to Douglas --

WOLF
You hear that, Dougie. I look like
an angel. And you know what Angels
are, don't you? They're generous.
So that's what I'm gonna be. I'm
gonna be generous and offer you a
deal. Give you a chance to rectify.
But I wanna warn you right now,
Dougie, if you don't hold up your
end of the bargain...

He grabs Douglas by the jaw and tilts his face in the
direction of Beatrice, still wrapped up by Man 2.

WOLF (CONT'D)
... I might just forget how
generous I am and finish what I
started upstairs.
Cuz we both know what the Big Bad
Wolf did, don't we...?
(beat)
He ate 'a bitch.

He turns Douglas' face back. Releases his jaw.

WOLF (CONT'D)
You understand me, Dougie? I mean,
FULLY understand me?

A long, unresponsive beat.

WOLF (CONT'D)
Let me know you understand me.

Finally Douglas's voice. A cracked and splintered voice:

DOUGLAS
I understand you.

WOLF
That 'a boy.
(pause)
Now here's what you're gonna do.

Wolf moves his mouth up to Douglas' ear and CUT TO --

A SLOW PUSH IN on Beatrice's face, as Wolf (voice unheard)
changes Douglas' life forever. A few seconds. Then --

ANGLE BACK ON WOLF AND DOUGLAS

Finished talking, Wolf hoists a limp Douglas to his feat. He straightens Douglas' posture, irons out the wrinkles in his shirt and then cups his face like a father would.

Douglas meets Wolf's eyes. Perversely nice eyes. Beat.

WOLF (CONT'D)
You're gonna be just fine, kid.

He releases him. Then a wide and gracious smile --

WOLF (CONT'D)
WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE GET MY BROTHER
HERE A DRINK?!

He starts to back away --

WOLF (CONT'D)
(sotto to Douglas)
I'll see you tomorrow.

LAWRENCE (formerly Man 2), releases Beatrice, who instantly rushes to Douglas' aid. He collapses into her arms.

CLOSE ON Douglas' battered face --

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BARBERSHOP - PRESENT DAY

Douglas' face is replaced by his father's. Stone-still. As is the razor, paused half-way down the ridge of Virgil's left jaw.

There's a kind of quiet awe in the room. As if the Customers had been on the lawn themselves, watching Douglas tormented.

Finally, George brings us back to the room --

GEORGE
You believe in God, son?

Beat. Virgil swallows. The blade undulates --

VIRGIL
(sotto; cracked)
On my better days.

GEORGE

And on those days... you suspect He
plans this dog and pony or is He
just rolling the dice for His own
sick amusement?

Virgil remains silent. Razor almost carving into his skin.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(inwardly)

If it's dice, that boy sure as hell
got the wrong kind of snake eyes.

Beat. Then Virgil finds his voice --

VIRGIL

Where do you stand?

GEORGE

This isn't about me.
This is about you.

Another beat.

VIRGIL

Dice.

Suddenly, George's expression morphs. It's hard for us to put
a finger on. He pivots to his counter. Wipes the hair laden
blade across his apron and gently places it down.

GEORGE

Excuse me.

The Barbershop Customers watch in silence as George walks to
the back and disappears into the --

BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

-- where we find him staring deep into the mirror, hands
gripping the sink edge.

He parts his collar and squeezes the Rosary dangling from
around his neck. Then, sotto, to himself:

GEORGE

Thou art the living fountain of
hope. So great and so availest,
that whoso would have grace and has
not recourse to thee, would have
his desire fly without wings...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GEORGE'S LIVING ROOM

Night of Douglas' beating.

George (looking roughly the same age) leans in a recliner and reads from DANTE'S DIVINE COMEDY: PARADISO.

GEORGE

(sotto)

... Thy benevolence not only
succors him who asks, but
oftentimes freely foreruns the
asking. In thee mercy, in thee
pity, in thee whatever of goodness
is in any creature, are unite --

FRANTIC KNOCKS at the door!

BEATRICE (O.S.)

MR. PINES! MR. PINES!

George drops his book, whips on glasses and rushes to the door. Opens it to find --

A disheveled Beatrice barely managing to hold Douglas up. It's raining outside now and they're both drenched.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Oh, Mr. Pines! They almost killed
him! They almost killed him, Mr. --

GEORGE

Slow down, girl!

George takes hold of his son and carries him to the couch.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(to Beatrice)

My first aid kit. Under the sink.

He places his hand against his son's forehead.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Who did this to you?

Beatrice is back. George begins to tend to the wounds. His hands move from muscle memory, like he's done this a thousand times before. Hydrogen peroxide, gauze, butterfly bandages...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Talk to me, boy. Who did this to
you?

But Douglas is barely with us. Swimming in and out...

Beatrice kneeling close. To George --

BEATRICE
He calls himself Wolf.

George stands. Turns. Thinking. Then a realization --

GEORGE
Like father like son.

BEATRICE
What?

GEORGE
His name is Walter Wallace. Wolf
was his father's nickname. Got
fifty years in the Pen for 2nd
degree murder.

BEATRICE
We have to call the Police.

George shakes his head.

GEORGE
And then what? They'll pretend to
file a report, offer me some lip
service because I wear glasses and
then forget about the whole thing
after Denny's.

One hand on Douglas' forehead, Beatrice looks up --

BEATRICE
So what do we do?

Another beat of George thinking. Then CUT TO --

INT. GEORGE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Moving with military-like precision, George opens a closet
and retrieves a long, rectangular box. We know what's inside.

He kneels. Dials through a COMBINATION LOCK. Click. Revealed
is a SAWED-OFF SHOTGUN.

George squeezes it in his hands. A memory-lane look. But it's
a reticent one. Maybe guns used to be an every day appendage.
Not anymore. CUT TO --

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

George beelines it for the door. Quick stop --

GEORGE

I'll be back in an hour. Give him
600mg of ibuprofen for the swelling
and start with an ice pack in 20
minutes.

BEATRICE

(scared)

What are you going to do?

GEORGE

Protect my baby.

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Hard, pelting RAIN.

George walks to his car like a man possessed. Gets in. Sawed-
off across his lap like a deadly pet. Ignition growls.

He's off.

INT. CAR - NIGHT - MINUTES LATER

George parked in front of a house that wears the daily
beatings of poverty.

Downpour continues. Little rivers of rain water on the
windshield cast abstract shadows on George's face.

He looks at the house. Clutches the shotgun. Deep breath.

EXT. LAWN - MOMENTS LATER

George moves at the house like a hand-maiden of fate and --

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! AT THE DOOR

George waits. Gun hidden behind his back. Beat.

Door peeks open. A mid 20's WOMAN (maybe Wolf's girlfriend),
holding a baby, appears. Face the worse for wear.

GEORGE

Is Wally here?

WOMAN
Who wants to know?

GEORGE
I do.

WOMAN
And who the fuck is you?

GEORGE
That's none of your business.

WOMAN
Well you're on my porch, mister, so
it sure as fuck IS my business.

Beat. Her eyes study him.

JUST as she catches a sliver of the sawed-off hidden behind
George's back, the distinct pitch of Wolf's VOICE OFF SCREEN.

George shoulders her out of the way. PRIMES his gun.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
WALLY!

George tears in, traces the noise until he comes upon --

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Where Wolf, Lucky, and Lawrence play Texas Hold'em.

All eyes look up as heat-packing George enters and KICKS over
the table. Poker chips and bills scatter everywhere.

LUCKY
(getting up)
What the --

GEORGE
SIT DOWN, BOY!

He sits. The BABY is now CRYING somewhere in the house.
George aims directly at Wolf. Wolf stares back. Unfazed.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I'm going to start talking and
you're going to start listening. I
hope that the meaning of my
presence in your home is self-
evident. But in case it is not, I
am going speak as plainly and
concisely as possible.
(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

If ANY of the words that come out of my mouth do not match that description, this is your one and only chance to say so, because this will be the last congenial conversation we ever have. Do you understand me?

Beat. Nada. George cocks the sawed-off. Aims tighter.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?!

Wolf essays George. A father operating on pure instinct. A father prepared to spill blood. *And he knows it.* George's arms flex as he aims even tighter. Finally, Wolf nods...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

It's come to my attention that you and my son were introduced earlier this evening. The good news: apart from two black eyes and a busted nose, he's going to be fine. The bad news: he has two black eyes and a busted nose and I'd put money on my late wife's tombstone that that's only half the story. So here's how we're going to proceed: if I ever catch wind that your eyes have so much as GLANCED in Douglas' direction, if I hear from B or any other little birdie who may have accidentally floated by that your very scent wafted within a ten-foot radius of him...

(ablaze)

... As God is my witness, I will come crashing down on you with a wrath the likes of which you've never seen before, boy. And then we'll all get to see just how bad the Big Bad Wolf really is.

A beat. George letting the scene soak up his words.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

There are two types of people in the world, Wally: those who build, and those who destroy. You're still young enough to change your mind about which one you're gonna' be.

He lowers his gun.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I'm done talking. But you shouldn't
be done listening.

With that, George is gone. But we sit tight for a beat.

SLOW PUSH IN on Wolf, who almost, ALMOST looks embarrassed to be himself. The world has momentarily stopped making sense.

INT. GEORGE'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Paternal adrenalin waning. George, clutching the sawed-off tightly to his chest, vibrates. Really vibrates. Deep breath.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BARBERSHOP BATHROOM

Present day George, knuckles white around his cross. He splashes water on his face. Another glance at his reflection.

INT. BARBERSHOP MAIN ROOM - SAME TIME

Pin-drop silence.

Twelve pairs of disdain bore into Virgil's back. His eyes are shut... Traveling some inner landscape... Suddenly --

He opens them and looks into the mirror. Staring directly back is the oldest gentlemen present (maybe 70). Unlike the others, he neither looks angry nor hateful. Something closer to fascination. Virgil is an exotic animal.

They study each other through the mirror. Then --

George re-enters the scene. Picks up his razor from the counter, wipes it across his apron and turns to Virgil.

He's apparently shed his emotion from the previous scene.

GEORGE
You know it took me ten years of
saving to put a down payment on
this place? Ten years. I was pickin
up pennies on the fuckin sidewalk.

George thumbs away a dime of leftover hair from beneath Virgil's ear. Pushes the razor back into his skin...

And down it SCRAPES.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

After the first month of negotiating with the bank, some drug dealers from the neighborhood offered to loan me 50K to get started. But you know how that works. They scratch your back... then you've gotta scratch their's even harder.

He wipes the blade on his apron and continues.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Would've saved me years of working over time, though: spending weekends at the factory, missing family gatherings, football games, graduations... Countless nights I found myself with a phone in my hand about to dial that number.

He pauses the razor...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

But in the end, I turned it down.

(beat)

You want to know why?

VIRGIL

(sotto)

Why?

George leans in a little closer.

GEORGE

Because inside every man are two kinds of dog...

(beat)

The bad.

(beat)

And the good. And everyday they bare their teeth and fight for the permit on your soul...

Virgil's eyes slowly move south.

VIRGIL

Which dog wins in the end?

GEORGE

Whichever dog we feed the most.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Douglas, still wearing the beating, sits next to Beatrice. She steals several concerned sideways glances.

Every student has ANN PETRY's novel THE STREET on their desk. A female teacher, MS. WILCOX, reads a passage aloud:

MS. WILCOX

"The creeping, silent thing that she had sensed in the theater, in the beauty parlor, was here in her living room. It was sitting on the lumpy studio couch. Before it had been formless, shapeless, a fluid moving mass -- something disembodied that she couldn't see, could only sense.

(beat)

Now, as she stared at the couch, the thing took on form, substance. She could see what it was. It was --

Suddenly a quiet tap on Douglas' shoulder.

A STUDENT hands him a NOTE. Confused, he opens it --

CLOSE ON NOTE: "Change of plans. Back entrance. 3:30."

Douglas whips around. But no Lucky. No Lawrence. No Wolf. When he turns back, Ms. Wilcox is staring at him.

MS. WILCOX (CONT'D)

Is there a problem, Douglas?

DOUGLAS

No, no problem. Sorry, Ms. Wilcox.

EXT. SCHOOL BACK ENTRANCE - LATER THAT DAY

Douglas and Beatrice waiting. Shoulder to shoulder.

She's freaked. He's weirdly calm.

BEATRICE

Please don't do this, Douglas.

No response. He's zeroed in on some undefined future.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Douglas. Please.

He snaps to. Turns. Looks hard at her --

DOUGLAS

I'm not going to let anything happen to you, B. That's the deal. I do what he says and you don't get hurt. That's all that matters.

BEATRICE

I can take care of myself.

DOUGLAS

I didn't say you couldn't.

BEATRICE

Then why?

Suddenly, the tricked-out HUM of a low rider Car turning a distant corner and heading towards them. It looks alive.

Beatrice grabs Douglas. By the shirt collars. Urgent.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

My Grandma used to say that it wasn't violence she feared. Men and woman do horrible things to each other every day. She said it was the silence behind it. A creeping silence that's been there since the beginning. She said she could smell it everywhere. But it wasn't evil. She didn't believe in any of that. It's the Street, Douglas. That's what she said. The street is the silence. Do you understand me?

The low-rider is now twenty yards away. She cups his face with strong hands. Bores into him...

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

You're a good man, Douglas Pines. You're so good. And I love you. But if you get in that car...

Ten yards away...

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

... Your whole life was just an arrow heading straight for that silence. And there's no turning back. Wolf is a one way ticket.

The low-rider stops beside them, engine growling. The tinted driver-side window rolls down. A smiling Wolf appears. He quickly looks at Beatrice, privy to her last ditch efforts.

WOLF

You ready, Dougie? We've got a big day ahead of us.

Beatrice balls up Douglas' shirt and won't let go.

Douglas anchored on Wolf. Beatrice anchored on Douglas.

WOLF (CONT'D)

(smiling)

I promise I'll have him back by nightfall so that you two can get your home work done.

Beatrice can feel Douglas drifting away. Her face says it.

Grip loosens. A beat.

He slips through her fingers and enters Wolf's tinted world.

INT. WOLF'S CAR - LATER THAT DAY

Korea Town.

We're parked across the street from a nondescript building. Above a small entrance door is a sign: KOREAN CLEANERS.

Wolf behind the wheel. Lucky in the front. Lawrence and Douglas in the back.

Wolf puts on his "friendly and understanding" face.

WOLF

I wanted this shit to be clean, Dougie, I really did. But then your old man had to go and do something stupid. And now... well, shit just ain't so clean anymore.

DOUGLAS

What are you talking about?

LUCKY

Papa Pines made a house visit.

LAWRENCE

And it wasn't particularly... how did he put it, "congenial." Even made Wolf's baby cry.

LUCKY

Which is saying somethin, because
not even Lawrence makes Wolf's baby
cry and he looks like the fuckin
Elephant Man.

A beat. Douglas genuinely shocked.

WOLF

Apparently I don't smell good
enough to be Dougie Pines' buddy.

Lucky and Lawrence chuckle. Wolf reaches over and gives
Douglas' face a friendly rub. Douglas almost flinches.

WOLF (CONT'D)

But I still like this face...

Wolf studies Douglas like he's some old, antique relic.

WOLF (CONT'D)

It's like there's two of you in
there and they're battling to
figure out which one it's gonna be.
It's fuckin inspiring.

(beat)

So after a shit ton 'a soul
searching, I've decided to give you
another shot. Look outside.

ANGLE ON KOREAN CLEANERS

WOLF (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Looks like your run-of-the-mill
Asian dry cleaners, right? Think
again. This is where Sueños
Norteños launders their skril.

BACK INSIDE THE CAR

WOLF

But today, the spicks are gonna
come home to find an empty piggy
bank.

(beat)

Get the shit.

Lawrence gets out of the car. Moments later, he's back with a
large duffle bag. It's unzipped. Inside we find --

A small army's worth of weaponry. Two Shot guns. An assault
rifle.

Three hand guns, ammo galore, as well as something entirely unexpected: Four PLAGUE DOCTOR MASKS (same ones we saw at the beginning). As Lawrence pulls them out --

LAWRENCE
What the fuck are these?

WOLF
Ask the brainy nigga.

Lawrence looks to Douglas. A beat. He knows.

DOUGLAS
Plague masks.

WOLF
Exactly. And what are they for?

DOUGLAS
Doctors used to wear them. Thought
the beak protected them from the
plague.

LUCKY
What plague?

WOLF
Mexican voodoo, nigga. What do you
think?

Lucky chuckles. Wolf hands a WALTHER P99 PISTOL to Douglas.

WOLF (CONT'D)
You ever used one of these before?

Douglas' silence says, *no*.

WOLF (CONT'D)
Just aim. Pull the trigger. Shit
dies. Masks on, boys.

Moments later and we're staring at four Plague Doctors
packing serious heat. Lawrence and Lucky look giddy.

LUCKY
Feels like Halloween.

Wolf PUMPS his shotgun. CHICK CHICK.

WOLF
Let's go trick or treating, then.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Total silence. IN SLOW MO we see --

Beaked and armed, three gangsters and an honor student step out of the car and make towards KOREAN CLEANERS. It's an eerie vision to behold in broad daylight.

Suddenly, GEORGE'S VOICE --

GEORGE (V.O.)
I took this literature class in
high school once. It was senior
year though and all I cared about
were pretty girls and cheap beer...

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Where George moves his razor up Virgil's neck. The right side of his face is now bare skin.

GEORGE
Probably showed up all of five
times the entire semester. But the
teacher liked me for some reason.
Said she'd pass me if I memorized a
poem and recited it in front of the
whole class. So that's what I did.

George grabs a towel. Wipes away some excess foam.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Yeats, I believe it was. Irish
poet. You ever heard of Yeats,
Detective?

Virgil says nothing. It was a rhetorical question, anyway.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I still remember it. Word for word.

George gently tilts Virgil's head to the side, places the razor on his opposing cheek.

Beat.

And down it SCRAPES. Poem in tow --

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Turning and turning in the widening
gyre, the falcon cannot hear the
falconer...

BACK TO THE STREET

Where our four Plague Doctors huddle around the front door of KOREAN CLEANERS.

All DIAGETIC SOUND is gone. GEORGE'S VOICE is our only guide.

Wolf raises a hand. *On three: One. Two. Three!*

GEORGE (V.O.)
...Things fall apart; the center
cannot hold...

AND BAM!

INT. KOREAN DRY CLEANERS - CONTINUOUS

They burst into the shop waving their weapons. Not Douglas, though. He's forgotten how to use his body. Arms pinned to his sides. Gun barrel aimed uselessly at the ground.

Wolf's mouth says, *EVERYBODY ON THE FUCKIN' GROUND!*

Three KOREAN WOMEN drop to their stomachs SCREAMING.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...Mere anarchy is loosed upon the
world. The blood-dimmed tide is
loosed, and everywhere, the
ceremony of innocence is drowned...

Wolf towers over WOMAN 1. Crouches. Grabs a mound of her hair and ROARS into her face, *WHERE'S THE FUCKIN' MONEY?*

GEORGE (V.O.)
...The best lack all conviction,
while the worst are full of
passionate intensity...

Wolf motions for Douglas to guard the door, then drags the screaming rag doll Woman into the back. Lawrence and Lucky follow him.

SLOW PUSH IN on our man...

GEORGE (V.O.)
...Surely some revelation is at
hand. Surely the Second Coming is
at hand. The Second Coming!...

Suddenly, WOMAN 2 is off the ground and breaking for the door, but Douglas is too frozen to even register the escape.

A beat as we watch her dash.

He snaps to --

Catches her half-way out the door and drags her kicking and screaming back inside. She claws at his face and tries to wiggle free. He strengthens his hold. Hating himself for it.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...Hardly are those words out when
a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
troubles my sight...

A SIDE DOOR bursts open! Now, standing across the room, is a MEXICAN MAN brandishing a pump-action shotgun.

Douglas spins. BANG!

GEORGE (V.O.)
...Somewhere in the sands of the
dessert, a shape with lion-body and
the head of a man, a gaze blank and
pitiless as the sun, is moving its
slow thighs...

But it's not the Mexican Man who shot first. It was Douglas.

Mind unhinged, he stares down at his own outstretched arm, at his own finger curled around his own freshly pulled trigger.

Across the room, Douglas' victim is slumped against the wall. Bleeding from the gut. A confused beat. Then --

Douglas releases the writhing Woman (who bolts out the door), rips off his Plague Mask and rushes to the dying man's side.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...While all about it reel shadows
of the indignant desert birds. The
darkness drops again...

Sheer panic. Douglas on his knees. Vibrating uncontrollably. Arms turning red as he tries to hold the Dying Man up.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...But now I know, that twenty
centuries of stony sleep, were
vexed to nightmare by a rocking
cradle...

Dying Man meets Douglas' eyes. Expressionless but still alive. It's a weirdly intimate tableaux. His is the last face this man will ever see. But then --

Dying Man spits a thick wad of blood into Douglas' face. A look of pure, unadulterated hate.

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Just as George glides his razor up Virgil's chin.

GEORGE

...And what rough beast, its hour
come round at last --

But Virgil cuts him off and finishes the poem --

VIRGIL

-- Slouches toward Bethlehem to be
born.

George stops the shave. Mildly in awe. Impressed. But wouldn't dare show it.

He turns to his counter. Wipes off the razor and proceeds to sharpen it on his strip of leather.

GEORGE

(back turned)

That's right. You almost fail Ms.
Landingham's English class, too?

VIRGIL

Yeates was my father's favorite
poet... Used to whisper it to
himself during Sunday Mass.

George sharpening...

GEORGE

I'm curious then, what beast you
think he's really talking about?

Radio silence...

Done sharpening, George dips the razor into warm water, wipes it across his apron, turns back to Virgil.

VIRGIL

The devil?

George angles his blade just below Virgil's chin.

GEORGE

Not quite.

VIRGIL
What then?

Beat. George zeroed-in on the perched blade.

GEORGE
(almost to himself)
The devil inside.

HARD CUT BACK TO --

INT. KOREAN DRY CLEANERS - DAY

All DIAGETIC SOUND COMES ROARING BACK.

Choking blood. Light leaving his eyes. The dying Mexican Man manages to sputter out --

MEXICAN MAN
(in Spanish)
You're a dead man, bitch.
(Louder, in English)
YOU HEAR ME, MOTHER FUCKER?! YOU'RE
FUCKIN' DE--

But he chokes on the last syllable. Gone from this world. Douglas stares down in awe. *This can't be real.* CUT TO --

EXT. DRY CLEANERS - SAME TIME

As two SUV's SCREECH to a halt across the street. Out steps a Bull Elephant of a MAN. Mexican, mid-30's, tatted-up floor to ceiling. We'll know him later as SAN SUPAY.

In his wake, five additional MEN emerge. One of them tosses San Supay a SHOTGUN. He catches it mid-air. Pumps it.

SAN SUPAY
(in Spanish)
Nobody dies. I want all these
little *puntas* alive.

BACK INSIDE KOREAN DRY CLEANERS - SAME TIME

Wolf, Lawrence, and Lucky tear back into the main room, clutching duffle bags of CASH...

Korean Woman 1 in their wake, YELLING. Wolf spins, cold-cocks her to the ground. Then kneels beside our man.

WOLF
 (RE: handgun)
 I thought you never used one of
 these before.

Wolf removes his mask. Grins. Pats Douglas on the back.

WOLF (CONT'D)
 See. You ain't JUST a brainy nigga.
 Nobody's just one thing.

Douglas silent. Hypnotized by his own unexpected act of violence. Wolf notices. Gets philosophical --

WOLF (CONT'D)
 It's a trip, isn't it? Watching the
 light leave another man's eyes.

Wolf reaches down. Gently glides his hand over the dead man's eyes... they close.

WOLF (CONT'D)
 But you'll get used to it...
 (beat)
 Now get up and help me carry this
 booty. We're fuckin' kings now --

GUN BLASTS! Our Plague Doctors whip around to find San Supay and his Entourage pouring in, GUNS BLAZING.

WOLF (CONT'D)
GO! GO! GO!

They dash towards a back door and fly through. Hundred dollar bills spraying into the air, ripped apart by bullets --

EXT. KOREAN DRY CLEANERS BACK ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Douglas, still mask-less, duffle bag slung over his shoulder, runs with the gang down an alley.

San Supay materializes 20 yards back. PUMPS. BLASTS! A nearby escape ladder SINGS upon impact. His crew opens fire.

POP! Pump. POP! Pump. POP! It's a shower of lead.

Our Plague Doctors go full steam ahead. They reach a large wooden fence. Toss over the bags. Time to scale it.

Fingers are linked, hands cupped around feet, bodies hoisted up and over. Douglas is last to go. Wolf reaches down an arm. Douglas takes it. Up he goes. But then --

The wood next to his head EXPLODES. He loses Wolf's grip and drops to his feet. THUD. He turns. Looks down. *Fuck. He left his gun inside. This is the end.*

Still 20 yards back, San Supay suddenly stops. And for a beat that lasts forever, he and Douglas lock eyes. Finally --

SAN SUPAY
You killed my favorite brother,
punta. That wasn't a good idea.

JUST as he raises his gun --

We hear SHOTS FIRED O.S. WIZZING past Douglas' head.

Supay's right shoulder jerks back. He's hit. But barely even stumbles. Apparently it takes a lot more than just one bullet to bring this man to his knees.

Behind him, though, a Second Man crumples. Then a third. Bullets to the chest. ANGLE 180 degrees to find --

Wolf mere feet behind Douglas, double-fisting two handguns.

WOLF
GO, NIGGA! GO!

As Douglas is hoisted over the fence by Lawrence, Wolf fills up the alley with ROUND after ROUND.

WOLF (CONT'D)
(to San Supay)
I WAS HOPIN' WE'D MEET THIS WAY,
MOTHER FUCKER!

POP! POP! POP! CUT TO --

EXT. A RESIDENTIAL BACK YARD - CONTINUOUS

Where Douglas, frozen, watches Lawrence and Lucky scramble to cram fallen cash back into their duffle bags.

More SHOTS FIRED O.S. Douglas snaps to --

DOUGLAS
JUST LEAVE IT! WE GOTTA GO!

Lawrence and Lucky don't budge. Desperate to salvage their losses. More SHOTS FIRED O.S.

Suddenly, something bordering on leadership possesses Douglas. He runs over, kicks aside a bag and grips Lucky.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Are you really prepared to die over
some pieces of fucking paper?!

Lucky looks floored. Lawrence stops. Then--

The wooden fence behind them RATTLES with the SOUND of large
bodies scaling it.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
LET'S GO!

As one, they dash towards the back entrance of the house and
burst through a screen door into --

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Where a KOREAN MAN stammers into a phone. Police Dispatch on
the other end. Behind him are his WIFE and young DAUGHTER.
Both freaked. He sees our boys. Stops. Drops the phone --

KOREAN MAN
Please no harm! I tell no one!

They sprint past, into the LIVING ROOM. Just as they open the
front door -- BANG! Door frame explodes.

San Supay (eerily calm) and two new ACCOMPLICES are walking
up the lawn with purpose. Our boys backpedal.

SERIES OF SHOTS

They run through the Korean Girl's bedroom. SCREAMS O.S.
Clamber out the window and land in --
The next yard over. They're down to one duffle bag now.
POP! POP! POP! San Supay in pursuit.
They SCALE fence after fence after fence.
Perfect blue sky above. Sun beating down on them.
Dogs BARKING. Throats straining against chains. Finally --

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MOMENTS LATER

One last fence and they're out of the woods. THUMP. They
land. Hunch over. Hands on knees. PANTING heavy. Suddenly, a
familiar VOICE, but wracked with pain --

WOLF (O.S.)
DOUGLAS!

ANGLE ACROSS THE STREET, where we find Wolf clutching his
stomach, wincing in pain. Shirt stained red.

We race to Wolf's aid. Douglas stands back. Watches as Lucky and Lawrence support his sagging body. Laboured breaths.

Wolf lifts his eyes to Douglas.

WOLF (CONT'D)

You did good.

Douglas meets them, realizing that he's holding the last remaining bag of money. A BEAT. His face hardens.

DOUGLAS

Fuck you.

Just then --

SPANISH VOICES YELLING in the distance.

Here comes San Supay and Company.

But Wolf's car is blocks away...

Our boys are royally fucked.

And then it happens --

Operating on pure instinct, Douglas reaches into the back of Lucky's belt, pulls away a handgun, walks into the middle of the street and aims directly at an oncoming car.

Which SCREECHES to a halt. DRIVER throws up his arms.

Silently, almost gracefully, Douglas circles round to the driver side. Opens it. Deposits the Driver into the street and then looks at the gang. *Get the fuck in.*

Which they do, Lucky and Lawrence hauling the bloodied Wolf into the backseat. Douglas, knuckles white on the wheel, now the *de facto* leader, kicks it into gear -- Then BANG!

Back window SHATTERS.

LUCKY

GUN IT, DOUGIE!

Douglas peels off, sprays of bullets in pursuit. He glances back through the shattered window just long enough to see --

San Supay, dead calm, gun lowered, put a thumb up to his throat and make a slicing motion.

INT. HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Small and run down. Meager furnishings. Dust particles pick up afternoon light through grimy windows.

Our Plague Doctors BURST IN. While Lucky and Lawrence lay Wolf down on the couch, Douglas shuts all of the blinds. Then stands in the corner. Silently watching. Disdain on his face.

Lucky grabs a towel and tries to stop Wolf's blood flow.

WOLF

Get the fuck off me!

Taken aback, feelings almost hurt, he does as he's told.

WOLF (CONT'D)

(blood in his mouth)

Douglas. Get over here.

Douglas' face is in shadow. SLOW PUSH IN. Something deep inside him is calcifying. Turning to bone. Maybe his soul.

Finally, he walks over and kneels beside Wolf.

WOLF (CONT'D)

Saying something smart.

Radio silence.

WOLF (CONT'D)

Please talk to me, Dougie. I'm fuckin dying.

DOUGLAS

I have nothing to say to you.

Beat.

WOLF

You know I have a kid, right?

With his last remaining strength, Wolf reaches up and grabs Douglas by the shirt collars. Desperate. Dying.

WOLF (CONT'D)

I HAVE A FUCKIN KID!

DOUGLAS

You should've thought of that a long time ago.

WOLF

Please don't let that be the last thing I hear before I die.

Another beat. Douglas stone-cold. Expressionless.

DOUGLAS

You tried to rape my girlfriend,
Walter Wallace. And now you're
gonna rot in hell for it.

Wolf coughs up blood. It coats his lips. And then he starts
to cry. It's soft. But very real.

WOLF

I'm beggin you, Dougie. Please.
Something smart. Anything.

Douglas considers. Beat. Finally, with quiet conviction --

DOUGLAS

My father always says that God is
benevolent. Now I know he's wrong.
(beat)
God is angry.

And with that, we watch as Wolf, born Walter Franklin
Wallace, dies on the couch with a final look of agony.

The room is dead quiet. Douglas stands. Wipes his hands down
his face as if the afternoon might wipe away with it.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

(sotto, RE: San Supay)
He saw my face.
(beat)
He saw my face.
(beat)
HE SAW MY FUCKING FACE!

LUCKY

You're in it now, Dougie.

Douglas whips around. Vicious now.

DOUGLAS

My name is Douglas. You understand
me? Douglas. And what kind of a
name is Lucky, anyway? Considering
the circumstances it's laughable.

LUCKY

Come on, nigga, there's no reason
to get --

DOUGLAS

JUST SHUT UP AND LET ME THINK FOR A
SECOND! Can you do that? Are you
capable of doing that?

Lucky and Lawrence slowly back away. These two are not leaders. They're followers. And Wolf's death may have just passed the torch.

Douglas paces, rubbing his temples in slow, contemplative circles. Mustering every iota of his body not to lose it.

Finally -- He moves quickly to the door.

Lucky, almost scared, a new reverent tenor in his voice, steps into his path.

LUCKY
Where you goin, Dougie--
I mean Douglas.

But Douglas drills past him. Door SLAMS. He's gone.

INT. GEORGE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

George in his recliner, reading DANTE, a pen underlining passages, when SUDDENLY --

The front door opens hard and his son rushes past him. He gets up from his chair, puts on glasses and follows suit. When he gets to Douglas' bedroom door, it's shut.

KNOCK KNOCK... Radio silence.

GEORGE
Douglas?

Still nothing.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Douglas? Where have you been? It's
past dinner time.

DOUGLAS (O.S.)
Leave me the fuck alone, George.

Whoa. First name. A beat. He creaks open the door to find --

His son, turned away, staring out through the window at an endless matrix of chain-link fences.

George walks on egg shells. Unsure of the moment.

GEORGE
You've never called me George
before.

DOUGLAS
(vicious)
Get used to it.

GEORGE
Douglas, please turn around.

And so he does. But slowly. George's eyes immediately widen at the state of his son's bloodied appearance.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
What in God's name have you done,
boy?

DOUGLAS
What have I done?
(beat)
WHAT HAVE I DONE?!

Douglas is enraged.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
It was supposed to be clean. I do
what he says and nobody gets hurt.
But you had to be a fucking soldier
boy, didn't you?

GEORGE
What are you talking about?

DOUGLAS
You went to his home. You
threatened him.

GEORGE
(hard)
I was trying to protect my son.

DOUGLAS
Well take a good hard look at what
that means.

Douglas thrusts his blood-stained arms in the air.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
This isn't my blood, George. Do you
want to know who's blood this is?
It's actually a mixture. The first
belongs to a Mexican thug whose
brother is a ten foot tall, trigger
happy psychopath now hell bent on
slicing my throat. The second
belongs to Wolf's intestines. Oh,
and worth noting...
(MORE)

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
 they're both dead.
 (beat)
 So YOU TELL ME, Soldier Boy, was
 the juice worth the squeeze? 'Cuz
 in my book, this is a million miles
 away from "*protecting my son.*"

Long beat. George moves toward Douglas.

GEORGE
 Let me see you.

DOUGLAS
 Stay away from me.

He means it, too. But George doesn't back off. Tries to grab his son's arms. Douglas wrenches them away. George tries harder. And then it happens --

Douglas' fist is suddenly swinging through the air --

And BAM, PUNCHES his father hard in the face. George stumbles back, his glasses flying off and cracking against the wall.

The Douglas of old might have snapped back to reality, rushed to his father's aid, turned remorseful. But not new Douglas. He's different now. Crossed an irreversible threshold.

Father and Son, breathing hard, stare at each other ten feet apart. The space between them seems to be ripping in half.

LONG SILENCE... then GEORGE'S OMNISCIENT VOICE --

GEORGE (V.O.)
 You ever had that feeling like
 you've walked into the wrong story?

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Where George glides his razor down the ridge of Virgil's right jaw line. Wipes the grey-peppered hair across his apron.

WE TRACK across the faces of the Barbershop Jury...

GEORGE
 You keep telling yourself, *this*
can't be right, this isn't my
story. Somebody must have gotten it
 wrong...

George pivots to the counter and dips a brush into the warm, soapy water. Suddenly, he and Virgil locks eyes through the mirror. It's electric. A peculiar, almost lonely exchange.

CUT TO:

INT. RUNDOWN HOUSE - DAY

DOUGLAS BECOMES THE WOLF

He oversees two gruff-looking ARMENIAN MEN roll Wolf's body into a cocoon of thick saran wrap. Then get to work on cleaning the place of the dead man's blood.

GEORGE'S VOICE GUIDES US --

GEORGE (V.O.)
...Maybe fate got confused. Maybe
you slipped through the clouds
while the angels were arguing...

Douglas pays the Men. A Blank, neutral affect.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Beatrice barely listening to a lecture. Keeps looking over at an empty chair beside her. The absence feels huge.

INT. GEORGE'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

George seated at a small table. It's set for two. Just in case. Two plates of salad and spaghetti.

He slowly crosses his fingers in prayer --

GEORGE (V.O.)
... Either way, you know, you know
in your bones, this just ain't your
story...

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - DAY

Douglas in a chair. Shirt off. A tattoo artist needling an elaborate image onto his back...

GEORGE (V.O.)
...You've heard the story a
thousand times. Sure. But you'd
been told it was already cast.
Promised, even. The set built.
(MORE)

GEORGE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Lights hung. All the lines
rehearsed and memorized...

The needle is pulled away to reveal --

GEORGE (V.O.)
...You were gonna be the one too
busy to go to the show...

A WOLF. STARING BACK AT US.

Not a vicious-looking wolf, however, with cruel eyes or
bloodied fang. But rather the *essence* of one. A survivor that
does what it does exactly because it is meant to do so.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY, BACK YARD - NIGHT

Bumping. Loud MUSIC. People drinking from plastic cups.
Cigarette and blunt smoke form pungent curls in the air.

Amidst it all -- Douglas, in a wife beater, short dreadlocks
now, sits in a lawn chair reading Machiavelli's THE PRINCE.

Laser focus.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...But the whole time, Fate, or the
Angels, or maybe just some hack
writer who had dirt on God,
secretly had you in mind for the
understudy. And you just never even
knew it...

A scantily-clad WOMAN approaches Douglas.

WOMAN
Wutchya' readin, Dougie.

DOUGLAS
(not looking up)
It's Douglas.

WOMAN
Jesus. Sorry. Wutchya readin,
Douglas?

DOUGLAS
Shit you wouldn't understand.

WOMAN
Psh. Fine, then.

DOUGLAS
Fine, then.

Douglas turns a page.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...And then it happens: the day
when the lead actor comes down with
a back case of the flu...

The Armenian "cleaners" pull into a junk yard. Get out and toss Wolf's saran wrapped body into a CAR CRUSHER. They lite up cigarettes and wait for the metal jaw to finish chewing.

INT. CAR - DAY

Douglas, Lucky and Lawrence all brandishing shot guns. As one, they put on Plague Doctor masks and jump out --

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Our Doctors marching towards the entrance...

GEORGE (V.O.)
...So now it's your turn. The understudy. And you're backstage sweating. You can hear the audience breathing behind the curtain...

They reach the door.

GEORGE (V.O.)
... it's show time.

AND BAM!

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

They storm in YELLING. Everybody freaks. Arms to the sky.

While Lucky and Lawrence heard the cattle, Douglas walks up to the CASHIER and calmly requests he empty the register.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...Your first night goes well...

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A huge bag of money dropped onto the floor. Lucky and Lawrence look up at Douglas smiling. He doesn't smile back.

GEORGE (V.O.)
 ...Too well, in fact, and now your audience is hungry for more. And it feels good to be wanted, doesn't it? There's nothing wrong with that. So you give it to them...

QUICK SHOTS

The Plague Doctors robbing a GAS STATION --

GEORGE (V.O.)
 ...You think you'll do a few more shows and that'll be that...

Plague Doctors robbing a 7 ELEVEN --

GEORGE (V.O.)
 ...You're the understudy, after all. But night after night the lead star's still coughin in bed while you're out there wooing the crowd...

INT. GEORGE LIVING ROOM

George on the edge of his couch. Watching the 5 o'clock News.

ON THE TV, a FEMALE ANCHOR --

FEMALE ANCHOR
 ...a series of robberies in South Central LA this past week by a gang calling themselves, The Plague Doctors...

B ROLL FOOTAGE shows a blurry, SECURITY CAM VIDEO of our Plague Doctors holding up a SMALL BANK, guns wielding.

Then, the SECURITY FOOTAGE turns into the real thing --

INT. BANK - DAY

Twenty plus PEOPLE on their stomachs. As a terrified CLERK helps our gang fill up duffle bags, a VOICE PIPES up O.S.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Fuckin niggers.

Abrupt stop. Lucky swivels. It came from a COP, stomach down but chin up. Hate in his eyes. Lucky makes for him...

LUCKY
THE FUCK YOU JUST SAY TO ME, WHITE
BOY?!

He's JUST about to kick the cops' head when --

DOUGLAS
LUCKY! Settle down.

Lucky steps aside as Douglas walks over. Crouches down. Leans his PLAGUE BEAK in real close. The cop doesn't bat an eye.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
You know what I just realized?

COP
What?

A beat. Douglas tilts his head to the side. Thoughtfully.

DOUGLAS
(to Lucky)
Get me a sharpie.

QUICK SHOTS of the Cop squirming as Douglas and company rip off his shirt, gag him and tie him to a chair. Then --

Douglas writes something (unseen) onto his chest. CUT TO --

INT. SAME BANK - MINUTES LATER

SWAT TEAM pours in to find the collateral damage. But no Doctors. They take off their masks. Catch sight of the cop. All their faces aghast...

Written on the COPS CHEST in big red sharpie is:

"I AM THE PLAGUE."

GEORGE (V.O.)
...And before you know it, nobody's
calling you the understudy anymore.
It's just you. You're the man the
spot light's jonesing for...

INT. CAR - DAY

Masks off. Douglas behind the wheel. Slaloming through traffic. Lucky and Lawrence giddy in the back.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...And the worst part of it is...

INT. HOUSE - DAY

The moment the Plague Doctors stumble in, Douglas grabs Lucky by the shirt collars and SLAMS him hard against the wall.

GEORGE (V.O.)
...You realize that you're actually
really fucking good at it.

A beat. Douglas x-raying Lucky.

DOUGLAS
Are you drunk, Lucky?

Lucky shakes his head *no* but his eyes tell a different story.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
(menacing)
You sure about that, Lucky. 'Cuz
your breath says otherwise.

LUCKY
(freaked)
It was a only a few, Douglas. I
swear.

DOUGLAS
Elaborate on that for me, Lucky.
What does a *few* mean you?

LUCKY
I don't know... two?

DOUGLAS
Two? You sure about that?

Lucky, still pinned to the wall, gives up the ghost.

LUCKY
Maybe it was three.

DOUGLAS
Three. Good. I like prime numbers.

Douglas takes a step back, raises his arm to the sky and then
BACK HANDS Lucky hard across the face.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
One.

BACK HANDS him again.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Two.

And then again.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

Three.

Lucky, face now burgundy red, rises slowly from the beating.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

You ever drink on the job again and
I'll put you to bed six feet under
the ground without a proper
funeral. Is that understood?

Douglas turns to Lawrence, who's been watching at a distance.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

You have something you wanna say?

No. No he doesn't.

EXT. CLUB - SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Douglas and his crew waiting in a long queue. The BOUNCER catches eyes with Douglas. Covert nod. Waves him over.

EXT. ACROSS THE STREET - SAME TIME

Beatrice, dressed to the nines, travels in a caravan of other dolled up ladies. All talking over each other. She casually glances across the street... Eyes widen --

Stops dead in her tracks. Double takes... it's really him.

Pain and anger visibly negotiate on her face.

BACK OUTSIDE THE CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Douglas and company are just about to be waved in, when --

BEATRICE (O.S.)

DOUGLAS PINES?!

Douglas turns just as -- SLAP!

Beatrice lands a mighty, open-fisted crash across his face.

She's vibrating so hard she can barely breath. He looks up, stunned, the Douglas of old almost stealing through.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

I can smell it on you.

DOUGLAS

What?

BEATRICE

The silence.

Long beat as the former lovers stare at each other. Finally --

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

You're The Wolf now.

Her face looks like it's about to break... but it doesn't.

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Total silence. Only breathing heard.

Then -- the sandpaper SCRAPE of George shaving clean the rest of Virgil's upper lip. He wipes off leftover foam.

GEORGE

Douglas was only 8 years-old when his mother passed. After the wake, he told me that he hated God. And asked why the best ones always die.

He turns to his counter. Wipes his hands on a towel.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

The question haunted me for weeks. I couldn't give him a good answer.

(beat)

But then one night I had a dream... I'm walking through a meadow at sunrise. The meadow is split in two. Beautiful flowers on the right, ugly ones on the left. Suddenly, in the distance, I see my wife approaching. I want to make a bouquet for her, have something nice to give her when she arrives.

(beat)

And then it hits me. Clear as day. *Which flowers are you gonna choose, George? The worst. Or the best.*

Suddenly, the two men catch eyes in the mirror.

CLOSE ON VIRGIL'S FACE

Something new there. *But what is it?*

VIRGIL
Excuse me for a moment, Barber.

Slowly, George unties his smock. Lays it over the chair.

And then the Barbershop Jury watches as the Detective limps his way across the room and disappear into the back --

INT. BARBERSHOP BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Virgil boring into the mirror. Into himself. Suddenly --

VIRGIL
(sotto)
We sit in the fire...
We bleed ashes...
And then we stand back up.

CUT TO:

INT. GAS STATION FOOD STORE - AFTERNOON

Six years ago.

Virgil off-duty. Younger, brighter, clean shaven. No limp.

He stands at the register with his WIFE (Sarah) and their eight year-old SON. They make a quiet but happy trio.

The Son puts an ALMOND JOY onto the counter.

SARAH
No sugar before dinner.

SON
But there's coconut in it.

SARAH
(warm laugh)
And that's supposed to make it healthy? Nice try, kiddo.

SON
Our Health Ed teacher said that coconut oil improves blood cholesterol levels.

Virgil smiles. Kid's are born lawyers. He hands the candy bar to the CASHIER. Sarah smirks.

VIRGIL
That'll do it.

Then BAM! The FRONT DOOR FLIES OPEN as TWO MEN wearing ski masks storm into the store. Waving handguns recklessly.

MAN 1
EVERYBODY ON THE FUCKING GROUND!

FIVE OR SO PEOPLE do as their told.

MAN 2
(to Man 1)
I'm 'a check the back. You deal
with the punjab.

He disappears.

MAN 1 aims at the Cashier. Throws a bag at him.

MAN 1
Hurry up, Punjab!

Virgil and his family are flat on their stomachs. Slowly, imperceptibly, Virgil inches his fingers towards the back of his pants. A concealed GUN. Sarah notices --

SARAH
(sotto)
Virgil, no.

VIRGIL
(sotto)
Just stay down.

He locks eyes with his Son. A silent understanding. *Stay put.*

Virgil stands. Slowly. Unholsters his gun. Aims at Man 1.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
I've got a Glock 23 aimed at you
right now, son, with 15 magazines
of lead desperately interested in
exploring the back of your head.

Man 1 doesn't budge.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
So let's just calmly put the gun
down and place our heads over our
head. How does that sound.

Long beat. Man 1 frozen.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
I'm not gonna ask you --

Suddenly -- Man 2 materializes on the far side of the room.
Raises his gun. COCKS. Virgil doesn't see it. But Sarah does.

SARAH

NOOOO!!

She springs.

SON

MOM!!

He springs.

Just as Man 2 FIRES OFF TWO ROUNDS --

Sarah and the Boy have entered the BULLETS PATH --

They collapse like broken toys at Virgil's feet.

Man 1 finally turns around.

MAN 1

(off bodies)

Holy shit.

He looks to Virgil, whose gun is now lowered. Paralyzed.
Gazing down at something that can't possibly be real.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

(to Man 2)

We gotta roll, Barry. Like double
quick. C'mon!

But the ski-mask-obscured man known as Barry is paralyzed.
Feet like anvils. *What's going on behind that mask?*

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

You deaf, Barry?! C'MON!

Still nothing.

MAN 1 (CONT'D)

Fuck it. I'm gone.

Sharp DING as the door flies open and Man 1 disappears.

And then it happens --

Barry drops his gun to the floor. Or, to put it another way,
the gun drops him. They no longer suit each other.

BARRY

(sotto)

Oh my God.

He takes off his mask...

Revealed is not a hostile face. Not even close. You might even call it kind. The face of BLACK MAN (30's) who just happened to have been born on the wrong block.

On the wrong day.
In the wrong year.
In the wrong life.

A rag doll of circumstance.

He looks directly at Virgil. Their eyes lock. His face struggling to find some sort of appropriate expression.

Finally --

BARRY (CONT'D)
Please kill me.

And he means it.

Virgil points his gun at Barry. The total some of his body's blood pulsing in a single trigger finger...

SLOW PUSH IN ON VIRGIL

No longer a man. A pawn in a fucked-up game of chance.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CALIFORNIA STATE PRISON, LOS ANGELES COUNTY - DAY

Six years later.

And Virgil's face wears them heavily.

We're at SECURITY CHECK IN -- where he drops his gun, badge, and keys in a plastic bin, then walks through a METAL DETECTOR. Several familiar nods exchanged.

BEEP BEEP. Virgil forgot about his DOG TAGS.

Takes them off. Delicately. Places them into the plastic bin.

INT. PRISON CONFERENCE ROOM - SAME TIME

Twenty INMATES (all different ages), sit in a window-less room. It's fucking depressing. But their faces, ironically, are somewhat lit up, captivated, hungry for something...

ANGLE 180 degrees to find --

The MAN who killed Virgil's family: Barry Jones. 40 now.
Built. Handsome. Confident disposition. A Bible in one hand.

We find him mid sentence --

BARRY

Now I want y'all to throw away that
God's wrath business. Okay. God's
anger. Fire and brimstone.
Armageddon. All that Old Testament
shit. We're throwin it all right
out the window. 'Cuz I got news for
you: there ain't no such thing as
Hell. God and the Devil ain't
fighten for your soul. Heaven and
Hell are decided right here.

He points authoritatively at the ground.

BARRY (CONT'D)

RIGHT HERE. On Earth. This is where
we get to decide which kingdom we
gonna build. You understand me?

All of the Inmates nod as one.

Barry opens his Bible to an ear-marked passage.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Isaiah 43: 25 through 26. God says,
"I am he who blots out your
transgressions, for my own sake,
and remembers your sins no more.
Review the past for me, let us
argue the matter together; state
the case for your innocence."

A beat. Barry shuts the Bible.

BARRY (CONT'D)

State the case for your innocence.

He paces the front. Essays the room.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Now a lot 'a folks out there gonna
say I'm tryin to debunk personal
accountability. But that ain't what
I'm doin. When we say, "state the
case of your innocence," what we
really talkin about is you takin a
microscope to each and every moment
of your past to figure out what
shit was beyond your control.

(MORE)

BARRY (CONT'D)
Cuz I'm looking around the room
right now and I can't seem to find
a single bad man...

Passionate nods. They want to believe him. Desperately.

BARRY
No, sir! Not an evil man in the
house tonight! What I see is a
bunch a strong, good men, who just
happen to lose their way.

(BEAT)
But we gonna find it again,
gentlemen, I assure you that. So
make your case. What were you up
against?

Suddenly, a PRISON GUARD quietly steps in and approaches
Barry. A certain reverence with which he does so --

PRISON GUARD
Detective Marx is here for you.

If Barry is troubled by this news, he doesn't show it.

INT. PRISON VISITORS ROOM - SAME TIME

Several metal tables scattered throughout. Wives, Mothers
Sons, Daughters, all interacting with men who may or may not
be ever coming home. It's a bitter sweet tableau.

Virgil sits at a table for two. Fingers crossed, almost in
prayer. Wholly focused on a patch of floor.

The ANGRY SOUND of a security door unlocking and he looks up--

In walks Barry Jones. Bible in hand.

Moments later, they're seated across from each other.

A Beat. Then, with atonement in every syllable --

BARRY
Mr. Marx.

VIRGIL
You gotta stop calling me that,
Barry. It's been six years.

Barry nods. *Let's try that again --*

BARRY
Virgil.

Another beat. Months of silence thawing out. Finally --

VIRGIL
Can I ask you a question?

BARRY
Of course.

VIRGIL
(Off Bible)
You really believe in all that...
savior business?

Barry lets out a partial, almost exhausted sort of laugh.

BARRY
Well, it sure as hell makes my
prison cell seem bigger.

Virgil smiles a weary smile.

VIRGIL
You know, Barry. Coming here and
talking to you like this has
probably been one of the only good
parts of my life.
(beat)
Isn't that strange, how the world
works? You tell this story to
someone, the two of us, talking
like this, they'd say you're
insane. But it's true. You might
know me better than anyone else on
this whole damn planet.

BARRY
I feel the same way, Virgil.

They stare at each other. A powerful, convoluted mixture of
pain, remorse, anger. Maybe even something like love.

VIRGIL
But the thing that breaks my heart?
(pause)
I hate you. I hate you, Barry
Jones. More than anyone I've ever
known. And I'm not sure I know what
to do about that.

Barry lowers his eyes.

BARRY
I hate me, too. Every single day.

Beat. Then Barry holds up his Bible. A time-worn thing.

BARRY (CONT'D)
This is what I do about it.
(pause)
What do you do?

Virgil offers a broken grin.

VIRGIL
Whiskey.

Barry laughs.

BARRY
Shit. If I'm gonna be entirely
honest with myself, I could use a
stiff drink, too.

VIRGIL
Well maybe in another life we can
grab one sometime.

BARRY
I'll be lookin forward to it.

They share a smile. It's a genuine, unspoiled one.

Beat. Barry studying Virgil. Finally --

BARRY (CONT'D)
There a particular reason you here
today, Virgil?

Virgil, staring at the floor, takes a deep breath.

VIRGIL
You're gonna hear about me on the 5
o'clock news tomorrow, Barry, and I
just wanted you to know...

He looks up.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
... I want you know that I didn't
do it out of any... misguided sense
of revenge. You'll never fully
understand, but I'm doing it for
the right reasons. I need you to
believe that.

Barry takes this in. Nods gravely.

BARRY
If you want me to believe you,
Virgil, then I'll believe you.

Suddenly, a LOUD BUZZER.

PRISON GUARD (O.S.)
Visiting time is over.

A beat. Then --

We watch as these two broken men do what we can only assume
is a years-old catechism.

BARRY
We sit in the fire.

VIRGIL
We bleed ashes.

BARRY
And then we stand back up.

They stand and shake hands. It's a full-bodied shake.

VIRGIL
You're a good man, Barry Jones.
(pause)
You always were.

BARRY
Same goes for you, Virgil Marx.

And with that, Barry watches Virgil disappear.

EXT. VIRGIL'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Virgil lets himself in. A carton of NICORETTE under one arm.

The place is small, a little claustrophobic. The maximum
comfort that Social Security checks can get you.

But it's cozy, too. Feels lived-in.

Virgil enters the DINING ROOM, where a half-smoked cigarette
leans against an ashtray. Still burning. He sits.

VIRGIL
I'm here, ma.

A beat. Then --

MAGGIE MARX (the Old Woman from our earlier news footage) enters the room. She's mid-70's, a shriveled grape, gnarly scar over her larynx. But despite it all, it's clear she used to be quite the looker.

In her right hand is an ELECTRIC BUZZER.

She sits down across from Virgil. Crosses her legs. Picks up the burning cigarette and drags deep.

She looks at the Nicorette carton and smirks.

NOTE TO READER: Every time Maggie speaks, she will place the Electric Buzzer against her throat.

Out comes an eerie, metallic voice --

MAGGIE

Nice try.

VIRGIL

Ma, you've got a hole in your lung for Christ's sake.

MAGGIE

Quality of life. Not Quantity, boy. I don't understand why everyone's so keen on this immortality business. You ask me?... Life is poor, nasty, brutish and short. And it's 'sposed to be that way.

(beat)

Who was it said that? One of them famous depressed guys, I think.

Virgil almost laughs. His mom's an impenetrable force.

A beat. Virgil openly pensive. Drumming on the table.

Suddenly, he reaches over, pulls a cigarette out from his mother's pack and lights up. Deep drag.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Those'll kill you, ya know?

He throws her a playful *fuck off* look.

Mother and Son smoke in silence. Just the cigarette hiss of their inhales. Finally, she squints hard at him --

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

What'd you do, boy?

VIRGIL
What do you mean?

MAGGIE
You got that same look on your face
you used to get when you was gonna
confess to sumthin stupid as hell.

Virgil remains quiet.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Well out with it, boy.

He meets his mama's eyes --

VIRGIL
You're gonna have the media
swarming all over your lawn like
cockroaches in the next couple of
days.

Beat. She takes a drag. Squints at him even harder.

MAGGIE
You fixin to do sumthin stupid?

VIRGIL
Depends on who you ask.

MAGGIE
I'm asking you.

Virgil takes a final drag. Cashes it in the tray. Stands.

VIRGIL
No. Not stupid. Dumb, maybe. But
not stupid.

Maggie smiles.

MAGGIE
I'll take dumb over stupid any day.

INT. FRONT ENTRY WAY - MOMENTS LATER

Virgil and Maggie at the door. She cups her hands around his face. Knuckles like tree knots and fingers stained yellow.

MAGGIE
(a scratchy whisper)
You ain't half as mean as you think
you are, Virgil Jon Marx.

She lowers his head and kisses him on the forehead.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BARBERSHOP BATHROOM - PRESENT DAY

Where Virgil is glued to his reflection. A beat. Deep breath.

INT. BARBERSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Virgil limps back into the main room. The collective GAZE of the Customers following him back to the chair.

He sits.

George's back is turned. Sharpening the razor. Suddenly --

He and Virgil catch eyes in the mirror. Linger a moment...

George averts. Turns. Ties a fresh smock around Virgil's neck. Retrieves an already soapy brush and begins to apply the warm lather to the hair around his Adam's Apple.

Several seconds of silence. Brushing...

Finished, George gently pushes on Virgil's forehead with his left hand. Balances the razor on his throat with the right.

GEORGE

Your turn.

Virgil yields to the razor, craning his neck. Exposed jugular.

SMOOTH, CRISP SCRAPES as the razor makes semicircles around Virgil's bulging Adam's Apple.

He closes his eyes. Goes somewhere inside. And then --

THE YARN

VIRGIL

I heard a story once about a cop at
the end of his rope...

Beat. He opens them. Anchors to the ceiling.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

Dead wife. Dead son. He's paid his dues, faked the straight and narrow, put on a god damn smile for ten fuckin years and now he's ready to cash in and call it quits. Retire on a deserted beach somewhere.

(beat)

Somewhere without human voices.

George wipes the razor clean. Returns it to Virgil's throat.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

And then it happens. Signs. Omens. Harbingers. Everywhere. Cropping up all over town. Like the universe itself was talking right to him.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

We're looking up through the WINDSHIELD.

Briefly, but just long enough to see it, a sagging telephone wire passes our field of vision. Dangling from it --

A lynched VODOO DOLL (maybe one foot tall) wearing none other... than a Plague Doctor Mask.

We PAN DOWN to reveal Virgil, behind the wheel, looking up at the eerie death totem.

VIRGIL (V.O.)

Sueños Norteños was sending a message. A deafening message.

(beat)

Douglas Pines is a dead man.

QUICK SHOTS of more VODOO DOLLS dangling from different telephone wires. All wearing the beaked mask. PRE LAP --

INT. NEWS ROOM STUDIO

FEMALE ANCHOR speaking into the camera. B Roll in the corner.

FEMALE ANCHOR

An eerie sight cropped up in the Southland this week.

(MORE)

FEMALE ANCHOR (CONT'D)
What appears to be a voodoo doll of
the notorious Plague Doctor gang,
hanging from telephone wires all
over the city.

EXT. RUNDOWN STREET - DEAD OF NIGHT

WIDE ON a large, crumbling brick wall.

We hear the rhythmic shake of several spray paint canisters.

THREE SHADOWY FIGURES enter the frame with ladders. Which
they lean against the wall.

MAN'S VOICE
(in Spanish)
This should get his attention.

A beat. Then the spray cans get to work.

EXT. SAME - EARLY MORNING

The warm, honeyed glow of Magic Hour now lights up the wall.

What we see is a startling vision. Something right out of
Dante's Inferno. A Graffiti masterpiece A la Gustave Doré's
illustrations of the epic poem. And at the center of it all --

A solitary Plague Doctor, hunched, surrounded by hell hounds.
Mouths gnashing. About to lunge. A darkly beautiful sight.

WE PULL BACK to reveal a LARGE CROWD amassed. A quiet sense
of awe. Among them are Lucky and Lawrence.

They look at each other. Terrified.

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Virgil's throat almost horizontal. George's razor gliding
gracefully upward. Clean skin in tow.

VIRGIL
So the cop saw his chance.
(beat)
And he took it.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

Somewhere in Echo Park. The part not gentrified yet.

WIDE ON A SMALL HOUSE

A police car pulls up to the curb and parks.

INT. POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Virgil in the passenger seat. Behind the wheel, NINA GOMEZ, Latina, late 30's, a fiery tom-boy.

NINA

So how are we doing this?

VIRGIL

I go in. Have a nice little chat.
If I'm not out in 15 minutes you
come in with the warrant.

NINA

Why do they call him San Supay?

VIRGIL

He's the Incan God of Death.

NINA

Jesus. Homeboy's got an ego on him.

Virgil half-guffaws. *You can say that again.*

He reaches into the glove box. Pulls out a PISTOL fashioned with a SILENCER.

NINA (CONT'D)

15 minutes. Not a second more.

(pause)

And no John Wayne shit. Choose your
words carefully. This guy kills
with impunity.

Virgil nods. Just as he opens the door to get out --

NINA (CONT'D)

Virgil.

He turns.

NINA (CONT'D)

Why you bringing the silencer?

VIRGIL
Too lazy to take it off.

Holsters it. Shuts the door.

EXT. SAN SUPAY'S RESIDENCE - MOMENTS LATER

Virgil KNOCKS. Not even remotely nervous. Or at least that's the vibe he's radiating. Wait a moment. And then --

The door opens. But just a sliver. The face of a MEXICAN MAN appears. Without skipping a beat, he laughs. Loud and cocky.

MEXICAN MAN
No. Fucking. Shit.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(in Spanish)
Who is it?

MEXICAN MAN
The pigs.
(beat)
What you want, white boy?

VIRGIL
A word with San Supay.

MEXICAN MAN
You got a warrant?

Virgil matches the Man's cocky smile.

VIRGIL
Listen, vato, I'm guessing you've been playing this game long enough to know it doesn't make a fucking difference one way or the other.

A beat.

SAN SUPAY (O.S.)
LET HIM IN!

The door opens further and the Mexican Man lets Virgil through. Hovering close. Chest grazing his movements.

INT. SAN SUPAY'S RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Where we find five MEMBERS of Sueños Norteños gathered around a couch. All packing. Gun handles poking through their pants.

Sitting on the couch is their ring leader -- San Supay. Say what you will about him, the man's presence is huge. Piercing, intelligent, creative-looking eyes.

He seems to be seeing everything at once.

SAN SUPAY
Take a seat, officer.

Virgil sits in an armchair directly across from San Supay.

SAN SUPAY (CONT'D)
What can I do for you?

VIRGIL
It's pretty simple, actually.
(beat)
Pay me to kill Douglas Pines.

San Supay and company all break out into raucous laughter.

SAN SUPAY
(in Spanish)
We got ourselves a fucking comedian
up in here, boys!!

Laughing continues. It's kind of contagious. Virgil joins in.

Then suddenly addresses San Supay in Spanish. Which immediately shuts every body up.

VIRGIL
(in Spanish)
You know what's even funnier? My
partner's waiting outside with a
warrant for your arrest and she's
gonna be knocking on the door in...
(check his watch)
... ten minutes. Which gives us
just enough time to make ourselves
a little deal.

Beat.

Pin-drop silence. San Supay doesn't look so bubbly anymore.

SAN SUPAY
What deal?

Virgil reaches into his shirt, at which point everyone reaches for their guns. He holds up a calming hand --

Don't worry.

Retrieved is a simple piece of paper. Virgil places it on the coffee table. Taps it with his forefinger and we CUT --

CLOSE ON THE PAPER

Where a blurry SECURITY CAM STILL shows a MAN in a ski mask clutching an Assault Rifle, mid robbery. Particularly noticeable is the Man's arm, which dons a tattoo of the Virgin Mary with the *Ouroboros* (*snake eating its own tail*) coming out of her mouth and wrapping a figure eight around her body. Mouth and tail meeting over her chest.

Virgil smiles. Points to San Supay's right arm --

He's got the same tat.

VIRGIL

You know, you're probably the only vato in town that I can think of who has that tattoo. Which means...

(beat)

... that you're also probably the only vato in town who hit up the Chase Bank in Eagle Rock last Tuesday. So you either go to the fucking prom with me, San Supay, or I let your time run out.

He checks his watch.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

Seven minutes.

INT. POLICE CAR - SAME TIME

Nina. Antsy as hell. Keeps checking the time...

BACK INSIDE SAN SUPAY'S

We're a rubber band about to snap.

A beat. San Supay reigns his confidence back.

SAN SUPAY

You know what Sueños Norteños means, offcier?

VIRGIL

Northern dream.

SAN SUPAY
That's right. *Es verdad*. And you
know why we call ourselves that?

VIRGIL
I haven't the faintest idea.

SAN SUPAY
Irony.

He leans towards Virgil. Crosses his fingers.

SAN SUPAY (CONT'D)
You know what irony is, don't you,
officer?

Virgil is a blank stare.

SAN SUPAY (CONT'D)
It's like a surprise. At the end of
a story. When the meaning is the
opposite of what you thought.

VIRGIL
(checks watch)
Six minutes and counting...

SAN SUPAY
It's ironic, because we come to
this country looking for a dream...

He waves his arms around the room...

SAN SUPAY (CONT'D)
... But all we find are nightmares.

Beat. Virgil and San Supay stare at each other. Finally --

SAN SUPAY (CONT'D)
You familiar with the Mexican
American War, officer?

VIRGIL
Vaguely.

Virgil couldn't care less. Checks his watch.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Five minutes.

SAN SUPAY
In the Spring of 1845 your country
stole what you now call Texas. But
that wasn't enough, *esse*, was it?
(MORE)

SAN SUPAY (CONT'D)
 Manifest Destiny's a fucking
 drug, no?
 (taps his vein)
 Gotta get that fix. So then you
 took little more.

VIRGIL
 Four minutes.

SAN SUPAY
 In 1846, you marched into Alta
 California, what is now Los
 Angeles, and laid waste to my
 ancestors. Then wrote up a little
 treaty to legitimize your blood
 lust. What was it called?

MEXICAN MAN (O.S.)
 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

SAN SUPAY
 That's right. The Treaty of
 Guadalupe Hidalgo. Crazy, no? What
 a little piece a paper can get you?

VIRGIL
 Yeah. It sure is. Two minutes.

INT. POLICE CAR - SAME TIME

Nina checks her watch. Time's just about up. She reaches into
 the glove box and pulls out the WARRANT.

BACK INSIDE SAN SUPAY'S

SAN SUPAY
 So let's just say, hypothetically,
 that Sueños Norteños did hit up
 that bank in Eagle Rock last
 Tuesday. Wouldn't we just be takin
 back what's rightfully ours?

A Beat. Virgil picks up the blurry PHOTOGRAPH of San Supay's
 tattooed arm. Then pulls out a cigarette lighter. Flicks it.
 Holds the flame an inch below the paper.

VIRGIL
 Listen to me very closely, San
 Supay, or whatever the fuck your
 real name is. Maybe some other time
 can we argue the finer points of
 American imperialism.
 (MORE)

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
But right now, I'm not speaking in
hypotheticals. I'm blackmailing
you. So you can either pay me half
for Pine's death and this goes
away...

The flame hits the photograph. Catches fire. Virgil places it
down on the coffee table as it burns.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
... or you start praying to God
that you don't become someone's
prison bitch.

Long beat. Supay's fierce, creative eyes boring into Virgil.

SAN SUPAY
(in Spanish)
How do I know you're not gonna
double cross me?

Suddenly -- Virgil throws his BADGE into the air and whips
out his SILENCER. Everyone present rapidly draws their guns.

But Virgil isn't aiming for them. He's zeroed in on the
BADGE. And CLICK --

A MUFFLED PING as the BADGE bounces off the wall.

He re-holsters his gun.

VIRGIL
(in Spanish)
That's why.

A beat. Then --

San Supay CLAPS his hands hard and starts laughing.

SAN SUPAY
FUCK! HOMIE'S GOT BALLS!

His Posse begins to laugh as well. But apprehensively. *Is
this friend or foe laughter?*

SAN SUPAY (CONT'D)
I like that. I FUCKIN like that.

Virgil pulls out another piece of paper. Taps it. An address.

VIRGIL
Money is here by 330 tomorrow or
the deal is off.

Then he reaches into his pocket and pulls out what looks to be a small bottle of CONCEALER. Places it on the table.

SAN SUPAY
What the fuck is that?

EXT. SAN SUPAY'S RESIDENCE - MOMENTS LATER

Nina walking aggressively up the foot path.

Just as she gets to the door -- it OPENS! Virgil just stepping out. He nods at her.

VIRGIL
We're all good here, Gomez.

NINA
Let me see it.

Virgil lightly pushes Nina back.

VIRGIL
He's not our man. We got it wrong.

NINA
Let me fuckin see it!

Smiling, San Supay steps into view and stretches out his arm--
Blank skin. No tattoo to speak of.

NINA (CONT'D)
But I thought --

VIRGIL
Let's get outta here, Gomez.

Nina turns. Baffled. Heads towards the car...

Just as Virgil turns with her --

SAN SUPAY
(sotto to Virgil)
Kill'em slowly. For my brother.

He and Virgil share one final cryptic glance, then Virgil follows Nina back to the car.

INT. POLICE CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Nina turns on the ignition.

NINA

What'd he say to you back there?

VIRGIL

Nothing.

BACK INSIDE SAN SUPAY'S - MOMENTS LATER

Grinning, San Supay turns from the door, licks his finger and wipes it across his forearm. A sliver of the Virgin Mary and her cannibalizing snake comes back to life.

INT. VIRGIL'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

A weak dawn light seeping in through the windows.
Virgil wide awake in bed.
He hasn't slept yet. A beat.
Swivels to the edge of his bed.
Looks around the room.

CLOSE ON A RECORD PLAYER

Erik Satie's Gnossienne No.1 is unsheathed. Needle touches vinyl and the eerie, meditative sonata CRACKLES to life.

It's the kind of piece a man listens to who deals with his emotions intellectually.

AS SATIE PLAYS, WE SEE THE FOLLOWING:

Slow, expressionless, Virgil packs up his home. Everything going into boxes. Clothes. Kitchen ware. Books. Furniture bubble wrapped and tucked into the living room corner.

An entire life disassembled.

Finally, all that's left is his bed and an armoire. On top of which is the PHOTOGRAPH of his late wife and son.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - LATER THAT DAY

Erik Satie continues...

Ominous grey sky above. Pregnant with lightening.

Virgil approaches two adjacent TOMBSTONES with flowers.

The larger one reads: Sarah Marx.
The smaller: George Marx.

Virgil kneels. Gently lays down the flowers. Closes his eyes.

A beat. Virgil traveling some inner landscape.

EXT. DECREPID APARTMENT BUILDING, BACK ALLEY - LATER

Satie continues...

A Car parks next to a metal stairwell.

Out steps Virgil. Holding a large duffle bag.

He climbs the steps to a door that looks like it hasn't been opened in eons. Under the mat is a key.

INT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

"Apartment" is generous. A room. A decrepit room. The same one, in fact, as the very beginning of our story.

Flaking walls, peeling linoleum, holes in the plaster that reveal the rotting wooden guts of its infrastructure. But nobody's bleeding to death on the floor just yet.

Not yet.

Just beside the door is a METAL BRIEFCASE. SNAP. Virgil opens it: a large collection of bills. San Supay followed through.

Virgil unzips his duffle bag and pulls out the following:

Domestic cleaning supplies.

Black leather gloves.

Metal pliers.

A Ziplock bag.

A hair buzzer and razor.

A business suit.

A fifth of whiskey.

Duck tape.

And lastly... a Glock 23.

Across the room are two wooden chairs, one free standing and the other bolted to the wall. The latter has hand cuffs dangling from one of its arms.

In a word, the place looks like a torture chamber.

SAME - LATER

QUICK SHOTS of Virgil, gloves on, cleaning the room top to bottom. Wall to wall. Not an inch overlooked.

Finished, he takes stock. Satisfied with his work. Forensics couldn't hold a candle to this place.

He's ready.

EXT. SMALL RUNDOWN HOUSE - DAY

Same one Virgil raided at the beginning.

Erik Satie finishes his sonata.

And now we're caught up. Minutes away from where our story began. Virgil parks at the curb. Kills the engine.

Above and around -- a dense, metal-grey sky. Lightening makes blue gashes in the distance. Low growl of THUNDER.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Virgil stares through the window at the ramshackle house...

He doesn't look like a man capable of evil. Capable of what we know he's about to do. Instead, we see a sad, war-haunted vet doing everything in his power to stave off fear.

Long beat. Finally --

VIRGIL
Get out of the car, Marx.
(beat)
Get out of the car.
(beat)
GET OUT OF THE FUCKING CAR!

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - CONTINUOUS

Virgil EXPLODES out of his car with purpose. Utterly transformed. Mr. Hyde with a glock and badge.

Up the unkempt lawn.
A bat outta hell.
Body vibrating.
He looks fucking deranged.

VIRGIL'S SHAKY POV

The front door racing at us and --

CUT TO:

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Where George shaves off another swath of hair.

VIRGIL

It was almost too easy. The kid was a sitting duck. You think he would've been smart enough to read the signs and skip town. But power has a way of blinding a man, doesn't it? He thought he was black Napoleon. Towering above the streets.

(long beat)

The cop put that fantasy to rest.

FLASHING IMAGES FROM THE BEGINNING

- Virgil kicks the door open, fires into the ceiling.
- SLUGS Lucky to the floor.
- The Pit bull comes rushing.
- BANG!
- Virgil wrenches Douglas back through the window.
- SLUGS him.
- The Woman in bed SCREAMS.
- Virgil wrestles Douglas through the living room.

EXT. RUNDOWN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Virgil shoves Douglas up against his car, cuffs him, then stuffs him into the back.

EXT. DECREPID APARTMENT BUILDING, BACK ALLEY - DAY

Same one from earlier. The car pulls up.

VIRGIL (V.O.)

He took him to a little room that he keeps for a rainy day. A room that no one ever comes out of.

Virgil hoists Douglas out of the car and drags him up the stairs and through the small door.

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Chilling Silence. Long beat.

VIRGIL
That's where the cop tortured him.

George's arm freezes.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
For information.

A vein twitches just above George's left eye.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Sueños Norteños wanted to know
where The Plague Doctors kept their
spoils.

George's hand quivers. The blade vibrates on Virgil's throat.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
And he did it slowly... Just like
they asked.

An eternity passes.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Do you wanna' know how he did it?

Suddenly, George's hand jerks and he punctures Virgil's neck.
Ever so slightly. A spec of blood boils up.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
You're hands are shaking, Barber. A
barber's hands should never shake.

George grabs a cloth and dabs the slight puncture. Then
returns his blade to Virgil's throat and we CUT TO --

INT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT - DAY

Douglas sits on a small wooden chair, his head limp, hands
cuffed behind his back, duck tape over his mouth.

Virgil takes a swig of whiskey straight from the bottle.
Wipes his mouth with a forearm. Then pulls up the second
chair inches in front of Douglas. Sits and leans back.

Long beat.

Virgil quietly examines Douglas, whose eyes are now bright
and veiny-red, streaming with tears.

VIRGIL (V.O.)
There's nothing more poetic than
those first, fresh minutes just
after a man's ego has been
destroyed. That pathetic look on
his face as he watches his own
house of cards come crashing
down...

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

Just as George's razor slides vertically up Virgil's neck.
Another clean patch of skin leftover.

Suddenly, the two men lock eyes. They share a look that's
hard for us to put a finger on. Almost covert.

VIRGIL
The cop saw that look. And he
almost felt pity.

BACK TO THE RUNDOWN APARTMENT

Just as Virgil rips the duck tape off of Douglas' mouth.

Douglas looks up. Beat. Then SPITS in Virgil's face.

VIRGIL (V.O.)
But the kid put up a fight, and the
cops's pity vanished just as fast
as it came. He increased the pain.

Strangely, however, Virgil doesn't look enraged, not even
angry. He simply wipes his face clean of Douglas' spit and
calmly takes another drag of whiskey.

Beat.

He retrieves the dog tags from inside his shirt and holds
them in front of Douglas' face.

VIRGIL
You see these?

Douglas refuses to look. Virgil gives him a light slap.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Do you know what these mean?
(beat)
They mean that you've got two
options now, Douglas Pines.
(MORE)

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

Option A, I let you walk out that door and you get a bullet through your brain by night fall.

(beat)

Option B, you let me help you.

Douglas suddenly looks confused. Virgil un-cuffs him.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

I'll give you five minutes to decide. After that you're on your own. But I'll warn you, San Supay's not just some local thug. He's got eyes and ears in every major American city. He will hunt you down. And he will kill you.

(beat)

I found the last guy who pissed him off in a dumpster out in Echo Park. He had his own dick in his mouth.

Virgil heads to the door, pulling out a cigarette.

DOUGLAS

(cracked; barely audible)

Why are you doing this?

VIRGIL (V.O.)

The kid still wouldn't play nice, so the cop had to give him a little incentive: showed him a photograph of his old man.

Virgil turns, pulls out his wallet and tosses it to him.

VIRGIL

Look inside.

He exits.

Douglas opens the wallet. Sifts through a few bills until he finds an old, worn PHOTOGRAPH. He pulls it out and we see --

Younger versions of VIRGIL and GEORGE standing side-by-side. Arms around each other. Stoic grins. Both hold rifles. The whitewashed desert of Afghanistan stretches out behind them.

EXT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT, STAIR LANDING - CONTINUOUS

Virgil lights up a cigarette. Deep drag. Long exhale.

SLOW PUSH IN on his smoke-obscured face and --

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. MUD AND BRICK HUT - DAY

Kandahar, Afghanistan. Early 2000's.

Remember Virgil's fable at the dive bar.
That's where we are now. Come to life.

He's more than ten years younger. Crouched beside an AFGHANI BOY (intensely focused) in a claustrophobic panic room. The Boy reads from a book. A picture book of Aesop's Fables.

CLOSE ON: A cartoon CRANE, neck sunk deep down a WOLF'S maw.

FLIP THE PAGE: The Crane, bone in his beak, holds a Wing out for his reward. The Wolf wears a duplicitous grin. Suddenly --

GUNFIRE OFF SCREEN!

Virgil swivels. Waits. More GUNFIRE. He grabs the Boy's shoulder. So paternal. He'll make a good father.

VIRGIL
(in *Pashto*)
Stay here.

He crawls up through the trap door. Draws his M4 RIFLE and crosses a small kitchen and out into a dense maze of mud and brick walls. A Qalat Fortress. Bullets rain and then --

BOOM! as an IED EXPLODES just behind us.

Virgil is tossed through the air in a cloud of dust and mortar. He slams against a wall and slumps to the ground. Over his stomach, his fatigues ripped and soaking red.

The sound of chaos dims. Like we've dropped under water. But still, through it all, a MAN'S VOICE penetrates --

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
MARX!... MARX!
Look at me, god damnit!

Virgil loosing consciousness... then -- a pair of arms enter frame, clutch his shirt and shake him to the core.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Fuck you! Come back! This isn't
where you die, you understand me!
This is NOT where you die!

Virgil's eyes lift open. He coughs blood and we --

CUT WIDE to reveal GEORGE hoisting Virgil up and over his shoulders. Watch as he wields a free arm like a machete, chopping their way through epic plumes of dust and debris.

BACK TO THE STAIR LANDING - PRESENT DAY

Virgil blowing out smoke. Beat. Pulls his mind back.

VIRGIL (V.O.)
The cop gave him a five minute
rest. A little time to imagine his
old man buried prematurely six feet
under the ground.

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

The COLLECTIVE EXPRESSION of the Twelve Customers is one of
hate, pain, anger...

George's razor has paused again.

GEORGE
(quiet)
What happened next?

VIRGIL
The kid exploded.
(chuckle)
The most stubborn son of a bitch
the cop had ever seen.

BACK TO THE RUNDOWN APARTMENT

Where Virgil steps back inside to find Douglas pacing
frantically. His wallet and photo are on the floor.

DOUGLAS
So just because you and my old man
killed some ragheads together back
in the day I'm supposed to lay my
fucking life in your hands?! Fuck
you! I own this fucking town! This
is ALL ME up in here! You can take
your "big brother" bull shit
somewhere else, mother fucker!

VIRGIL (V.O.)
But the cop straightened him out
quick.

Suddenly, Virgil picks Douglas up by the shirt collars and slams him hard against he wall.

VIRGIL

You think I give a shit about you,
boy?! Huh?! Do you?! I don't give a
fuck about you, you understand me?!
I'm doing this for your father!
That's it!

(beat)

Do you wanna' know why?! Do you?!

DOUGLAS

(struggling to get free)

Fuck you!

Virgil slams him hard against the wall again.

VIRGIL

Because my guts were spilling out
of my god damn stomach and your
father carried my ass 20 miles
through the most desolate hell
you've ever seen. And here you are,
the prodigal son, pissing away the
life he made for you from the sweat
off his back. You think you're hard
core? You ain't hard core till'
you've seen your friend explode
into a million pieces because he
stepped on the wrong patch of
fucking earth!

Douglas' breathing has calmed, the violence in his eyes
melted. Virgil lets go of his shirt and steps back. Beat.

Then, as if in a dream, Douglas glides to the wooden chair
and sits down. Virgil sits as well, pulls out a cigarette,
lites it, then hands it to Douglas. He drags deep.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

(calm)

Your father is the best man I've
ever known.

Douglas puts his face in his hands.

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

We TRACK across the Customers...

VIRGIL (O.S.)
And when the cop got all the
information he need...

ANGLE ON VIRGIL

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
... He put a bullet in the kid's
brain.

BACK TO THE RUNDOWN APARTMENT

Douglas looks at Virgil. An internal sea change.

DOUGLAS
What do I need to do?

*** MONTAGE SEQUENCE ***

-- Virgil holds a buzzer up to Douglas' head and shaves off
his short dreads. A mound of hair builds on the floor.

-- Virgil takes a big swig of whiskey and then hands the
bottle to Douglas, who chugs... and chugs... and chugs...

Finally, he wipes his mouth with a forearm.

DOUGLAS
OK. Let's get this shit over with.

He sits down in the wooden chair and opens his mouth. Virgil
approaches with a pair of pliers. He sinks them deep into
Douglas' mouth.

Douglas' eyes widen in preemptive agony.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
(mumbled)
Fuck fuck fuck...

Virgil clamps the pliers around a back molar. With his free
hand he grips the back of Douglas' head. They lock eyes.

VIRGIL
One. Two...

And YANK! Douglas SCREAMS.

Virgil stumbles back as Douglas starts coughing up blood.

Virgil pulls out a ziplock bag. Places the bloody molar
inside.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
See. That wasn't that bad.
(beat)
Now one more.

They get back into position. Douglas spitting up blood.

-- Wearing gloves, Virgil wipes off his Glock with a disinfectant-soaked cloth. Then hands it to Douglas.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Get your prints all over it.

Finished, Douglas places the gun into a ziplock bag.

-- Douglas walks out of the bathroom and stands before Virgil. Apart from a swollen cheek, he's a brand new man. Buzzed head, shaved face, suit and tie.

DOUGLAS
How do I look?

Virgil sizes him up.

VIRGIL
Almost respectable again.

-- Night has fallen. Virgil and Douglas step outside. But Douglas suddenly stops. Steps back inside. Pensive.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

DOUGLAS
My dad used to say that when you
cross a threshold you should always
step with your right foot first.

Beat. Douglas staring at the empty space between the door frame. An invisible threshold that only he can see. The official boundary, perhaps, of a new personal epoch.

And Virgil affords him this. Doesn't rush him. Finally --

VIRGIL
Right foot forward, Douglas. You've
got a plane to catch.

Douglas takes a deep breath. Then steps through.

*** END MONTAGE ***

SERIES OF SHOTS

Virgil and Douglas driving freeways at night.

VIRGIL (V.O.)
Once the kid was dead, the cop
stuffed him in the trunk and drove
him out near LAX.

Virgil's car pulls up to an LAX PASSENGER DROP-OFF curb.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Virgil hands Douglas a large envelope.

VIRGIL
Passport. Plane tickets. Five
thousand in cash. And you've got an
offshore account with a little
extra money to get you started.

DOUGLAS
How'd you pay for all this?

VIRGIL
You really want to know the answer
to that question?

Douglas nods.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Your father's retirement.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Same one from the opening. We enter just as --

Virgil pockets a large envelope of money. Pounds a shot glass
and stands.

VIRGIL
Second the jaws open, I stick my
neck down as far as it'll go.

Suddenly, emerging from the shadow, George Pines. He stands.

The two war brothers stare at each other for a beat. A
fraternal bond deeper than blood. Then --

George grabs Virgil's head with both of his hands and brings their foreheads together. He's holding back tears.

GEORGE
Promise me this works.

VIRGIL
I promise, George.
(beat)
You just stay as far away as possible.

BACK INSIDE VIRGIL'S CAR

Where Douglas's chin drops heavy to his chest. Deeply, deeply ashamed. The colossal effect of his life decisions weighing on him. And then, slowly, he begins to cry.

Virgil doesn't interrupt. The boy needs to purge.

Several seconds pass. Then --

VIRGIL
Hey. Look at me.

Douglas lifts his chin. Their eyes meet.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
No matter how deep into the woods we get, the path is never lost. This is the part of your story where you find it again.

Virgil lands a hand on Douglas' shoulder.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Now go make your father proud.

Douglas' lips part. He wants to say thank you, but the words don't come. His look says it all. He gets out of the car and Virgil watches as LAX swallows him forever.

INT. CAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Virgil parks in a DISCREET ALLEY. Kills the engine.

EXT. DISCREET ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

He gets out, loops around to the trunk and opens it...

There's a MALE CORPSE crammed inside.

* INTERCUT SEQUENCE *

INT. MORGUE - GRAVEYARD SHIFT - SOMETIME BEFORE

Virgil follows a MORTICIAN down a dimly lit hallway, who swipes an electronic fob at a heavy metal door --

It CRANKS open.

Virgil nods covertly, hands him a fat envelope of bills.

Mortician leaves without a word. Virgil enters.

Stench of formaldehyde. Sickly green fluorescent lights.

TRACK ACROSS walls lined with modular mortuary cabinets. Virgil inspects red tags that dangle from icy toes. He stops.

CLOSE ON A TAG: "John Doe." Virgil slides the drawer out.

BACK TO DISCREET ALLEY

Virgil drags the corpse around the car to the driver's seat. Awkwardly crams the lifeless mass into position. Places it's cold dead hands on the dashboard. Cuffs them to the wheel.

The corpse falls forward, smashing against the steering block. Virgil pushes the head back against the headrest. Jaw falls open... grey-blue toothless gums.

Virgil pulls out the ziplock bag with Douglas' molars. Tosses them into the John Doe's lap.

BACK TO MORGUE

Hunched over an operating table. Virgil, donning latex gloves and surgical pliers, systematically wrenches out all of the dead man's teeth. A nearby tray piles up with enamel.

BACK TO DISCREET ALLEY

Where Virgil pulls a JUG OF GASOLINE from the trunk and soaks the corpse, then douses the rest of the car.

Finished, he backs away and lites up a cigarette.

A few drags. Silver exhales drifting through the night.

VIRGIL'S VOICE AGAIN --

VIRGIL (V.O.)
And then the cop lit his ass on
fire.

Without further ado, he flicks his cigarette onto the gas-drenched car. Watch it spin through the air. Watch the burning cherry kiss the gas. And then --

VIRGIL (V.O.)
Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.

WIDE ON THE ALLEY

Virgil walking away as the car is engulfed in fire. Bright flames licking upward into the night. A beat --

Then BOOM! The whole fucking thing EXPLODES.

INT. RUNDOWN APARTMENT - SOMETIME LATER

Virgil steps in. Puts on the leather gloves. Retrieves his Glock (covered in Douglas' prints), grabs his bottle of whiskey and sits down on the wooden chair...

Then cuffs himself to it.

He takes a long swig. Beat. Huge, HUGE breath. Then --

He puts a small wooden stick into his mouth.

Closes his eyes.

Bites.

Needles the Glock into his thigh.

One one-thousand, two one-thousand, three one --

Fuck it. Now or never and --

BANG! as he FIRES a bullet into his own leg.

ANIMAL ROAR

The stick drops from his mouth.

He pales over. Blood leaking from under him. He takes off the gloves, sinks his teeth into his undershirt and rips a swath free. Fashions a makeshift tourniquet around his thigh and --

SQUEEZES

Suppressed moans of agony.

He pulls out his cellphone and dials 911.

MOS, he mumbles into the phone.

It drops from his wet red fingers.

Hits the ground.

So does his face.

SLOW PUSH towards him. Eyes glazing. Life losing definition --

BACK TO THE BARBERSHOP

We're dead quiet. George's razor perched on Virgil's throat. Only a small patch of hair is left. DOG TAGS slip through George's collar and dangle from around his neck.

GEORGE

(quiet)

Tell me, Marx, what would you do if
you were me?

VIRGIL

(equally quiet)

I'd wait for a collect call.

And with that, George quickly and gracefully shaves the last patch of hair on Virgil's throat.

He turns around and cleans the blade in a glass of warm water. Calmly, he takes a hot towel and wipes away the remaining lather from Virgil's face and throat.

Then, he rubs aftershave into his palms and applies it. Slowly, meticulously, as if Virgil were just like any other customer. As if Virgil were not the protector of his son.

Finished, he unbuttons the sheet from around Virgil's neck.

Virgil stands. Examines his reflection.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

That's a clean shave if I've ever
seen one.

He pulls out his wallet, but George waves it away.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

No. I insist.

He hands George a folded hundred dollar bill.

CLOSE ON George's hands unfolding it. Inside is a small piece of paper with a BANK ACCOUNT NUMBER written on it. *George is gonna get his retirement fund back. Compliments of San Supay.*

VIRGIL (CONT'D)

Keep the change.

Everyone watches silently as Virgil limps his way to the front door and grabs his cane.

Just before leaving, however, he stops --

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
(facing the door)
I heard this story once about a guy
who went in to have his wisdom
teeth taken out.

Virgil turns to his audience.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
A routine procedure. But the guy's
body didn't sit right with the
general anesthesia and he croaked.
Everyone starts freaking out. The
doctor calls an ambulance, and 30
minutes later the medics arrive.
But get this: just as they're
lifting the sad sack onto the
gurney, his heart beat just...

He snaps his fingers --

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
... pops back to life and he
rejoins the land of the living.
Naturally, one of the medics asks
him if he remembered anything from
the other side. The guy replied in
kind, "I went to heaven." So the
medic asks him, "What did heaven
look like?" And you know what the
guy says? You'll never believe it.
(beat)
"Heaven looks a lot like Norway."

Virgil smiles.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Can you believe that? I always
thought heaven would be somewhere
in the Caribbean, but apparently
heaven gets four months of snow a
year.

Virgil and George share one, final, cryptic look. An
understanding silently exchanged.

Virgil puts on sunglasses.

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
Norway. I'll be damned.

And with that, he opens the door, DING, and steps outside.

EXT. BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Virgil stands on the front step. Several cars are now parked at the curb, surrounded by at least thirty PEOPLE. All of whom share the same expression --

Solidarity.

Virgil feels his freshly shaven neck with the whole of his hand, then makes the slow, limping walk to his car.

INT. BARBERSHOP - CONTINUOUS

As George walks to the front door, Logan pipes up --

LOGAN

What was that shit about a collect
call?

But George doesn't hear him. His attention fixed on the spot where Virgil spun the final yarn. He stops at the door.

A long beat as he watches Virgil part the crowd, get into his beat-up station waggon, and drive away.

Suddenly, he notices something dangling from the door handle.

Something light and metallic.

Moments later and George has Virgil's DOG TAGS clenched firmly in his palm.

CUT TO BLACK