

TURPENTINE

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WATER--

Fills the screen. Clear and placid. Until--

A single drop of RED strikes the surface and is immediately diffused.

A beat later, a FEW MORE DROPLETS arrive in quick succession, like dripping blood.

And for a second, we're left to wonder: Is it blood?

But then we watch as--

A PAINTBRUSH enters frame, swirling through the water.

We follow it, lifted to a nearby palette of acrylic paints. An old hand -- slender fingers, papery skin -- guides the brush to a canvas and begins to PAINT.

We FOCUS ON the careful strokes. CLOSE ON the little details. Colors. Textures.

And finally, we WIDEN TO REVEAL--

INT. SHED-DAY

The full, finished canvas -- a naturalistic PORTRAIT of an OLDER WOMAN staring straight ahead, SMILING KINDLY.

A REVERSE SHOT reveals the author of this piece -- HELEN BOGGS (60). She's sitting inside a small, cluttered tool shed in her backyard in a little town called Patterson, Georgia -- population 2,000, give or take.

Helen is surrounded by rusted metal implements -- shears and shovels and rakes. But in this one corner of the shed, she's managed to carve out her own little world. An art nook filled with easels, stacks of canvases, tubes of paint, paintbrushes.

Helen studies the portrait she's just created. It happens to be a very accurate and well-rendered depiction of herself.

It's such a good likeness, in fact, that as Helen stares at her painting like this, it's almost like she's looking into a mirror. The only conspicuous difference being that Real-Life Helen doesn't smile. Real-Life Helen's tired, sad, worn down by life. Painted Helen seems almost like a wish -- a quiet attempt to will herself into a different existence.

And these two Helens just continue staring at each other, unblinking.

INT. BOGGS HOME-DINING ROOM-LATER

Helen now sits at a little kitchen table, eating dinner across from her husband, GENE BOGGS (67). Gene's a simple, uneducated man. Strong but slowing down in his old age. Short hair, going gray. Thick hands with big knotty knuckles.

The two of them eat silently for a while, without making eye contact -- silverware lightly scraping vintage Corelle dinner plates.

Helen looks up to see Gene stab into a breaded slab of brown meat, then fork a small portion into his mouth. He chews slowly, moving the food around in his mouth, as though trying to discern something. Watching this, Helen seems to grow uncomfortable.

Finally, Gene swallows. He takes a sip of Natural Light from a half-empty can, then stares back down at his plate. He pokes the meat with his fork. He lifts it with his knife to get a look at the underside. Helen forces a smile.

HELEN

Somethin' the matter, Gene?

Ignoring her, Gene continues to prod his meal suspiciously. Finally, he looks across the table, serious.

GENE

What is this?

Helen gives a bemused look.

HELEN

What do you mean, what is it? It's chicken fried steak.

GENE

Yeah, I know it's chicken fried steak, Helen. I meant what'd you put in it?

Helen looks bewildered.

HELEN

Put the same things in it I always do.

Gene stares at her, eyes narrowing. Slowly, he saws off another piece and brings it to his mouth. He chews deliberately, without breaking eye contact. Finally, he swallows and shakes his head.

GENE
Nope. Somethin's different.

HELEN
Different? What do you-- Different
how?

GENE
Somethin' else is in here, Helen. I
can detect it.

HELEN
Oh, you can detect it, huh? Well,
what are you, some kinda bloodhound
then?

Helen smiles again, trying to seem playful. But Gene just
stares back. A long, awkward beat. Finally, smile fading, she
relents--

HELEN (CONT'D)
I put some extra spice in there,
okay?

Gene absorbs this confirmation of his suspicions.

GENE
Extra spice.

HELEN
Little paprika.

GENE
Hmm.

HELEN
And a little cayenne for a change.

GENE
Paprika and cayenne.

HELEN
Didn't think it'd be a big deal,
Gene.

GENE
Didn't think so, huh?
(beat, then)
You lied to me, Helen.

HELEN
Lied. Gene, come on--

GENE

I asked you what's in here. You said it was the same things you always put. But that wasn't true. 'Cause there's paprika in here. And cayenne.

HELEN

Just a little.

GENE

So it was just a little lie then.

HELEN

(entreating)

Gene--

GENE

No. It's okay. Probably good to assess where a relationship stands after so many years.

(nods)

Small lies are acceptable now. I'll make a mental note.

HELEN

I just wanted to try somethin' new is all. Wanted to add a little extra spice.

Gene sits silent for another long, tense beat. Helen makes another attempt at an amicable smile.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Well, do ya like it at least?

His eyes trail back down to the plate. Finally, he shrugs.

GENE

It's fine, I s'pose.

He takes another bite, chews without looking back up at her. She watches him silently, swallowing her disdain.

INT. BOGGS HOME-KITCHEN-LATER

Helen stands at the sink, quietly doing the dishes -- washing then drying.

INT. BOGGS HOME-SPARE BEDROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Gene stands upstairs in a plain spare bedroom. There's a twin bed with a paisley quilt. A little dresser with some baseball trophies on top of it that read "Patterson Little League." But the real focal point of the room is A LARGE PINE GUN CABINET set against the far wall. That's where Gene has positioned himself, looking through the glass, admiring his prized collection of exotic and antique guns.

After a beat, he lifts a twine lanyard over his head and grabs the key that hangs from it. He uses the key to unlock the cabinet, then pulls the doors open.

The overhead panels cast down a soft dramatic light courtesy of a row of small interior bulbs. We see a WINCHESTER 44 CENTERFIRE RIFLE positioned on a middle rack. A couple WWII SERVICE ISSUE COLT 45s. And Gene's most-prized piece: an original SPRINGFIELD ARMORY U.S. OFFICER'S TRAPDOOR RIFLE. He lifts it out of the case and runs a hand along the wood body with unusual tenderness. Then he replaces the rifle on the rack, closes the doors, and locks the cabinet with the key.

INT. BOGGS HOME-BEDROOM-LATER THAT NIGHT

Gene and Helen are in bed. Opposite sides of a full-size mattress. Not even close to touching. Lights off. Silence.

A beat, then--

The phone starts to RING -- one of those old 90s Trimlines on the nightstand next to Helen. Helen shifts a little, which prompts a quick scolding from Gene.

GENE

Don't.

Obediently, Helen stops short. But the phone keeps on.

RING... RING... RING...

Until Helen can't help herself. She reaches for the bedside lamp, twists it on.

GENE (CONT'D)

(warning)

Helen...

She picks up the phone, but before she can speak, Gene angrily reaches over and pries it from her hand, inadvertently striking her across the side of the head with his arm. She weakly recoils. He glares at her as he brings the receiver to his ear. Silence on the other end.

GENE (CONT'D)
(gruffly, into phone)
Well? Ain't you gonna say nothing?

Click. Dial tone. Gene hands the phone back to Helen.

HELEN
Who was it?

GENE
Who do you think?

She gently returns the receiver to its base, then looks at Gene as he rolls back onto his side.

HELEN
That's the third time this week.
Something must be wrong.

GENE
Told you not to answer it.

With that, Gene drops his head down heavily onto his pillow. Helen reaches for the lamp. Lights out.

EXT. BOGGS HOME--MOMENTS LATER

Outside the house, the block is quiet. A couple dim streetlamps light the neighborhood. A string of tiny dilapidated homes -- ranch houses and cottages and Queen Annes.

A battered Oldsmobile 88 Royale is parked on the street.

INSIDE THE CAR

We find Helen and Gene's only son, DUANE BOGGS (30), holding his cellphone, looking up at his parents' darkened bedroom window. Duane is slight of frame, anxious.

After a beat, he tosses the phone into the empty passenger seat and turns the ignition. Loud HEAVY METAL music starts to play from the in-dash cassette deck. Duane throws the car into gear and drives off.

EXT. CYPRESS BAR & GRILL--LATER

Duane pulls up to a little roadside bar. Dirt parking lot filled with old Chevy pick-ups. Flickering neon in the windows.

Duane steers into an open space. As he puts the car in park, the heavy metal music suddenly becomes garbled. He tries to eject the tape, but it's jammed in there. Frustrated, he turns off the car, silencing the noise, and heads inside.

INT. CYPRESS BAR & GRILL-MOMENTS LATER

The place is medium-crowded, glassy-eyed regulars hunched at the bar. A country song plays on the juke box. Duane walks past a pool table, approaching a high-backed booth in the far corner where a fidgety black man (PATRICE, 35) sits staring down into a tall cocktail glass he's got gripped between both hands. Duane forces a smile when he sees him.

DUANE

Patrice. There you are...

The man looks up. He's got a swollen eye and some fresh-looking cuts on his lip.

DUANE (CONT'D)

Whoa. What happened to your face?

PATRICE

Where have you been, Duane?

DUANE

I'm sorry, I--

PATRICE

We said nine o'clock, right?

DUANE

I mean, yeah. It's not that much after--

PATRICE

We said nine.

Duane nods contritely and slides into the booth, across from Patrice. He forces a smile again, trying to break the tension.

DUANE

What's that you got there, huh?
That one of those Sex on the Beach
drinks I heard they sell here?

Patrice's eyes hold on Duane, silent and severe. Duane smiles nervously in response.

DUANE (CONT'D)
You ever had sex on the beach,
Patrice? In real life, I mean--

PATRICE
Cut the shit, would you?

DUANE
(smile fading)
Okay. Yeah. Geez.

PATRICE
You got it or not?

Duane hedges for a beat, then--

DUANE
Well, no, not yet--

PATRICE
Fuck. Duane--

DUANE
But I'm working on it--

PATRICE
I need that money, man.

DUANE
I know--

PATRICE
Do you?

DUANE
Yeah.
(then, tentative)
What happened to your face,
Patrice?

PATRICE
Hollis is getting involved.

At the mention of this name, Duane looks suddenly concerned.
Patrice stares back gravely.

PATRICE (CONT'D)
It's on his radar now. You
understand what that means, right?
When Hollis gets involved?

Duane again notes the injuries to Patrice's face and nods,
serious.

DUANE

I'll get you the money. I promise.

INT. GALLERY SPACE-DAY

Helen stands in a little main street art gallery owned and curated by her friend EDNA WHEATLEY (65). Edna's a confident and regal black woman with white hair and lots of turquoise jewelry. She holds a huge portrait of herself, painted by Helen, and admires it reverently.

EDNA

My word, Helen.

HELEN

(smiles, touched)

Do you really like it?

EDNA

Like it? Dear, please do not diminish the feelings I have for what you've created here.

HELEN

(demure)

Oh, stop.

EDNA

No, I mean it. This is special. And that's coming from someone who's job it is to be able to discern things like that, so--

HELEN

Thank you, Edna.

EDNA

I say "job" but it's more like a gift, isn't it? A gift that some of us have, and others unfortunately do not. Like my Bruce, for example. Sadly, he falls into this latter group of people I'm describing. His idea of refined home decor is one of those rubber fishes you hang on the wall...

Helen smiles.

EDNA (CONT'D)

You know what I'm talking about.
Push a button, they sing some
goddamned ridiculous-- Pardon my
language, but those hurt my soul,
Helen. Those goddamned rubber
fishes.

HELEN

Yeah, I don't really care for them
much either.

EDNA

That's because you have what I'm
talking about. Talent and vision.
(then)
And that's exactly why it's so
imperative that I host a gallery
show for you--

HELEN

Edna--

EDNA

I'm serious, Helen. Get you that
recognition you so richly deserve.

Helen shakes her head modestly.

EDNA (CONT'D)

To say nothing of the money.

HELEN

That's very kind--

EDNA

We're talkin' thousands of dollars
here. If not more.

HELEN

Thousands?

Helen looks surprised. Edna smiles.

EDNA

See? Now I got your attention.

Finally, Helen relents, shaking her head.

HELEN

The thing is, Gene thinks it's
silly. My art. So, he'd rather I
not, uh--

EDNA
Right. Yeah. Gene.
(nods, sympathetic)
Well, you let me know if you ever
change your mind.

HELEN
I will. Thank you, Edna.

Edna looks back at the painting.

EDNA
I'm gonna hang this in my great
room. Right over the mantelpiece.
(smiles)
That'll drive Bruce crazy for sure.

EXT. SUBURBAN RANCH HOUSE-DAY

Duane unloads a large dogwood tree from a long flat bed truck with the help of two co-workers: BENJI HUNT (29, dim-witted, trucker cap) and RODNEY TEMPLETON (30, long hair, neck tattoo, perpetually stoned).

They wear beige tactical shirts emblazoned with a logo for PELFRY LANDSCAPING on the back.

BENJI
(to Duane)
Eight thousand? Shit. How'n the
hell'd you run up a tab like that?

DUANE
Well, I been coping. You know? Ever
since Minnie threw me out, been
trying to get my head straight.

The three men carry the tree toward a deep hole in the middle of a well-maintained suburban front yard.

DUANE (CONT'D)
My mom was helping me for a bit,
giving me some money. Then my dad
found out and he cut me off.

The three men drop the tree into the hole and use crowbars to pry away the rotted boards that contain the root system.

DUANE (CONT'D)
So, I'd become accustomed to a
particular lifestyle, you know?
(MORE)

DUANE (CONT'D)

Then, suddenly, through no fault of my own, I was no longer able to afford that lifestyle. And the uncertain feeling of not bein' able to afford it made me need it even more. Ya know? So it was, like, this real unhealthy cycle.

Duane snaps the last board off the base of the tree, and all three men straighten back up, wiping their brows.

MOMENTS LATER

They sit at the curb outside the house, next to the flat bed, eating sandwiches. The flowering dogwood looms behind them, dropping a few petals into the humid Georgia breeze. Rodney takes a drag from a joint and blows the smoke out the corner of his mouth. Benji takes a bite of sandwich and chews.

BENJI

How much you think they keep in those cash registers over at the Qwik Mart?

DUANE

What?

BENJI

'Cause I was thinkin', y'know, that could be a way to help you out of your little predicament.

RODNEY

Shit, Benji. You talkin' 'bout robbin' the Qwik Mart?

BENJI

Why not? Tommy Ramos did it. Remember? That liquor store on Ryedale? Whaddya think he walked away with?

DUANE

Man, Ramos got killed during that robbery.

BENJI

Did he?
(then, remembering)
Oh, damn. That's right.

Suddenly, behind them, the front door of the house opens and a balding homeowner in a bathrobe steps out onto the porch.

HOMEOWNER

Hey, I know what you boys are doin' out there, okay? I can smell it all the way up here in the house.

Duane holds up a hand apologetically.

DUANE

Sorry, sir. Just finishing up our lunch--

HOMEOWNER

I'm gonna call the service, you hear me? Let 'em know what y'all are up to.

DUANE

Oh, come on now. You don't gotta go do nothing like that--

HOMEOWNER

Gonna let 'em know what kinda employees they got working for 'em.

Benji stands and faces the homeowner.

BENJI

You don't gotta do that, sir.

HOMEOWNER

Yeah, well, it's not exactly up to you what I do, is it?

Benji stares at the man blankly for a beat, then casually reaches into the truck and pulls a snub-nosed revolver from the glove compartment before turning back to the homeowner.

BENJI

I really wish you'd reconsider what you were sayin' just then.

HOMEOWNER

(concerned)

What the hell you think you're doin'?

DUANE

Benji. Come on, man.

Benji starts slowly traipsing up the front lawn.

BENJI

Filin' a complaint about us and all...

HOMEOWNER

You stop there. You hear me? Stop
right there.

Benji stops halfway up the lawn, gun held down at his side.

BENJI

Just really wish you'd
reconsider...

The two men stare each other down for a tense beat. Then--

HOMEOWNER

You goddamn punks.

The homeowner cautiously backs into his house and closes the door. Benji smiles, pleased with himself, then turns back to the others, who stare at him incredulously.

DUANE

What in the hell'd you do that for?

BENJI

Whaddya mean? He was gonna file a
complaint.

DUANE

Well, now he's definitely filin'
one.

BENJI

Nah, I don't think so. You think
he's filin' one, Rodney?

RODNEY

(exhales smoke)
Definitely.

Benji shrugs. Rodney watches him toss the revolver back into the truck, then turns back to Duane.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

Your old man still got that gun
collection of his?

DUANE

Yeah, like he'd ever give those up.

Rodney looks at Benji as he crosses back toward them.

RODNEY

You ever seen that? All those old
guns he's got over there?

BENJI
What old guns?

RODNEY
This whole collection. Antiques or
whatever. From way back in the day.
(then)
Crazy bastard doctored up his birth
certificate when he was sixteen
years old so he could join the
Marines early.

BENJI
Get outta here.

RODNEY
Duane'll tell ya.

Duane nods.

DUANE
No, it's true. They sent him to
Parris Island. Then off to Vietnam.
He wasn't there more than a couple
days before his bunker got bombed
and they shipped him right back
home. Ended his service.

RODNEY
But he kept on collecting those
guns.

DUANE
Yeah, he sure did.

Rodney takes a long hit from the joint again, then exhales
with a thoughtful shrug.

RODNEY
So that's gotta be worth something,
right? Collection like that?

Duane looks at Rodney.

DUANE
Yeah, I s'pose so.

RODNEY
More than what you owe even, I'm
guessin'.

DUANE
S'pose you're right about that,
too.

BENJI
What're you sayin', Rodney?

Rodney shrugs.

RODNEY
Just talkin' is all.

Duane's eyes drift off, mulling this over a beat. Benji watches with a devilish grin. Finally, Duane looks up again.

DUANE
I mean it couldn't be me, is the thing. It'd have to be somebody else. Somebody he wouldn't recognize.

Rodney and Benji exchange a look, understanding the implication.

DUANE (CONT'D)
What do you say? You boys interested in makin' a little extra money?

INT. BOGGS HOME-SPARE BEDROOM-DAY

Gene has a few of his guns dismantled and carefully laid out on the bed. He delicately cleans each component, running a brush through the bores and lubricating the barrels. Finally, he reassembles the pieces and wipes them down with a cloth.

INT. SHED-LATER

Helen carefully paints another portrait. We see the inspiration for the piece clothes-pinned to the side of her easel -- an old family photo: her, Gene, and Duane, years ago, standing before a velvet backdrop at one of those professional portrait studios in the mall.

Her painting is nearly complete. And it very accurately reflects the source material. With one obvious exception: she has not yet painted any of the faces.

INT. SUNNY MEADOW PRESCHOOL-CLASSROOM-LATER

A woman (MINNIE VOWELL, late-20s, tough and tattooed) sits in a child-size chair in a cluttered preschool classroom across from a teacher (MISS WICK) who's about her same age, though considerably sweeter and more conservative.

MISS WICK
Thanks for coming in, Ms. Vowell.

MINNIE
(a little nervous)
Oh, yeah. Sure. I got somebody to
cover my shift... I work over at
the Piggly Wiggly in Blackshear.

Minnie shifts uncomfortably in the little chair, then nods
and exhales nervously.

MINNIE (CONT'D)
Okay. Well, let's have it then.

Miss Wick is about to speak, when they hear a knock on the
classroom door--

DUANE (O.S.)
Hey. Sorry. Am I late?

Both women turn to see Duane standing in the doorway,
grinning.

MINNIE
Duane? What the fuck are you doing
here?

DUANE
What am I--? I got a message about
Beau.

MINNIE
What? How'd you get a message?

DUANE
Well, I dunno. I guess my name's
still on the thing.

MINNIE
(turns to the teacher)
Could you take his name off the
thing, please?

MISS WICK
Oh, I don't--

DUANE
Minnie. Come on.

MINNIE
(still to teacher)
He doesn't have custody no more.
(MORE)

MINNIE (CONT'D)

So I don't think he should be allowed to come to these types of things.

Duane turns to the teacher, too.

DUANE

Well, that custody thing, that was a mistake. That's gonna get worked out eventually--

MINNIE

He was arrested--

DUANE

Yeah, and I explained--

MINNIE

Twice.

DUANE

He's still my kid, Minnie.

MINNIE

Once for drug possession and once for public intoxication.

DUANE

Hey, we don't gotta get into all the-- Look, custody or not, he's still got half of me all mixed up inside of him. Which entitles me to come to somethin' like this, I think.

MINNIE

He also stopped paying his child support about six months ago.

Miss Wick purses her lips, clearly uncomfortable. Duane looks at her sheepishly.

DUANE

Look, I didn't have what you would call a stable father figure growing up--

MINNIE

Oh, here we go.

DUANE

So, without that shining example to follow, I've been forced to figure things out as I go--

MINNIE
(scoffs)
Please.

DUANE
I'm not saying there haven't been
roadbumps along the way--

MINNIE
Roadbumps?

DUANE
--'cause there have been--

MINNIE
You mean speed bumps? Or bumps in
the road?

DUANE
What difference does that-- Look,
the point is, I'm tryin', okay? I'm
tryin' to succeed where my own
father...

(gathers himself, then)
And, listen, if you must know,
there's gonna be some money comin'
my way soon. Okay? I got something
lined up and it's gonna get me back
on track. But that's not even the
point. Point is, I came here 'cause
of our son.

He turns to Miss Wick, entreatingly. She tries to pick up
where she left off.

MISS WICK
Yes. Right. Well, as I was
saying... Beau's been having a bit
of trouble here recently.

DUANE
What kinda trouble?

MISS WICK
For one thing, he's been crying a
lot lately.

MINNIE
Crying?

MISS WICK
I'm afraid so.

DUANE

Well, that's okay, right? He's sensitive. I used to be like that, too, believe it or not.

MISS WICK

Also, he's been acting out. Physically, I mean.

DUANE

Physically?

MISS WICK

Violently.

MINNIE

Oh my god.

DUANE

You mean like he's been fightin' and stuff?

MISS WICK

No, not fighting exactly...

DUANE

Well, what--

MISS WICK

He's been pulling kids' hair.

DUANE

Pulling their hair?

Duane squints, attempting to process this.

MINNIE

I'm so sorry. I have no idea why he'd be doin' something like--

DUANE

Are you sure about that? Pullin' hair? I mean, that don't really sound like Beau.

MINNIE

Like you would even know.

DUANE

I'm just sayin'. Sounds like more of a girl thing, don't you think? Pullin' hair or whatever?

MINNIE

Oh god.

DUANE

What?

MINNIE

You sound so ignorant when you say stuff like that--

DUANE

Ignorant?

MINNIE

A girl thing?

MISS WICK

You know, sometimes this type of... acting out, these big emotions... it can be the result of stress. Social... academic. Or perhaps even stress at home. Does that seem like it could be a possibility? That Beau's feeling some amount of stress at home?

Minnie stares back, mildly offended.

MINNIE

No. No, he's doin' just fine at home.

DUANE

(beat, then)

You see now, that's the problem. Since I'm not around anymore, I can't exactly speak to that one way or the other.

Minnie shoots a dirty look in Duane's direction. He shrugs innocently.

INT. SUNNY MEADOW PRESCHOOL-HALLWAY-MOMENTS LATER

BEAU VOWELL (4) is ushered out of an administrator's office by a FACULTY MEMBER into the hallway where Duane and Minnie stand waiting. Seeing his son, Duane smiles wide.

DUANE

Hey, there he is. Come on over here, boy.

Duane moves to Beau and hugs him awkwardly. When Duane breaks the embrace, he looks down at Beau admiringly.

DUANE (CONT'D)

Well, you're even more good lookin' than the last time I saw you.

(then, to Minnie)

I think he looks like me. Don't you? What are people sayin' about that?

MINNIE

(annoyed)

Nobody's really mentioned it.

DUANE

Really? 'Cause it seems kinda, I don't know...

(searches, then)

Noteworthy.

MINNIE

Come on, Beau. We'll talk about what happened on the ride home.

She takes Beau by the hand and starts to lead him off.

DUANE

All right. Good to see you two.

(then)

And I'm serious about that money, Minnie. I got a real good prospect lined up.

Duane smiles sincerely. Minnie calls back over her shoulder.

MINNIE

Well, forgive me if I don't hold my fuckin' breath.

DUANE

Oh come on now. Don't--

(then, to Beau)

That was a bad word your mama said. Don't you go talking like that, okay?

Minnie stops walking and turns around.

MINNIE

He don't need no advice from you.

DUANE
 (to the boy)
 Swearin' is bad. You listen to your
 daddy, okay?

BEAU
 (small)
 Okay.

DUANE
 Good boy. Smart.
 (then, to Minnie)
 Smart and handsome. Just like his
 old man.

Minnie rolls her eyes and continues to lead Beau off as Duane watches them go.

INT. BOGGS HOME-LIVING ROOM-THE NEXT DAY

Helen and Gene sit together silently in their living room. Late afternoon sunlight filters in through gossamer curtains, softly illuminating the space. It's quaintly-decorated with floral prints, lace pillows, and potted plants. There's a smattering of U.S. Marine iconography here and there, too, courtesy of Gene.

Helen's on the couch, quietly folding laundry. Gene's reclined in an old La-Z-Boy, gripping a can of cold beer as he watches a Braves game on low volume. They occupy the same space, but are worlds apart.

The silence is finally broken by the sound of two hushed voices outside, approaching the front window.

VOICE ONE (O.S.)
 What exactly am I looking for?

VOICE TWO (O.S.)
 ...supposed to be here somewhere.
 Under one of those fake rock
 thingies...

Helen and Gene both turn toward the sound, confusedly. Helen turns to Gene, whose eyes, likewise, shift to meet hers. They both look mildly perplexed.

VOICE ONE (O.S.)
 I got it. Look...

VOICE TWO (O.S.)
 Give it here...

Without moving from their spots, Helen and Gene apprehensively let their eyes track the following sounds--

FOOTSTEPS HEADING UP THE FRONT WALK.

A KEY ENTERING THE LOCK AND TWISTING QUIETLY.

THE DOORKNOB TURNING.

DOOR HINGES CREAKING OPEN.

And suddenly--

TWO MEN with pantyhose over their heads step into the living room, both holding handguns. Despite their disguises, we recognize them as Benji and Rodney. Helen turns to Gene, terrified.

HELEN

Gene?

Benji raises his pistol towards them.

BENJI

Nobody fuckin' move.

HELEN

We don't, uh--

GENE

Helen--

BENJI

Shut the fuck up. All right? Both of y'all.

Helen nods in fear. Gene sits stoically in his La-Z-Boy, maintaining eye contact with the intruders.

BENJI (CONT'D)

(nods)

Good. Yeah. That's better.

Helen draws in a quivering breath. The sounds of the ballgame play out quietly on the TV. Crack of a bat. Cheering crowd.

BENJI (CONT'D)

We want your guns. Okay? That's why we're here. You give us the guns and we head off on our merry way. Nobody's gotta get hurt.

Gene and Helen exchange a look. Gene squints at her, signaling "keep your mouth shut." She does.

BENJI (CONT'D)

So, yeah. Like now would be good.

GENE

(beat, then)

I'm afraid we don't know what
you're talkin' about, son.

Gene inconspicuously reaches for the key hanging around his neck and tucks it into the front of his shirt, out of sight.

BENJI

I'm talking about your goddamn
guns, mister.

GENE

Well, I think there must be some
sort of misunderstandin' then.

BENJI

Misunderstandin'?

(then)

You sayin' you don't got a bunch of
fancy old guns stashed away in here
some place?

Helen shoots a tense look in Gene's direction.

HELEN

Gene--

GENE

Quiet, Helen.

Rodney steps up from behind Benji and addresses Gene.

RODNEY

Look, we know, okay? The guns. We
have it on good authority--

BENJI

We know it, is what he's sayin'.
It's not a fucking... educated...
whatever you--

RODNEY

Hypothesis.

BENJI

It's not a fucking hypothesis, man.
We know. You understand me? We came
here for the guns and we're not
leaving without 'em.

Helen looks at Gene pleadingly, but he remains locked in on the gunmen.

GENE

Well, as I mentioned before, my wife
and I, we don't know about any--

BANG.

Helen and Gene both flinch as Benji fires off a round into the far wall, blowing a small hole into the plasterboard, narrowly missing a framed family photo of Helen, Gene, and Duane.

Gene stiffens in his recliner. Helen's face drains of color. The sound of the gunshot continues to reverberate around the tiny room for a few moments, then--

BENJI

Wanna try that again?

Gene gulps a little before proceeding--

GENE

Listen, whoever it was who told you
this... well, you got some bad
information, I think.

Benji and Rodney look at each other incredulously, then Benji turns to Helen.

BENJI

You seem like you got somethin' on
your mind.

Helen looks at Benji. She desperately wants to tell these men everything. She even looks like she's considering it, when she glances over at Gene, who stares back at her sternly, brow furrowed, nostrils flared. Helen turns back to Benji and shakes her head in silence. Benji looks exasperated.

BENJI (CONT'D)

Okay. Fine. If that's how you
wanna...

Benji takes a step closer and points his gun directly at Gene's face.

HELEN

Oh my god... no... please...

Gene stares back at Benji, unflinching.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Please... please don't...

BENJI
Shut up.

Benji's hand clenches hard around the gun handle, finger dancing on the trigger.

HELEN
You don't have to do this. I'm
telling you, you don't have to--

Benji suddenly swings the butt of his gun violently into Helen's face. Her nose spurts blood as she cries out loudly. Gene, for the first time, registers a hint of emotion, albeit subtly. Rodney looks to Benji, taken aback.

RODNEY
Shit, man.

BENJI
I told her to be quiet.

Helen falls back into the couch, crying, holding her nose, the blood running through her fingers.

BENJI (CONT'D)
Get up. Come on. Sit back up.

Helen struggles to do as she's told. Once she's pulled herself back into an upright position, Benji grabs her by the blouse. He presses the barrel of his gun squarely against her temple. Helen releases a reflexive whimper, trembling. Benji turns to Gene, unsparingly.

BENJI (CONT'D)
We'll do it the old fashioned way.
Count of three.

Benji cocks the weapon, jamming it harder into the side of Helen's head.

GENE
You're makin' a big mistake--

BENJI
One.

Gene doesn't move. His eyes trailing back and forth between Helen and Benji, quietly assessing the situation.

BENJI (CONT'D)
Two.

HELEN
(crying)
Gene...

Helen's body shakes with muffled sobs. Blood has now streaked down her neck and stained the front of her blouse. Gene stares, eyes narrow. Rodney watches in stunned anticipation. Benji shakes his head as he turns to Helen--

BENJI
I'm very sorry, Miss Boggs. Just
remember, this was your husband's
decision...
(then)
Three.

Benji takes a deep breath, steeling himself. He turns his head away, bracing for recoil, eyes clenching shut, body tensing. And then...

He STOPS.

He opens his eyes and shakes his head.

BENJI (CONT'D)
Fuck.

He lowers the gun and, frustratedly, turns to Rodney.

BENJI (CONT'D)
What are we supposed to--?

RODNEY
Let's just get the fuck out of
here.

BENJI
Stubborn old fuck!

Benji kicks the coffee table out of frustration, snapping off one of the legs. Then the two young men turn and rush out the same way they came in, their silhouettes trailing across the front curtains, hushed voices gradually disappearing down the sidewalk.

Helen slumps back into the couch, weeping, gasping for air. Gene sighs, relieved. He leans forward, grabs his beer can off the floor, and takes a sip. Then he looks over at Helen, emotionless.

GENE
I knew they weren't gonna do it.

Helen tries to nod, but she can't stop crying.

GENE (CONT'D)
(firmly)
Hey. Enough of that.
(then)
Better go on and call the police,
let 'em know what happened.

With that, Gene's eyes return to the TV where the sound of an old stadium organ quietly plays.

EXT. SYCAMORE SPEEDWAY-LATER THAT EVENING

Duane sits in the bleachers of an old clay track speedway, illuminated by stadium lights. He sips from a plastic beer cup, while anxiously checking his phone.

In front of him, a demolition derby is in progress. Swirls of dust and debris. The angry cacophony of engines rumbling. A half-dozen crummy sedans with spray-painted chassis slam into each other to the audible delight of the crowd.

After a beat, Duane's phone RINGS. He nervously answers.

DUANE
Hey. 'Bout time. I was beginning to--

BENJI (ON PHONE)
No go, Duane.

DUANE
What? Whaddya mean no go?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
He wouldn't give up the goods.

DUANE
Wouldn't-- I don't understand. Did you...

Duane pauses as he looks around for any nearby eavesdroppers, then lowers his voice.

DUANE (CONT'D)
You had your guns on you, right?
You threatened him and everything?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
Yeah, we had guns. What do you--?

DUANE
And you feel like you were
sufficiently threatenin'?

Duane stands and starts to climb toward the top of the bleachers.

BENJI (ON PHONE)
This was not a failing on our part,
Duane. It didn't matter what we
did. That man is a stubborn piece
of shit. And he was not gonna
listen to reason.

DUANE
Okay. Shit. Fuck.
(then)
That's fine. That's... I'll just...
I'll have to--

RODNEY (ON PHONE)
(in background)
Tell him already.

BENJI (ON PHONE)
(to Rodney)
Shut up. I'm getting to it.

DUANE
Is that Rodney? What's he saying?

INTERCOM VOICE (ON PHONE)
May I take your order please?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
(into intercom)
Yeah, uh...

DUANE
Where the hell are you guys?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
(into intercom)
We'll take two number ones. One
with a Dr. Pepper...
(then, to Rodney)
What do you wanna drink?

RODNEY (ON PHONE)
Blue Powerade.

BENJI (ON PHONE)
(into intercom)
And one of those blue Powerades.

DUANE
Are you at the Dairy Barn?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
What? Hang on a second,
Duane.

INTERCOM VOICE (ON PHONE)
That'll be fourteen-twenty-
five. Pull forward to window.

BENJI (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
(into intercom)
All right. Thank you.
(then, to Duane)
Yeah, listen, you wouldn't believe
how hungry we are. I think it's
because of the adrenaline or
whatever. It was, like, real taxing
on our bodies.

RODNEY (ON PHONE)
(to Benji)
Tell him what I told you.

BENJI (ON PHONE)
(to Rodney)
Yeah, yeah. I'm tellin' him.

DUANE
Tell me what?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
Rodney wants me to tell you that we
need recompense, Duane.

DUANE
Recompense?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
That's what he says.

DUANE
That you need recompense?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
We feel like you should still pay
us what we agreed on. For our
trouble and everything.

DUANE
Your trouble?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
Even though it didn't work out, we
still went in there, put ourselves
in harm's way. I think I mighta
broke your mom's nose--

DUANE
Wait, what?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
That's gonna be something I carry
with me, you know? She's a sweet
woman. She did not deserve that.

DUANE
What are you--? My mom wasn't
supposed to be a part of--

BENJI (ON PHONE)
That's what I'm tryin' to tell you.
We had to improvise, man. Heat of
the moment. Point is, we did a lot
of dangerous work there. And we
deserve some recompense.

DUANE
Well, that's kind of a problem,
isn't it, Benji? Because that was
the recompense. It was, you know,
contingent. So, obviously I don't
have--

RODNEY (ON PHONE)
(in background)
What's he saying?

BENJI (ON PHONE)
(to Rodney)
Saying it was contingent.

RODNEY (ON PHONE)
(in background)
Contingent? Gimme that.
(then, into phone)
Listen, Duane. We went in there. We
did it like you told us to do it.
We deserve what we were promised.
End of story.
(then)
This is Rodney.

Rodney hangs up.

DUANE
(under his breath)
Fuck.

Duane stands at the very top of the bleachers, looming over
the crowd. Out on the track, in the far corner, he watches as
the three remaining derby cars repeatedly smash into each
other, over and over again.

EXT. BOGGS HOME-LATER

A Patterson POLICE CRUISER is parked in the driveway.

INT. BOGGS HOME-LIVING ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Sheriff's Deputy RALPH STANSALL stands in the Boggs' living room, taking down their statements in a little notebook. He's 60, soft-spoken. Helen sits on the couch, holding an ice pack to her nose, shakily taking sips from a glass of water. Gene sips a fresh beer in his La-Z-Boy.

RALPH

Any idea who might've been behind this, Mr. Boggs?

Gene turns his attention to Ralph.

GENE

You know Tom Hoppe? Works at the pharmacy over on Maple?

RALPH

Well, I'm still relatively new to town, Mr. Boggs. I don't believe I've had the pleasure.

GENE

Tom's an old friend of mine. He told me last week, they found two men in the alleyway out back doin' methamphetamines and sucking on each other's whatchamacalits.

Ralph looks confused as to what he's getting at.

RALPH

Sorry, are you saying you think these two men might've been--

GENE

No.

(shakes head)

Just sayin' that's the world we're living in now, isn't it?

Ralph nods uncertainly. Realizing he may have better luck with Helen, he turns toward her.

RALPH

And how about you, ma'am. Anything you recall that might help us identify these men?

HELEN

Well, I don't know. One was a little taller than the other--

RALPH

(taking notes)

Okay. That's a start.

HELEN

And he had some kinda tattoo right about here...

She points to the base of her neck.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Maybe a snake or a tentacle of some sort...

RALPH

Tattoo. Very good.

HELEN

But, like I said, they were wearin' hosiery over their faces. Concealing their identities...

RALPH

Sure--

HELEN

Although, that taller one -- he did seem familiar to me.

RALPH

How so?

HELEN

I dunno. Like I recognized him from somewhere, but I couldn't quite place him.

Ralph makes a note of this, too, then--

RALPH

Anything else then?

Helen considers this, then glances over at Gene. Gene shakes his head. Helen turns back to Ralph.

HELEN

Sorry.

RALPH

Nothing to be sorry about.

(then)

And I certainly don't mean to upset you with all these questions, ma'am. You and your husband have had quite the ordeal today.

Helen nods "thank you."

RALPH (CONT'D)

If you like, I can pass along some recommendations. These types of things tend to have repercussions. You know, lingering... psychological, I mean--

GENE

We appreciate that. But she'll be just fine. She's a strong woman.

For a moment, Ralph observes them both with a hint of suspicion. Helen nervously looks to Gene, who stares back menacingly, then forces a smile as she turns back to Ralph.

HELEN

I think what I'm feeling most right now is a sense of gratitude. You know? I'm alive. Able to be sitting here talkin' to you right now.

Ralph smiles, empathetic.

RALPH

A little worse for the wear.

HELEN

Not compared to what it coulda been.

GENE

What'd I tell ya, huh? Strong.

Ralph nods, letting this sink in. Then--

RALPH

One last question, Mr. Boggs. I mean I'd be remiss if, um...

(then, sincere)

How come you didn't just give 'em the guns?

Gene looks at him obliquely.

GENE
Give 'em the guns?

RALPH
I'm just sayin' -- why risk it like that? After all, they're just guns.

GENE
Well, they're my guns. You understand? So I wasn't about to let a couple assholes take what's rightly mine.

Ralph makes a note of this. Gene watches him, seeming to bristle a little at the extended interrogation.

GENE (CONT'D)
And I'll tell you another thing, too. Something else for you to write down in that little book of yours. It woulda never got to that point if I woulda had my guns within reach. We'd all be singing a much different tune here, I can assure you that. 'Cause I woulda ended it. Right then and there.
(shakes head, then)
Alas, my wife here does not believe in guns. Isn't that right, dear?
(then, to Ralph)
Makes me keep 'em upstairs. Hidden away under lock and key. Though perhaps she's reconsiderin' that childish philosophy now.

Helen averts her eyes, ashamed. Ralph notices and turns back to Gene, unintimidated.

RALPH
With all due respect, I don't think your wife can be held responsible for what happened here today.

A flicker of appreciation appears on Helen's face.

GENE
(dismissive)
Yeah, well.

Gene takes a long sip of beer.

GENE (CONT'D)
We 'bout done here then?

RALPH

I believe so.

(addressing them both)

I want you to know I'll be continuing to look into this matter. I'll reach out directly with any new developments. In the meantime, feel free to contact me for any reason at all.

Helen smiles, appreciative. Gene settles back into his chair, ignoring the broken coffee table that sits at his feet at an awkwardly sloped angle. Helen looks at her husband for a beat, then turns back to Ralph.

HELEN

Lemme show you out.

Ralph and Helen cross to--

THE FRONT DOOR

RALPH

(quietly)

I meant what I said, Ms. Boggs. If there's anything you need, please let me know.

HELEN

Thank you, officer.

Ralph glances warily back into the house, toward Gene--

RALPH

Are you sure everything's, uh...

Helen looks at him innocently.

HELEN

What?

RALPH

(then, switching gears)

Just do me a favor and take care of yourself, okay?

Helen gives an appreciative nod as he turns and exits. She closes the door behind him.

INT. OLDSMOBILE-LATER THAT NIGHT

Duane drives down a dark street in a residential neighborhood, dragging from a sloppily-rolled joint, trying to calm his nerves.

He tries to turn on some music, but the sound is still garbled. He presses the eject button repeatedly, but the tape won't come out. He starts trying to pry it out with his fingers as he pulls up to a 4-way stop.

He doesn't notice that another car (a '95 Chrysler LeBaron) is idling at the stop sign to his right. Duane blows some smoke out his open window as he continues to fiddle with the tape deck. The other car proceeds into the intersection but stops abruptly, directly in front of Duane's car. Duane looks up, noticing. He's confused for a beat. Then it dawns on him...

DUANE

Oh shit.

Panicking, Duane fumbles the gearshift into REVERSE and tries to back up, only to realize that ANOTHER CAR is behind him, blocking his way. When Duane looks back out the front windshield, he sees a man is now standing there in the intersection, cigar in his mouth, ominously illuminated by Duane's headlights. This is HOLLIS DIXON. He plucks the cigar from his lips and lowers it to his side.

HOLLIS

Duane Boggs. My name's Hollis
Dixon.

Duane reacts to the mention of this name.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

You've heard of me.

Duane nods, tentative.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Good. That'll save us some time.
(then)
Let's you and I go for a ride.

INT. CHRYSLER LEBARON-MOMENTS LATER

Duane sits in the back seat next to Hollis, who's wearing a black leather jacket. He's clean shaven with shaggy blonde hair. LAURENCE, an enormous man in a windbreaker and a beanie drives.

HOLLIS

I spoke to Patrice. He tells me
you've been running quite a large
tab with him.

DUANE

(nervous)

Uh, yeah... well, I mean, Patrice
and I... we're friends, you know?
So... sometimes if I'm ever in a
bind... he'll float me some, uh...
But he knows I'm good for it.

Hollis nods and puffs on his cigar.

HOLLIS

He's a friendly guy, isn't he?

Hollis gives a wan smile. Duane swallows nervously.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Eight thousand dollars.

(wistful)

Such a generous man.

Duane glances out the window, trying to figure out where
they're going.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

I don't know if it would surprise
you to learn that you're not the
only person Patrice has been
friendly with, Mr. Boggs.

Hollis looks up toward the driver, meeting eyes with him in
the rearview mirror.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Laurence? How many others around
town would you say Patrice has been
friendly with?

LAURENCE

Too many.

HOLLIS

It turns out, generosity is
something of a chronic indisposition
when it comes to our good pal
Patrice.

The car slows to a stop in front of a shabby shotgun house
with a sagging chainlink fence outlining the perimeter of its
front yard. Duane looks out with mounting dread.

Laurence turns off the engine and, again, meets eyes with Hollis in the rear view mirror. Hollis nods, and Laurence leans over to the glove compartment, pulls out a revolver, then turns to look back at Duane, who immediately tenses up.

Laurence pops his door open, slides out of his seat, and heads toward the house. Duane watches as he bypasses the front porch, walking along the side of the home, eventually disappearing behind it. A beat of silence, then--

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

His family came here from Detroit.
Did you know that?

Duane shakes his head nervously.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

It was a rough neighborhood from what I understand. And they were looking for a new beginning. So they found a nice little neighborhood in a nice quiet town. Settled down. Bought themselves a house.

(points out the window)

This house actually.

Duane looks sick as he glances out at the house again.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

His mother and father were named Eddie and Cleo. They worked hard their whole lives to be able to afford the place. And then, when they passed away, they left it to their only son, Patrice.

(smiles, then)

Generosity runs in the family, I guess you'd say.

A silent beat before THREE MUFFLED GUN SHOTS can be heard inside the house along with three bright flashes seen through the curtained windows. Duane flinches, but Hollis is unfazed.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

I don't know about you, Mr. Boggs. But I never got a single thing from my family. Unless you count the unfortunate regional dialect of Pennsboro, West Virginia, which I most certainly do not.

(grim smile, then)

(MORE)

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

I left home at the tender age of fourteen, traveled here to Patterson, and eventually went on to create a whole new life for myself. My own little empire.

Out the window, we see Laurence come lumbering around the corner of the house, toward the car.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Obviously, I can't have people owing me money all over town. Beyond the obvious poor optics of that, it's just not a tenable business model.

Duane nods numbly as Laurence gets back in the driver's seat. He sets the gun down on the center console, then takes out a handkerchief and wipes some flecks of blood from his cheek. Hollis remains fixated on Duane.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Hopefully it's starting to become clear to you by now, Mr. Boggs, that I take my work very seriously. I like to get to know the people I'm involved with. To concern myself with the details of their lives. Details, after all, are what give life its richness and texture, don't you think? It's why I know what kind of car you drive. Why I know where you live. And why I know where all your family members live. Your parents. Your ex-wife. Your little boy.

He lets this threat hang out there for a silent beat, then--

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Eight thousand dollars. You've got 'til the end of the week.

EXT. STREET-MOMENTS LATER

Duane is deposited back at the 4-way intersection where Hollis first intercepted him. Duane watches the Chrysler drive off, then turns back to his own car, still parked in the middle of the road, underneath a dim streetlamp.

INT. BOGGS HOME-LIVING ROOM-THE NEXT DAY

Helen stands in the living room watching a LOCKSMITH re-key the lock for the front door.

Her eyes trail over to the bullet hole in the plasterboard. She stares at it, thinking.

MOMENTS LATER

Helen hammers a small nail into the wall, just above the bullet hole. She hangs another framed photo on the nail, covering the hole. It's a picture of her and Duane from many years ago, painting together at side-by-side easels, both smiling happily. She takes a step back and stares at it longingly.

INT. SHED-LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Helen sits in front of her easel, staring blankly at a half-finished family portrait. She looks around at the shed -- all of Gene's tools and yard implements. And her relegated to this one, tiny corner.

Slowly, she raises her hand to paint. A couple strokes before she withdraws her brush from the canvas and watches as her hand starts to tremble. A second later, she's crying unabated, all of her bottled emotion suddenly released.

Then, just as quickly, she swallows the pain in a very practiced way, like she's done it her whole life. Regaining her composure to a certain degree, she wipes her eyes, as we watch them darken. Her sorrow evolving into anger.

Then, in one violent motion, she grabs the canvas with both hands and hurls it across the shed. It lands near an assortment of fertilizers, pesticides, and poisons in ancient-looking tins and containers. Helen stares at these for a beat, thinking.

INT. BOGGS HOME-KITCHEN-LATER THAT EVENING

CLOSE ON A SERIES OF ACTIONS:

A chuck roast sears in a cast iron skillet.

A sharp knife slices through some carrots, celery, potatoes.

Two oven mitts remove an enameled dish from the oven and pull the lid off, releasing a cloud of steam.

REVERSE ON HELEN. She looks down at the steaming roast now on the counter. Then over at an old vintage tin of squirrel poison that she brought in from the shed, beside it. Her eyes move back and forth between the two.

And then, in one swift motion--

Helen grabs the tin of poison and adds it to the roast, blending it together with the rest of the ingredients. She looks anxiously to the other room and calls out in her best casual sing-song--

HELEN

Dinner.

INT. BOGGS HOME-DINING ROOM-LATER

Gene limps up to the empty table holding a folded newspaper in one hand and a can of beer in the other. He takes a seat, puts some bifocals on, and reads as he waits for Helen to serve him.

INT. BOGGS HOME-KITCHEN-MEANWHILE

Helen stands nervously in the kitchen, holding a plate of food in each hand. She cautiously sniffs the roast, testing for any noticeable irregularities, then takes a deep breath, steeling herself.

INT. BOGGS HOME-DINING ROOM-MEANWHILE

Gene, at the table, finishes his beer, growing impatient. He looks toward the kitchen--

GENE

Hey, what's the hold up, huh?

No response.

GENE (CONT'D)

Helen?

Then--

A LOUD CRASH.

Gene sighs, setting the paper down, and heads to the kitchen.

INT. BOGGS HOME-KITCHEN-MOMENTS LATER

Gene enters to find Helen on her hands and knees, using a dish towel to scoop up the overturned enameled dish.

GENE
What the hell?

HELEN
Sorry, Gene. It just... it slipped.
I'll fix you something else, okay?

INT. BOGGS HOME-DINING ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON a plate containing a sad-looking cold cut sandwich as it's plopped down on the dining room table in front of Gene. He stares at it for a beat, unimpressed, then looks up to Helen, who forces a smile.

INT. BOGGS HOME-BATHROOM-LATER THAT NIGHT

Helen goes through the motions of her bedtime routine. Brushes her teeth. Applies some thick, white, age-defying face cream, delicately avoiding the gauze taped to the bridge of her nose. When she's done, she stares at her reflection in the bathroom mirror.

INT. BOGGS HOME-BEDROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Helen enters the semi-dark bedroom and climbs into bed next to Gene, who lays on his side, facing away from her. She looks at him for a beat, then, tentatively--

HELEN
Gene? You awake?

No response. Helen steels herself, then--

HELEN (CONT'D)
Listen, I know it's not always easy for you to talk things out. But I'm different. I need that. And you never even asked me how I'm doing. After everything that happened, you never thought to check in and see if I'm okay.

A beat, then Gene sighs deeply, annoyed.

HELEN (CONT'D)
What?

GENE
Nothing, Helen.

HELEN
Well, don't say nothin'--

GENE
I was driftin' off just then. If
you must... I'd nearly drifted. Now
who's to say how long it'll take
before I can get back to where I
was.

HELEN
Well, I'm sorry. I was just trying
to have a--

GENE
You wanna talk. Is that it? Okay,
let's talk...

Gene gruffly rolls over to face her.

GENE (CONT'D)
You know it was him right? Your
precious golden child. He's the one
who put those boys up to that.

HELEN
He's your child, too, Gene.

Gene shakes his head with a look of detestation.

GENE
I know you blame me for driving him
away. But it's you who was always so
soft on him. Never instilled nothing
in him that was gonna prepare him for
this life. He needed to be strong if
he was gonna have a chance. But you
gave him the easy way out at every
turn.

HELEN
I gave him love.

GENE
And look at what good it did. You
think he's grateful to you for all
your indulgences? He sent those
boys here to rob us, Helen. To wave
their pistols around in our faces.

(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

That's the extent of what that child of yours thinks of you and me.

HELEN

I don't think Duane woulda done it unless he was in real trouble.

GENE

Listen to yourself. Always making excuses. You keep trying to find something good and useful amidst all of the rot and decay in him. But, I promise you, no matter how hard you look, there's never gonna be nothing there.

(shakes head)

And now look at me. Wide awake. And who knows how long before I'll get back to where I was.

Gene turns back over onto his side. Helen lets her head settle into her pillow, laying there, still, eyes open. A beat, then a few silent tears fall down her face.

INT. MOBILE OFFICE TRAILER-THE NEXT DAY

Sunlight creeps in through cheap blinds inside a cramped mobile office with a wood-paneled interior. An overweight man in a corporate polo shirt, MR. PELFRY, sits at a desk surrounded by squat beige file cabinets, holding a piece of paper. Across the desk from him sit Duane, Benji, and Rodney. Duane, in particular, looks preoccupied.

MR. PELFRY

This complaint was filed by a gentleman named Harrington. Says you were smoking marijuana on his property--

RODNEY

Well, technically, we were on the curb. So, that's like the city's property really--

MR. PELFRY

He says you pulled a firearm on him. Raisin' your voice. Makin'...
(looks at paper)
"Intimidatin' advances."

BENJI

Okay, I did have a gun. That part's true. But I don't believe that any of us raised our voice--

MR. PELFRY

(shakes head)

Look, boys, the fact is, I don't need the headache anymore. I mean the amount I've already--

(beat, then)

Benji, when your daddy passed, I promised him I'd give you a fair shake here. I owed him that much and I was happy to do it. But I believe I've followed through on that promise. And then some.

DUANE

Mr. Pelfry, you're right. We can be a handful sometimes. There's no disputin' it. And we, uh, we certainly apologize for any--

MR. PELFRY

It's too late for that, Duane.

Duane nervously wipes some sweat from his upper lip.

DUANE

Well, you know, it's just -- this is a sensitive time right now. I, in particular, could really use the income--

MR. PELFRY

I'm sorry, but I gotta let you go.

Duane stares back, one of his eyes starting to twitch a little.

DUANE

Okay. Well, in that case...

Duane reaches behind him, pulls a handgun out of the waistband of his pants, and points it at Mr. Pelfry.

Benji and Rodney instinctively scoot their chairs aside.

BENJI

Shit.

RODNEY

What the fuck?

Sweat drips from Duane's forehead.

DUANE

How much money you got in that safe
over there?

Mr. Pelfry stares back blankly, then--

MR. PELFRY

Put that thing away, Duane.

Duane doesn't move. Mr. Pelfry continues to glare at him.

MR. PELFRY (CONT'D)

I said put it away before you hurt
somebody.

A beat, then--

DUANE

Okay. Yeah.

Duane immediately lowers his weapon, emasculated, and shakes
his head apologetically.

DUANE (CONT'D)

(small)

Sorry.

MR. PELFRY

Go on and get outta here, you
dummies.

EXT. MOBILE OFFICE TRAILER-MOMENTS LATER

Duane stands outside the office trailer, nervously smoking.
The sun beats down. Benji and Rodney are with him.

RODNEY

What the hell was that, huh?

Duane blows some smoke out the side of his mouth and runs a
hand shakily across his chin.

DUANE

I dunno. I think I'm losing it,
man. That guy, Hollis -- if I don't
get him his money by Sunday, he
said he's comin' after me...

Benji and Rodney exchange a tentative look, then--

BENJI

What about our money, Duane?

DUANE
(incredulous)
Did you hear what I just said? This
guy's gonna fuckin' kill me, man.

BENJI
Yeah, I heard--

DUANE
Well, then how the fuck are you
askin' me about your money, huh?
What the fuck?
(under his breath)
Your money... shit.
(then)
You were the ones supposed to be
helpin' me.

RODNEY
We did help you, Duane. That's the
whole entire point.

DUANE
(scoffs)
Yeah. Some help.

RODNEY
You act like you're the only one
who needs things around here. You
know I got that student loan debt,
been taking all those online
business courses. And Benji's been
feelin' real stressed out ever
since the robbery. He's thinking he
might need to get some medication
or even go see a therapist or
somethin'.

DUANE
A therapist?

Benji looks away sheepishly.

RODNEY
The good news is, we agreed to
accept a reduced fee.

DUANE
Are you fucking kidding me?

RODNEY
'Course, if you can't pay us right
away, we'll have to charge you
interest on that amount.
(MORE)

RODNEY (CONT'D)

That's what they do in business.
Now, I'm not talkin' like a payday
loan or credit card interest rate
or nothing like that. Just like a
nice reputable lender-type
situation. Say, maybe like a 3.49
APR or somethin'? We're open to
discussin' it.

Duane stares back in disbelief. Clearly, he's on his own now.

INT. WHEATLEY HOUSE-GREAT ROOM-LATER

Helen and Edna sit on couches near a majestic fireplace over which Helen's portrait of Edna is proudly displayed. They drink tea out of little porcelain cups. Helen has to awkwardly maneuver hers to avoid bumping it against her injured nose. Edna shakes her head, sympathetic.

EDNA

It's unspeakable really.
(then)
Or is it unthinkable?
(then, shrugs)
Maybe it's both.

HELEN

Could be.

EDNA

Why didn't you just tell them
yourself? Some men are threatening
my life like that? Making demands?
I woulda pointed them right toward
those guns and been done with it.

At that, Helen appears slightly ashamed of herself.

HELEN

Yeah, I don't know. Guess I didn't
want to upset Gene.

EDNA

Upset Gene? Dear, I do not
understand that.

HELEN

I knew he didn't want me to say
anything.

EDNA

But he was gonna let them kill you.

Helen shrugs self-consciously and starts to give the same rote defenses of Gene that she's given for years--

HELEN

He says they weren't. He said he had a good read on them.

EDNA

Helen. No way he coulda known that.

Helen considers this. Some cracks in her well-practiced facade are starting to show. She thinks a beat longer, replaying it in her mind. As she does, her eyes trail off, and suddenly she's fighting emotion.

HELEN

You're right.

EDNA

Oh, no...

HELEN

Why'd I do that?

EDNA

Dear--

HELEN

Why'd I do exactly what he wanted me to?

(then)

It's my fault, Edna.

EDNA

Don't say that.

HELEN

It is. I'm not blind to the way I am. The things I put up with. I allowed my life to turn out like this. I got nobody to blame but myself.

EDNA

Helen--

HELEN

I never tried to take control of the situation. Never once stood up to him. And it's not like it never occurred to me either.

EDNA

What could you have done?

HELEN

I coulda said something.

EDNA

Something tells me he wouldn't have been too receptive to that.

HELEN

I coulda left him maybe. Filed for divorce.

EDNA

You really think so?

HELEN

Well, I coulda killed him then.

A quiet beat. Finally, Edna smiles weakly.

EDNA

Yeah, well. We've all thought about that once or twice, haven't we?

HELEN

I've played the whole thing out in my head more times than I can count. Waiting for the day when I might get up the nerve to actually do it.

(then)

But I realize that day's never coming. That's the point. It's never coming, because I'm too weak to see that it does.

EDNA

Dear, you are not weak. You live with a man like Gene day in and day out. I'd say that makes you one of the strongest people I know.

Helen awkwardly takes another sip of tea, contemplating.

INT. PIGGLY WIGGLY-AFTERNOON

Helen pushes a shopping cart through the aisles of a modest grocery store. She stops in front of a shelf of spices, browsing all the little glass canisters, but ultimately moves on without grabbing any.

Then, reaching the end of the aisle, she hears a commotion coming from up near the registers.

She looks to see Minnie, dressed in a store-mandated apron, following a nervous-looking store manager, DONNY, past a few busy check-out lines. They're in the midst of an argument that's already drawn the attention of a number of shoppers.

MINNIE

This is bullshit, Donny.

DONNY

(hushed)

Minnie. Please. The customers.

MINNIE

Who, you mean Darlene? You think she don't already know what kinda man you are?

Donny smiles apologetically to a female customer.

MINNIE (CONT'D)

What you're doin' is a load of B.S., and you well know it--

DONNY

You were two hours late for your shift. What do you want me to--

MINNIE

I told you, Beau was sick. And this bitch-ass babysitter of mine--

DONNY

Can you please not--?

(then)

Those are not my problems, Minnie.

Helen continues to eavesdrop from afar.

DONNY (CONT'D)

Now, I am sorry. I am. And I do not mean to sound callous here, but this is not a new thing. You are consistently comin' in late--

MINNIE

Do you have any idea how often kids get sick, Donny?! It's, like, all the damn time. They say these preschools are like fuckin' petri dishes or whatever. And now he's been cryin' and pullin' people's hair--

DONNY

It's already done, Minnie. Okay? I already gave your shifts to Jasmine. So, you know, there's really nothing further to discuss. I'm sorry.

MINNIE

Yeah, like hell you are.

They stand there for a beat, staring each other down.

DONNY

Please don't make me hafta get Nick to escort you outta here.

Donny crosses off as Minnie angrily removes her apron. Helen cautiously approaches, pushing her cart.

HELEN

Minnie, hi. I couldn't help but overhear--

MINNIE

It's not really a good time, Helen.

HELEN

No, of course. Are you okay though?

MINNIE

What do you think?

HELEN

I heard you say that Beau's sick. Is that... is he--

MINNIE

You can't come here talkin' to me about Beau--

HELEN

No--

MINNIE

I'm sure you mean well, but you just can't do it, Helen.

HELEN

No, you're right. I'm sorry.

(then)

You're a good mother to him, Minnie. I've always thought so.

Helen's eyes flash with sadness. Minnie notes this and softens a little. She points to Helen's nose.

MINNIE

What happened there? Gene do that?

Helen instinctively touches the gauze taped to her injured nose.

HELEN

Oh. No. No, that was just a little accident.

MINNIE

Yeah, I bet.

(then)

Listen, I think Duane might be up to something. He showed up to Beau's school the other day, talking about some new prospect. Some big time money-maker. Figured you should know. Maybe that way you can prepare for the fall-out.

Helen nods slightly, resigned. As she does, something catches her eye near the front of the store -- it's Rodney, who's just entered through the automatic doors. He spots Helen almost immediately and conspicuously freezes. The two of them stare at each other awkwardly for a beat. Then, Helen notices the familiar tattoo on his lower neck -- the uncoiled black tentacles emerging from the top of his shirt collar -- and her face suddenly registers a wave of recognition. Rodney, sensing this, abruptly turns and rushes out of the store. Helen turns back to Minnie--

HELEN

'Scuse me, dear.

She briskly follows Rodney out.

EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT-CONTINUOUS

As Helen steps past the automatic doors, she sees that Rodney's broken into a full-on sprint across the parking lot. She chases after.

HELEN

Hey! Wait a minute!

Rodney reaches his old beater car and quickly climbs in the front seat. He slams the door shut and nervously fumbles for the key to the ignition but, in doing so, drops the whole key ring onto the floor.

RODNEY

Shit.

He bends down to pick them up, and by the time he raises his head again, Helen's stern face is there, filling his driver's side window, startling him.

HELEN

(through glass)

Rodney Templeton?

Slowly, Rodney cranks the window all the way down and looks at her sheepishly.

RODNEY

Hey, Miss Boggs.

INT. RODNEY'S BEATER CAR-MOMENTS LATER

Helen sits in the passenger seat of Rodney's car, still parked out front of the Piggly Wiggly.

HELEN

I knew somethin' was familiar about you that day.

Rodney sits silently, ashamed. Helen shakes her head, disappointed.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I gave you straight A's on your report card in the 4th grade. Do you remember that?

RODNEY

No, ma'am.

HELEN

You were such a good boy. Such potential. What happened?

RODNEY

I'm not exactly sure, ma'am.

Helen sighs.

HELEN

Nothing ever ends up how you think.

A long beat. Then--

HELEN (CONT'D)

Did Duane put you up to it?

Rodney doesn't say anything.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Is he in some kind of trouble,
Rodney?

Rodney shifts nervously.

RODNEY
I dunno, Miss Boggs. You probably
oughta ask him about it.

Helen considers this. Then--

HELEN
How much was he gonna pay you?

RODNEY
I don't, uh--

HELEN
How much?

Rodney hesitates, unsure whether to answer this or not. Then--

RODNEY
Thousand bucks.

HELEN
For you and your partner.

Rodney nods, averting his eyes. Helen thinks it over. Then--

HELEN (CONT'D)
Well, how's five thousand sound?

RODNEY
Five thousand?

Rodney finally looks over at her. Helen tries to read his reaction. Finally, tentatively--

RODNEY (CONT'D)
What for?

HELEN
For going back and finishing what
you started.

Rodney squints, trying to gauge her seriousness.

RODNEY
You want us to try to take your
husband's guns again?

HELEN

No.

Helen shakes her head.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I was thinkin' 'bout more of a
permanent solution this time.

Rodney looks at her in confusion and disbelief.

EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY PARKING LOT-MOMENTS LATER

Rodney's car drives off. Helen stands in the parking lot watching him go. After a beat, she takes a cell phone out of her purse, and places a call.

HELEN

(into phone)

Edna, hey. It's me. You know, I've
been thinking about it... I'd like
to schedule that gallery show after
all.

(beat, then)

Soon as possible, yeah.

INT. OLDSMOBILE-LATER

Duane drives down a neighborhood street. He looks disheveled, like he hasn't slept in a while. His bloodshot eyes dart around nervously, taking inventory of his surroundings.

In an attempt to calm himself, he tries the tape deck again, but it sounds even worse than last time. Frustrated, Duane strikes the stereo with his fist a few times as he pulls up to a red light. Once stopped, he glances in his rearview mirror and sees a BLACK CHRYSLER pulling up right behind him.

Duane stiffens at the sight of the car, slinking down in his seat.

Up ahead, the traffic light turns green. Duane nervously proceeds through the intersection, keeping close watch on the car behind him. He makes a right turn at the next street, and looks into the rearview mirror: THE BLACK CHRYSLER FOLLOWS.

DUANE

Shit.

Duane accelerates, then makes another right turn. The Chrysler again follows.

Duane leans on the gas, speeding ahead down a long straightaway, and looks in the rearview mirror again. He's managed put some distance between him and the trailing car.

But up ahead, another intersection approaches. Duane presses harder on the gas, glancing up again as the light flashes to YELLOW.

He's going to try to make it.

The light flashes to RED. Duane's still 100 feet from the intersection. He considers his options. Maybe if he blows through it, he'll get lucky and avoid the cross-traffic?

But, at the very last second, he decides against that and SLAMS THE BRAKES, skidding to a stop just before the intersection. Then he can only watch helplessly as the black Chrysler draws closer.

As it pulls up behind him, its turn signal starts to flash, indicating a lane shift...

And, sure enough, it weaves left and rolls up alongside Duane. Duane hunches down a little. He steals a quick glance over, surprised to see--

A LITTLE OLD LADY with big coke bottle glasses sitting behind the wheel. She can barely see over the dash. She pays no attention to Duane.

The light turns green and the old lady continues harmlessly past. Duane laughs a little to himself. But what starts as a nervous burst of relief, quickly turns more emotional. He fights back tears as he drives slowly forward. Once he's through the intersection, he pulls his car over and parks. He's sweating. His hands are trembling. He takes a few deep breaths.

Suddenly, his phone RINGS, startling him. He looks down at it for a beat before answering--

DUANE (CONT'D)

Minnie.

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

Hey. I'm callin' 'bout that stupid thing you mentioned the other day. Whatever it was. You know what I'm talkin' about?

DUANE

The, uh... Yeah, the--

MINNIE

You said you had something... some money...

(then)

Donny fired me, Duane.

DUANE

Oh shit. That asshole.

(then)

You know, the thing is, Minnie... my prospect--

MINNIE

Beau needs glasses. Turns out, that could be the reason he's been actin' funny at school. 'Cause his eyes are workin' too hard. And it's throwin' everything else outta whack. They say it's been known to happen.

DUANE

Yeah. Well... the thing I was talking about... you know... it, uh...

(long beat, then)

It came through.

MINNIE

Yeah?

DUANE

That's right. Paid off big time. So... nothing to worry about.

MINNIE

Oh, that's amazin'. Thank you, Duane.

DUANE

Sure. Yeah.

(then)

Hey, is he there? Could you put him on?

MINNIE

You know he doesn't like talkin' on the phone--

DUANE

Yeah, no. I just wanna hear his voice for a sec.

MINNIE

Hang on.
(calling off)
Beau. Come on over here.

BEAU

Hello?

DUANE

Hey, boy. It's your daddy. How you doin'?

BEAU

Fine.

DUANE

Fine? Well, that's good.
(thinks, then)
Look, I wanted to tell you that I know you been cryin' lately. And pullin' hair. I heard about it. And I wanted to let you know there's nothing wrong with that, okay? Feelin' sad? That happens to the best of 'em. Okay? But everything's gonna be fine. You got nothing to worry about. You hear me?

BEAU

Okay.

DUANE

All right.

BEAU

Mom, here. I'm gonna press the button--

DUANE (CONT'D)

Your daddy loves you--

Click. The call drops. Duane lowers the phone and sits back for a beat, more desperate than ever. Suddenly, he SLAMS the stereo a few more times, drawing some blood across his knuckles.

INT. BOGGS HOME-KITCHEN-LATER

Helen and Gene sit across the table from each other, silently finishing their dinner. After a beat, Helen looks up from her plate.

HELEN

Meant to tell you... I got an art show this weekend.

GENE

Art show?

HELEN

Sunday night. At Edna's gallery.
She set it up.

Helen stands and starts to collect the dirty dishes.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You interested?

GENE

In what?

HELEN

I dunno. Thought maybe you might
wanna see what it's like.

Gene gives her a blank look, then--

GENE

Feel like if I went I'd probably
just keep on thinking about how
much money you spent on everything.
All that paint, and the brushes,
those canvases. Probably just wind
up pissin' me off in the end.

HELEN

Okay.

(nods, then)

Guess it'll just be me then.

Helen finishes stacking the dishes, then turns toward the kitchen. Once her back is to Gene, the littlest smile starts pulling at the corners of her mouth.

EXT. SHED-DAY

Helen watches as WORKERS carry a couple dozen individually-wrapped canvases out of the shed in the backyard, loading them carefully into the trailer of a pick-up truck.

INT. GALLERY SPACE-LATER

Helen and Edna walk through the gallery, directing the workers toward where to hang each of Helen's paintings.

INT. OLDSMOBILE-LATER

Duane sits in the front seat of his car, engine off, looking out at his parents' home. He takes a breath, then exits the vehicle and heads toward the house.

EXT. BOGGS HOME-LATER

Duane creeps up to the side of the house. He looks around to make sure nobody's watching, then crosses to a small basement window. With minimal force, he's able to pry it open. He gives one more cautionary glance around, then slides feet-first through the open window, into--

INT. BOGGS HOME-BASEMENT-CONTINUOUS

A cluttered, unfinished basement. Cement walls and stacks of cardboard boxes. An old water heater buzzes in the corner. Pink fiberglass erupts from the ductwork lining the ceiling.

Duane's feet find a small workbench under the window, allowing him to get his balance. He scans the space and spots a box nearby labeled: DUANE'S THINGS. Curious, he opens it and pulls out a messy stack of paper.

CLOSE ON: pen and ink drawings from his childhood -- comic strips and superheroes.

Duane stares at them for a beat, remembering fondly. Then he puts them back.

INT. BOGGS HOME-KITCHEN-MEANWHILE

Gene is in the kitchen, downing the last dregs of beer from a can. He throws it into the trash, which is filled with dozens of other empties, then crosses to the fridge for another.

INT. BOGGS HOME-MEANWHILE

Duane quietly ascends the creaky basement steps that lead to the main interior of the home. When he makes it to the top, he looks through the doorway and sees Gene in the kitchen, cracking open another can and taking a swig.

As soon as Gene's back is to him, Duane quickly crosses through the living room and makes his way upstairs.

INT. BOGGS HOME-SPARE BEDROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Duane quietly enters his old bedroom. Most evidence of his existence has been removed and painted over, except for his old baseball trophies that sit on the dresser. He picks one up and looks at it nostalgically, then crosses to the gun cabinet -- all those antique firearms organized meticulously by era. He tries the doors. Locked. He looks down at the trophy in his hand, then back to the glass of the cabinet. And just as he's considering smashing the glass--

He hears Gene CREAKING UP THE STAIRS.

Quickly, Duane ducks into the closet with the trophy, pulling the door closed, but leaving a small sliver of space to allow him to still see into the bedroom.

After a beat, Gene enters and sets his can of beer down on the dresser. He doesn't notice the missing trophy. He crosses to the gun cabinet and stands there, wavering unsteadily on his feet.

Duane watches as Gene uses the key around his neck to unlock the cabinet. He pulls out a 9MM GLOCK, then locks the cabinet and puts the key back around his neck.

Gene crosses to the bed and sits down at the edge of it, quietly. He stares off at nothing. Duane watches, trying not to make a sound.

Gene sighs. He seems tired, contemplative. He looks down at the gun in his hand. Then, suddenly, he starts to cry. He touches the bridge of his nose, trying to fight back the drunken tears. Duane stares in disbelief.

And then, as fast as it came, Gene's emotion passes. He's regained his composure. But he still looks tired. He sighs, expelling any residual emotion that may have been left inside of him, then lies down on the bed. He kicks one of his shoes off, onto the floor, then closes his eyes, still clutching the glock.

After a few moments, Gene begins to snore. Carefully, Duane pushes open the closet door and steps out.

He crosses to the bed and looks down at his father with a mixture of hatred and pity. Asleep, he seems almost harmless. But then again, he's still holding that gun...

Duane turns his attention to the gun cabinet. It's locked. The key is around his father's neck. No way to remove it without waking him. Same goes for smashing the glass. And with the gun in Gene's hand, Duane's not risking it.

Considering his options, Duane shifts his weight slightly, causing a floorboard to quietly groan underneath him. Gene stirs. Duane freezes, holds his breath. As soon as Gene settles, Duane quickly and quietly exits the room.

INT. BOGGS HOME-MOMENTS LATER

Duane makes it back down the stairs, into the basement, and slips back out the window undetected.

INT. STATION WAGON-LATER

Helen pulls into the driveway, then pauses to take a moment to stare at her house before getting out.

INT. BOGGS HOME-CLOSET-EVENING

Helen stands all the way in the back of her closet, pushing hanging garments aside until she finds what she's looking for -- a beautiful floral dress, wrapped in protective cellophane from the dry cleaners.

INT. BOGGS HOME-BEDROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Helen emerges from the closet with the dress. She carefully removes it from the plastic, puts it on, and admires herself in the mirror.

Stepping close to the mirror, she delicately removes the tape and gauze from her nose. The bridge is still swollen and slightly black and blue, but it's healing.

She applies some make-up and lipstick, then stares at her reflection, looking nervous. She forces a smile, but startles when--

 GENE (O.S.)
So this is it, huh?

Helen turns to see Gene standing in the threshold, watching. He looks unkempt and a little drunk.

 GENE (CONT'D)
Your big moment.

Helen averts her eyes uncomfortably.

 GENE (CONT'D)
You really think people're gonna
buy that stuff of yours, huh?

HELEN

Well, I don't know. Edna's optimistic. But it remains to be seen, I s'pose.

GENE

Yeah, I s'pose so.

Gene looks at her sincerely for a pronounced beat, his tone finally shifting--

GENE (CONT'D)

You look nice.

HELEN

(taken aback)

What?

Gene smiles.

GENE

You're gonna make me say it again, aren't you?

(then)

You look real nice, Helen.

Helen seems a little disoriented by this unusual kindness.

HELEN

Thank you.

Gene stares at her fondly for a beat, then--

GENE

You know, maybe I oughta come with you to this thing after all.

Helen stiffens reflexively.

HELEN

Oh.

She does her best to appear casual.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Okay, yeah. Sure. I mean--

GENE

Hey. Relax. I'm only kiddin'.

(smirks, then)

You get one compliment and you think the whole world's fallin' for you.

Helen looks back at him blankly for a beat, then--

HELEN
Goodbye, Gene.

INT. STATION WAGON-LATER

Helen drives in silence. Tense and anxious. She pulls her car up to a curb and parks. Out the windshield she can see the illuminated entrance of Edna's gallery. A few dozen people are already milling about inside, regarding her work. She takes a breath to calm herself.

INT. BOGGS HOME-LIVING ROOM-LATER

Gene is in his La-Z-Boy, watching another ballgame on TV. Drinking another beer. He sets the can down on the coffee table, which wobbles noticeably as he does. Gene looks at the broken leg, which he's clearly tried to fix with copious amounts of wood glue. He seems disappointed in the outcome.

INT. GALLERY SPACE-LATER

Helen stands before a stark white wall adorned with her paintings.

Each piece, a variation on a theme, depicts her own family in a posed setting, though the subjects portrayed are all faceless. Though otherwise possessing impeccable verisimilitude and attention to detail, they all have blank, beige spots where faces should be. They're stark, bold, and as we're well aware, resonant of her own existence.

Even Helen has to admit, the cumulative effect of seeing all these faceless familial portraits presented together is oddly haunting. She, herself, even gets slightly lost in them, but is shaken from her reverie when she hears--

RALPH (O.S.)
Excuse me, ma'am, but this is a
private event.

Helen turns to see Ralph standing there, dressed in his police uniform, smiling. Helen smiles back, genuinely.

HELEN
Officer Stansall.

RALPH
Please. Ralph.

HELEN

What are you doing here?

RALPH

You kiddin' me? Had to come and see what all the fuss was about.

(then, re: paintings)

This is very interesting work, Helen. I mean really. These, uh... well, the visages here... the absence of the, uh--

HELEN

You're wonderin' why they don't have faces.

Ralph smiles, sheepish.

RALPH

Caught me tryin' to speak all artistically.

HELEN

Well, if you ask Edna over there, she's gonna tell you 'bout the symbolism I was trying to express. How, when you paint a face, you got two eyes lookin' directly back at you. So these paintings here are about a discomfort with that feeling, she'll say. A general unease with the whole idea of being seen.

Ralph nods, impressed. Helen smiles.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Really, though, I could just never get my family to look the way I wanted 'em to.

They smile at each other again, then--

RALPH

Hey, is it true? I heard the drinks at these things are free.

EXT. BOGGS HOME-LATER

A sedan heads down the dark street, slowing to a stop in front of the Boggs home. The headlights promptly blink off.

INT. CAR-MOMENTS LATER

Benji and Rodney sit in the front seats, looking out at the house. They've both got pantyhose bunched at the tops their heads and guns in their laps. The first-story windows of the house are illuminated.

BENJI

So she's out for the night?

RODNEY

Couple hours, she said.

BENJI

And he's all alone in there?

RODNEY

That's the idea.

They look at each other, nervous.

BENJI

Well, shit. Let's get this over with then.

Simultaneously, they pull the pantyhose down to cover their faces, then look out again, girding themselves, before popping open their doors.

INT. GALLERY SPACE-LATER

Helen and Ralph walk together through the gallery space, holding champagne flutes.

RALPH

You know, I probably oughta say hello to your husband. Is he around somewhere or--?

HELEN

Oh. No. He didn't... um...

RALPH

Didn't he?

Ralph frowns. Helen shakes her head, dismissing it.

HELEN

It's fine.

RALPH

Is it though?

Helen seems unsure how to respond. Ralph notices.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have-- I've overstepped my bounds--

HELEN

No, it's all right--

RALPH

Let's chalk it up to the champagne, okay? I'm not exactly accustomed to alcohol of this caliber--

HELEN

Are you married, Officer Stansall?

RALPH

What'd I tell you? Call me Ralph.

HELEN

I keep forgetting. Must be the uniform.

RALPH

I'm divorced. As of about six months ago. That's why I took the job in town here. Needed a fresh start.

HELEN

I'm sorry.

RALPH

Don't be. It was for the best. It's human nature anyway. We change and we adapt. The moving on is unavoidable. Getting the timing of it right, that's the real trick.

They stop in a quiet corner of the gallery.

RALPH (CONT'D)

How long have you and Gene...?

HELEN

Thirty years.

RALPH

Quite the accomplishment.

She nods sadly.

HELEN

It was a marriage of necessity you might say. When I got pregnant with our son... Gene didn't want kids. Didn't want to keep the baby. But I convinced him otherwise.

(sad smile)

Might've been the only thing I ever convinced him of.

Ralph looks at her with tenderness.

RALPH

I didn't know you had a son.

HELEN

Duane.

Ralph nods, then--

RALPH

I take it he's not here either.

Before Helen can reply, the walkie clipped to Ralph's uniform crackles with static.

RALPH (CONT'D)

(to Helen)

'Scuse me a second.

(crossing off)

Go for Stansall.

He crosses off, just out of earshot. Listens. Nods. Replies into the walkie. Then crosses back to Helen.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Helen. Duty calls. Thank you for a very nice evening. Like I said, I'm no critic, but I found this whole experience here to be real... uh... illuminatin'.

Helen blushes.

HELEN

Me, too.

Ralph smiles, then crosses toward the exit. Helen watches him go. After a beat, Edna approaches with a small gaggle of prospective buyers in tow.

EDNA

Here she is, ladies and gentlemen!
The woman of the hour!

(MORE)

EDNA (CONT'D)

Come over here, Helen. Let me
introduce you to everybody.

Helen's happily overwhelmed as she's converged upon by admirers.

INT. BOGGS HOME-LIVING ROOM-LATER

Gene kneels next to the coffee table, stuffing drink coasters under the broken leg in an effort to steady it. He tests it, pushing down on the table with his hands, and is pleased with the result. As he stands up, he hears a faint clattering outside, like someone's knocked into the garbage bin at the side of the house. Slowly, Gene reaches for the TV remote, mutes the game, and listens.

Silence. Then--

TWO VOICES WHISPERING FROM THE BACKYARD.

Gene turns off the TV, and calmly sets down the remote.

QUIET RATTLING OF THE BACK DOORKNOB.

Gene reaches under his recliner. His hand re-emerges holding a 12-GAUGE SHOTGUN.

SLOW SQUEAK OF HINGES.

Gene checks the chamber. Then waits.

INT. GALLERY SPACE-LATER

In the empty gallery, post-show, Helen and Edna celebrate their successful night with glasses of champagne. Edna counts out cash on a countertop.

EDNA

What'd I tell you?

Helen looks utterly surprised and relieved.

HELEN

I can't believe it, Edna.

EDNA

Well, there's gonna be more where
this came from.

HELEN

Thank you.

EDNA
You earned it, dear.

She hands Helen the money.

EDNA (CONT'D)
Just promise me you'll do something
special for yourself, okay?

Helen smiles knowingly.

INT. STATION WAGON-LATER

Helen drives, alone and stoic. The true significance of this night has settled back in. The cash from the art show is on the passenger seat, wrapped in a bag from the Dollar Store. The roads and neighborhoods are dark. As she gets close to her home, she starts to speak softly, to herself.

HELEN
(feigning surprise)
Well, I don't know, officers. No, I
was out. At an event, that's right.
Oh, dear, that's just awful...
Yeah, that's him all right...
that's Gene...

She looks around and notices there's no police presence in the neighborhood. Everything's quiet and still as she pulls into her driveway. She cuts the engine and looks over at the front door with dreadful anticipation. Then she steels herself, grabs the Dollar Store bag, and exits the car.

INT. BOGGS HOME-LIVING ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Helen slowly pushes open the front door and stands there, waiting. She listens. SILENCE. She takes a few tentative steps inside, then freezes when she sees a BLOODY ARM extended from the kitchen onto the living room floor.

She stares at the arm ruminatively for a beat, unsure how to respond.

Then, before she can take another step, she hears a sound from the kitchen. A cupboard opening, then closing. Her expression immediately shifts -- worried and defensive.

HELEN
(tentative)
Hello?

The sound stops. Helen waits, frozen with uncertainty. Then--

GENE steps into the kitchen doorway, alive and well. Helen's eyes go wide.

GENE
(calmly)
You're home.

HELEN
Gene?

His clothes are covered in blood, but his calm demeanor suggests that it's not his blood.

GENE
Hope your night went a little
better than mine.

Helen's stunned. Speechless. Gene grabs a roll of duct tape out of a little wooden sideboard, then promptly returns to the kitchen. Helen remains standing there, reeling, feet planted in the carpet, mind racing.

She sets the Dollar Store bag down on the coffee table, then, slowly, coaxes her body forward, in small, uncertain steps, toward the kitchen.

INT. BOGGS HOME-KITCHEN-MOMENTS LATER

When Helen reaches the doorway, she sees that the bloody arm belongs to Rodney, who is dead, gunshot wound in the stomach, lying face-up in a pool of blood.

HELEN
(whispered)
Oh my god.

Positioned in the center of the linoleum floor, Benji sits on a kitchen chair, his arms and legs duct-taped to it. Benji's left leg is bleeding profusely, also from an apparent gunshot wound. He shoots a terrified glance toward Helen, his eyes pleading for her help, as Gene rips a piece of duct-tape from the roll and affixes it over his mouth.

GENE
You recognize 'em, right? Our old
friends. Back for more.

Helen's mind races.

HELEN
(shocked)
I don't...

GENE

They came in through the kitchen.
But this time, I was ready. Had my
shotgun under the La-Z-Boy.

(points to Rodney)

This one didn't even know what hit
him. And this guy tried to run. So
I shot him in the leg. Figured me
and him needed to have a little
conversation.

HELEN

Yeah? What, uh...

(tentative)

What'd he say?

GENE

What'd he say? Lots of stuff.

Helen noticeably tenses up.

HELEN

Oh yeah?

GENE

Ow, for example. *No. Stop.*

(shrugs, then)

Lotta other variations on that same
basic idea.

HELEN

So he didn't say anything then.

GENE

I just told you what he said.

HELEN

Right.

(then)

Which was nothin', basically.

GENE

What's the matter with you?

HELEN

Sorry. I'm just tryin' to wrap my
head around it...

GENE

Yeah, tell me about it.

Helen surveys the whole scene again, on the verge of tears,
then--

HELEN
Gene, listen, we can't--

GENE
Can't what?

Helen looks back at him helplessly.

GENE (CONT'D)
We didn't force the issue, Helen.
They did. They're the ones who
couldn't leave well enough alone.

HELEN
No, I know... this just seems...

Gene points a finger at Benji.

GENE
This is the one right here, you
know. He's the one who hit you in
the face that day. The one who held
his pistol up to your head. That's
what I wanted to talk to him about.

Gene bends down to get eye-level with Benji.

GENE (CONT'D)
You see, my wife is more big-hearted
than me. She's willing to look past
certain things. Forgive and forget.
But I'm different than that. Call me
old fashioned, but when someone
breaks into my own home... when he
holds a gun up to...

Gene suddenly chokes up a bit, emotional. Helen looks
surprised by this.

GENE (CONT'D)
(pushing through)
...when he holds a gun to my wife's
head... well, that's not something
I can easily forgive. And I'll
certainly never forget it.

Tears begin to fall down Gene's face as he inhales sharply.
Helen can hardly bear the sight of it.

HELEN
Gene, look at me. It's okay...

She can't help but begin to cry, too.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Come on now...

Gene, distraught, looks over to Rodney splayed out on the floor in a pool of his own blood.

GENE

I didn't wanna have to do it... I mean, if they wouldn't have come here...

HELEN

It's okay. It's over now.

Gene's expression turns menacing as he looks back at Benji.

GENE

No. Not yet.

Gene grabs his shotgun off the counter and holds it at his side as he stares blankly at Benji.

HELEN

Hey... you don't have to do that. We can let him go. He's not gonna say nothing.

(to Benji)

We can do that, right?

Benji nods.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You're not gonna talk to nobody?

Benji shakes his head, eyes filling with tears. Helen stares at him, trying to gauge whether or not she can trust him.

HELEN (CONT'D)

I just don't want you to do anything stupid here...

Benji shakes his head more emphatically, tears falling.

Helen looks back at Gene, standing there, vulnerable. Finally, he relents, leaning back against the counter, sliding down, letting the gun clatter to the floor.

Helen quickly crosses to the nearby knife block, grabs a butcher knife, and cuts Benji loose. She makes sustained eye contact with him before slowly pulling the duct tape from his mouth. She holds her breath, waiting to see if he's going to say anything. He doesn't.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Go on now.

He backs away from her, then finally turns and staggers off, out the back door. Once he's out of sight, Helen turns back toward the kitchen. She looks down at Gene, sitting there on the kitchen floor in a daze. She looks over at Rodney's dead body on the floor, the emotion welling in her eyes.

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-LATER

The lights are off. Duane sits on his floor, under the front window, holding a handgun. Nervously, he straightens up, and peeks out past the curtains. The street outside is quiet and empty. Duane slumps back down. Thinks for a beat. Then he pulls out his phone and dials a number. A couple rings, then--

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

Duane?

DUANE

Minnie, hey. How's, uh--

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

What time is it? Why're you callin'?

DUANE

Well, you know, I just wanted to talk.

MINNIE

Shit, are you high?

DUANE

No. No, I'm not-- Look, it turns out I was wrong about what I told you before, Minnie. That money, um--

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

Goddamn it, Duane.

DUANE

Yeah, I'm sorry about that--

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

I shoulda known. I don't know why I let myself--

DUANE

Listen, I'm real sorry. Okay? For everything. I know I've caused you a lot of pain.

(MORE)

DUANE (CONT'D)

And I know this ain't the first time I let you down. I never wanted to be like this. Never thought I would be.

(then)

There's a version of me, Minnie, when I think about myself, there's a version that's good. Can you imagine? A version that makes all the right choices. It's a version that would make you real proud, I think. You and Beau. If you could ever see it. But that's... it's more like a wish, you know? Because I don't know how to do it. I don't know how to take what's in my mind and make it real. I don't know...

(trails off, then)

Anyways, I'm sorry about not having the money like I said. And for everything else, too.

(then)

And, look, I know it's a long shot... but you wouldn't happen to have any money of yours that I could borrow--

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

What?

DUANE

I'd pay you back--

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

You asshole. You sonuvabitch--

DUANE

Okay, no. Just forget it then. But listen, you might wanna take Beau and go somewhere else for a little while--

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

What are you talkin' about?

DUANE

I'm just sayin'. Both of you, you should maybe go somewhere else. Just to be safe--

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

Safe? What the fuck? What did you do, Duane?

DUANE

I know. I'm sorry. Maybe get outta town though.

MINNIE (ON PHONE)

What the fuck did you fuckin' do?

She hangs up. Duane shakes his head, lowers the phone. He absently looks out the window again. And when he does, he sees a familiar black Chrysler LeBaron parked right in front of his house. Immediately, Duane drops down, out of sight.

DUANE

Shit...

Duane nervously checks his gun, then stands and races down a hallway, to his bedroom.

DUANE (CONT'D)

Shit... shit... shit...

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-BEDROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Duane scans the room for a suitable hiding place. He checks the closet but it's too cluttered for him to fit inside, so he drops to the floor and quickly shimmies under the bed.

Then he waits... lying there in the dark, on his stomach. It's silent for a beat, until he hears something... The sound of his back door being jimmied open.

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-KITCHEN-CONTINUOUS

Laurence (Hollis's driver who shot Patrice) makes his way past a broken doorframe and enters Duane's kitchen. He reaches into the back of his pants, removes a pistol, and screws a silencer onto its muzzle.

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-BEDROOM-CONTINUOUS

Duane listens to the sound of Laurence's footsteps as they exit the kitchen and move down the hall towards the bedroom, the sound of each successive step getting louder and more defined. Just as they reach the threshold of his bedroom--

THE DOORBELL RINGS.

The footsteps stop.

Silence.

Duane remains as still as possible, listening through short, clipped breaths.

We hear a QUICK SERIES OF KNOCKS on the front door.

And then--

A VOICE from behind it.

BENJI (O.S.)
Duane. Open up, man. It's Benji.

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-CONTINUOUS

In the dark living room, we HOLD ON the front door.

BENJI (O.S.)
I saw your car parked way down the street. I know you're here. I gotta talk to you. Man, I'm shot. Do you hear me? Your fucking dad, man-- Just open up, okay? Come on.

The DOORBELL RINGS again. And AGAIN.

And Benji keeps POUNDING.

BENJI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm not leaving, man! I know you're in there!

Finally, Laurence ominously steps into frame. Left with no other option, he promptly opens the door and shoots Benji dead.

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-BEDROOM-CONTINUOUS

Duane, still under his bed, flinches at the sound of the shot.

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-CONTINUOUS

Laurence drags Benji's body inside and closes the door. He pulls out his handkerchief and wipes his face with it, then heads back down the hallway toward Duane's bedroom.

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-BEDROOM-CONTINUOUS

Duane listens as the footsteps approach, but this time, they stop at the bathroom. He hears the faucet start running as Laurence washes the blood off his hands.

INT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-MOMENTS LATER

Laurence exits the bathroom, heads down the hall, and enters the bedroom. He looks around at the empty space.

He checks the closet. Nothing.

He turns around and stares at the bed. He readies his gun, then quickly ducks down to see...

Nothing.

Laurence stands and surveys the room again, then crosses to the closed curtains on the bedroom's far wall, pushing them gently aside. The window behind them is wide open. As he pokes his head out and looks around, we SMASH CUT to--

EXT. STREET-MOMENTS LATER

Duane sprinting down the street, huffing and snorting.

In one hand, he holds his gun. With his other, he desperately fishes his car keys out of his pants pocket. He makes it to his car, climbs in, and drives off.

INT. BOGGS HOME-BATHROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Gene stands in the shower, letting the water wash the blood off of him and carry it down the drain.

INT. BOGGS HOME-KITCHEN-MEANWHILE

Rodney's body has been removed. Helen mops up the pooled blood and scrubs the linoleum. When she finishes, she slumps back against the cabinets, and sighs deeply.

She stares off, contemplative, until a SOUND draws her attention, coming from the living room.

INT. BOGGS HOME-LIVING ROOM-MOMENTS LATER

Helen enters tentatively, listening for the source of the sound.

It's coming from the front door -- the sound of a key being forced into the lock, struggling to turn. The doorknob moves a little, forcefully jostled by the person on the other side. It suddenly STOPS. Helen's breath catches in her throat.

A beat.

Then, the doorbell rings and a voice on the other side calls out.

DUANE (O.S.)
Hello? Is anybody home?

Helen recognizes the voice. She immediately crosses to the door and unlocks it to find Duane standing there looking terrified and bedraggled.

DUANE (CONT'D)
Hey, Mom.

HELEN
Duane.

DUANE
Can I come in?

Helen beholds her son pitifully.

HELEN
What happened to you?

DUANE
I'm in trouble, Mom. I need help.

Before Helen can respond, they hear a CREAK on the staircase behind her.

They both look to see Gene standing there, halfway down the stairs, freshly showered, staring back. He notices the gun in Duane's hand.

GENE
What'd you do?

DUANE
I messed up. I owe some money.

GENE
How much?

DUANE
Eight grand.

GENE

Jesus.

Gene shakes his head. Duane looks back to Helen, contrite.

DUANE

I'm real sorry about this. I, uh--

HELEN

It's okay.

She ushers Duane inside and closes the door.

DUANE

I never wanted to, uh--

HELEN

You did the right thing, comin' here.

Duane looks at his mother gratefully, choking up suddenly with emotion--

DUANE

I know I'm a fuck up.

HELEN

Don't say that.

DUANE

I fucked my whole life up. And Beau's. And Minnie's. Everybody.

Helen looks at him sadly, trying to figure how she might help. Then she remembers the Dollar Store bag of cash. She crosses to the coffee table, grabs it, and extends it to him.

HELEN

Here. That's ten in there.

Duane opens the bag and sees the stacks of cash inside. He looks back at Helen, speechless. Gene descends the rest of the stairs and crosses to them.

GENE

Where the hell'd you get that?

HELEN

Sold some of my paintings.

Gene lets this sink in.

GENE

Well, shit. Good work.

Gene looks to Duane.

GENE (CONT'D)
Guess we oughta get goin' then.

DUANE
We?

GENE
That's ten grand in cash, son. I'm
not about to let you fuck this up.

HELEN
(to Gene)
Well, if you're going, I'm going,
too.

INT. STATION WAGON--MOMENTS LATER

Gene drives, Helen's in the passenger seat, and Duane sits in the back -- piled into the family wagon, like some distorted portrait of Americana.

Silence, apart from the engine running and the tires bumping along an old dirt road. Out the front window, the headlights illuminate a heavily wooded area -- tall, skinny longleaf pines rising up hundreds of feet, branches all clustered near the top, creating a wide canopy overhead.

Duane looks down at his phone, then out the window.

DUANE
Should be right up here.

EXT. TURNOUT--MOMENTS LATER

The station wagon slows, approaching a turnout off the shoulder of the road. Gene pulls into it, then swings the car back around so it's pointing toward the road, and puts it in park.

INT. STATION WAGON--CONTINUOUS

Duane, Gene, and Helen all glance at each other, silently, then look back out the front windshield and wait, the car gently idling.

EXT. FOREST ROAD--MOMENTS LATER

The road is empty in both directions. The forest is dark. A great symphony of insects CHIRPING and RATTLING.

Then, suddenly, in the distance, A FAINT LIGHT EMERGES. It's a hazy glow at first. Then a pair of headlights crest a small hill and continue along the dirt road. When they've gotten close enough, we recognize the vehicle they belong to -- the black Chrysler LeBaron.

The Chrysler slows as it approaches the turnout, then pulls in and parks, headlights pointed toward the forest, facing the opposite direction of the station wagon.

Both cars just idle there for a beat on opposite sides of the turnout. Until--

Laurence exits from the driver's side, the Chrysler still running. He closes the door and stands there, staring over at the station wagon, a pistol held at his side.

A beat after that, Duane opens his door and steps out, holding the Dollar Store bag. Laurence doesn't move or speak.

Tentatively, Duane waves the bag.

DUANE

Um... I got it... the, uh, the
money... it's all right here...

No response.

DUANE (CONT'D)

It's actually ten thousand, okay?
To make up for cuttin' it so close
and everything.

Still no response from Laurence.

Finally, the back window of the Chrysler rolls down. Hollis's face peeks through.

HOLLIS

Ten thousand?

DUANE

(anxious nod)

Yeah. You know -- for cuttin' it so
close.

A long beat. Then--

HOLLIS
Bring it here, please.

Duane nods, stiff with fear. He takes a couple steps toward the Chrysler. Slowly. Then he takes a couple more before stopping.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)
I'd like you to put it in my hand.

Duane deliberates. He nervously glances back at the station wagon.

DUANE
Yeah, uh... okay.

But before Duane can take another step, the passenger side door of the station wagon opens and Helen steps out.

HELEN
What's wrong with just settin' it
on the ground?

Laurence immediately raises his gun and points it toward Helen. Hollis squints into the darkness.

HOLLIS
Who's that?

HELEN
Just settin' it down and exchangin'
it that way. I think maybe we'd all
feel better about that.

DUANE
Mom, get back in there.

Hollis smiles as this realization sinks in.

HOLLIS
Hello, Mrs. Boggs. It's a pleasure
to meet you.

He nods at Laurence, signaling him to stand down.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)
This is your doing, isn't it? Well,
I hope your son knows how lucky he
is to have you.
(then, to Duane)
Bring the money here, Duane. Put it
in my hand, please.

Duane looks at Hollis, then over his shoulder, to his mother. Slowly, he starts toward the Chrysler again. Helen watches tensely. Laurence, with one hand gripping his pistol, eyes Duane as he moves past him, toward Hollis.

Then, abruptly, we ANGLE ON the dark woods, where, poking out between two tree trunks, we see the barrel of a rifle. Specifically, the Springfield Trapdoor rifle we saw prominently displayed in Gene's gun cabinet. And now, here's Gene, perched with it in the woods, pointing it toward the Chrysler. He moves his sight back and forth between Hollis and Laurence, his finger hovering just over the trigger.

Duane finally reaches the open window of the Chrysler and extends the money to Hollis, who reaches out with both hands and grabs it. Hollis looks inside the bag, then nods, satisfied.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Good boy.

Hollis then glances at Laurence again. Laurence subtly nods in reply. Was that a signal? Maybe. Or maybe not. It's not entirely clear.

Hollis leans back, disappearing into the Chrysler. His window goes up.

Laurence slowly turns in Duane's direction, staring at him inscrutably. Duane desperately tries to read his expression.

Then Laurence shifts, turning his whole body toward Duane, his hand flexing around his pistol. He slowly raises the gun, but it's not yet clear if he intends to fire or tuck it safely away in his pocket. Whatever his intention, we'll never know, because at that moment--

CRACK!

A STARK GUNSHOT echoes through the woods...

And Laurence's shoulder suddenly EXPLODES IN A MIST OF BLOOD, knocking him backwards.

Helen reflexively SCREAMS.

Duane looks immediately dazed by the carnage.

Helen makes a move toward her son, but stops, when Laurence, with his one good arm, raises his pistol at Duane.

HELEN

Duane!

Snapped back to reality, Duane dives to the ground and scrambles to the other side of the Chrysler for cover as Laurence starts to fire in his direction.

CRACK!

Another shot from the woods strikes Laurence in the head, sending his body crumbling to the dirt.

PAN TO THE WOODS: where Gene fires again and again, peppering the Chrysler with bullets.

INT./EXT. CHRYSLER LEBARON-CONTINUOUS

Glass shatters around Hollis as he opens the door on the opposite side of the car and crawls out, clutching the Dollar Store bag of cash in one hand and a gun in the other. As he tumbles out, he sees Duane cowering there, too, then scoots across the ground to the front passenger-side door, and opens it. He points his gun at Duane.

HOLLIS

Get in.

Duane, eyeing the gun, has no choice but to do as he's told. He climbs into the passenger seat and looks back at Hollis, who motions for him to scoot all the way into the driver's seat.

Hollis fires a few indiscriminate shots into the woods for cover, then climbs into the passenger seat and slams the door shut. He points his gun at Duane's head.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Drive.

Duane nods, trembling with fear. He gropes for the gearshift, throws the car in gear, and speeds off down the road.

EXT. STATION WAGON-CONTINUOUS

Helen, watching the Chrysler peel away, races to the driver's side of the station wagon, and calls out toward the woods--

HELEN

Gene! Let's go!

Gene comes scrambling out of the woods as Helen climbs behind the wheel and slams the door shut. Gene jumps into the passenger seat just as Helen peels out.

INT. CHRYSLER LEBARON-MOMENTS LATER

Hollis looks behind them, out the bullet-riddled rear windshield, to see the station wagon pull into the road and start to follow them. He turns back to Duane.

HOLLIS

I was going to let you go. You made
an intelligent business decision.
With terms that I found agreeable.
(shakes head)
And now I have to kill you all.

Duane looks over at the gun in Hollis's hand, then pushes down hard on the gas pedal, the Chrysler picking up speed on that skinny dirt road.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Duane just stares ahead, continuing to accelerate.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Slow down. Are you crazy?

Hollis levels his gun at Duane.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

I said slow down!

With all his might, Duane suddenly jerks the wheel hard to one side.

INT. STATION WAGON-CONTINUOUS

Through the front windshield, Helen and Gene watch as the Chrysler veers off the dirt road, tears through an overgrowth of wildflowers, then slams violently into the trunk of a longleaf pine tree.

INT. CHRYSLER LEBARON-CONTINUOUS

Both Hollis and Duane's heads snap forward on impact. The airbags deploy, saving them both, but rendering them equally stunned by the impact. Sound and image are both distorted in the immediate aftermath.

Hollis gets his bearings first and immediately begins looking for his gun. He locates it quickly, down by his feet. He bends down, grabs it, and points it at Duane.

HOLLIS

It didn't have to be like this.

Just as he's about to fire, his passenger side door is flung open, revealing Gene, pointing an 1851 NAVAL REVOLVER into the car. Hollis instinctively turns to look, and Gene, without hesitation, shoots Hollis in the head. His lifeless body falls limply into Duane's lap, who's still dazed from the crash.

DUANE

(re: the mess)

Oh, god...

Duane looks and sees Gene.

GENE

Come on. Get out.

Duane staggers out of the Chrysler and sees Helen standing by the idling station wagon. They make eye contact, each relieved that the other's all right. It's an oddly tender moment between them that's abruptly interrupted when Gene steps up to Duane--

GENE (CONT'D)

Grab his legs, help me throw him in the trunk.

EXT. BOGGS HOME-LATER

The station wagon scrapes the concrete as it pulls back into the driveway.

MOMENTS LATER

Gene throws open the back hatch revealing the contorted bodies of Laurence and Hollis.

EXT. BOGGS BACKYARD-MOMENTS LATER

Gene and Duane drag both men, one at a time, across the backyard, into the shed.

EXT. BOGGS HOME-MEANWHILE

Helen stands by the open back hatch of the station wagon, its tan carpeting stained with dark red blood. She stares at it for a moment, then sprays it with a cleaning solution, and starts to scrub.

INT. SHED-MOMENTS LATER

Gene and Duane struggle to stack the two bodies along the shed wall.

Once they do, Duane leans back, accidentally knocking into a burlap sheet, which slips to the floor revealing another body hidden there: RODNEY. Duane's eyes widen in shock.

DUANE

What the fuck?

He staggers backwards, tripping over a bunch of old lawn tools.

DUANE (CONT'D)

What is he--?

Duane turns back to Gene and stares at him, incredulous.

DUANE (CONT'D)

What'd you do?

GENE

What'd I do? Well, that's an awful interestin' way of puttin' it.

(beat, then)

You remember the last time you and me saw each other before all this, son?

As Gene poses the question, he casually pulls the Naval Revolver from his waistband and lets it hang at his side. Duane looks up at him from the dusty shed floor, petrified.

DUANE

What are you doin'?

GENE

I asked you a question: Do you remember that day?

DUANE

You just helped me out back there--

GENE

'Course I helped you, Duane. I'm not gonna let anybody treat my family that way.

Duane stares back, stupefied. Gene smiles wistfully.

GENE (CONT'D)

You pulled a knife on me, remember?
The very last time we saw each
other. You threatened to kill me.

Duane nods warily.

GENE (CONT'D)

Your mother was in the hospital at
the time--

DUANE

Where you put her.

A look of anger flashes in Gene's eyes, then dissipates.

GENE

Your mother was in the hospital and
you were upset about it. Wanted to
stand up to your old man. So you
did.

(then)

And that was it. Last time we ever
crossed paths.

(then)

Which was okay with me. I figured
we'd run our course, you and me.

(grim smile)

But you know what's funny? That
day, the day you left, the day you
put a knife up against my throat --
that's still the only time in my
life that I ever remember feelin'
proud of you. The only time I
thought maybe, just maybe, you
might make something of yourself.
Against all odds. And yet...

(shakes head)

No such luck. Fell right back into
your old ways. Lyin'. Cheating.
Doin' drugs.

(then)

And you just had to go for those
guns of mine, didn't you?

Duane hesitates, resisting, then gives up and admits--

DUANE

It wasn't supposed to happen like
that.

Duane looks over at Rodney's sallow face.

DUANE (CONT'D)

Nobody was supposed to get hurt.

GENE

Well people did get hurt. This friend of yours got hurt. And these two. And your mother. She got hurt.

(then)

And now I want you to feel that hurt, too, son. Not from some stranger. From me.

Gene cocks his gun and points it at Duane.

GENE (CONT'D)

This is what they did to us, those boys you sent. This is what it was like. Do you feel it? The helplessness?

Duane stares back at his father, pleadingly.

GENE (CONT'D)

And once was bad enough. But sending them back again? A second time? What'd you think was gonna happen?

Duane looks confused.

DUANE

I didn't send them a second time.

Gene scoffs, dismissive. Duane shakes his head.

DUANE (CONT'D)

I wanted to get your guns. That's true. But it didn't work out.

Gene's eyes darken with uncertainty.

DUANE (CONT'D)

I swear I don't know about a second time...

Gene's conviction starts to waver. He still aims the revolver at Duane, but now his mind has started to race a little.

GENE

Well, if you didn't send those boys back here, who did?

Then, from behind Gene, they hear--

HELEN (O.S.)
Get away from him, Gene.

Gene turns to see Helen standing in the doorway to the shed, holding his Trapdoor rifle, looking gravely serious.

HELEN (CONT'D)
It wasn't him.

A bemused smile spreads across Gene's lips, realizing.

GENE
No. Couldn't be.

HELEN
I'm not an unreasonable person. I never needed much. Just the smallest bit of kindness exchanged between us every now and then. That would've been enough. But you couldn't even manage that.

Gene stares back silently, focused on the gun barrel.

GENE
So what? You're gonna shoot me?

She raises the gun a little higher so that it's pointed right at his face. Gene stares at her, cold and unrelenting.

GENE (CONT'D)
Go on then. Do it.

A tense beat. Helen's hand begins to tremble.

She can't bring herself to pull the trigger.

GENE (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.

Helen, disappointed and overwhelmed, lets the muzzle drop.

GENE (CONT'D)
You act so innocent, Helen.
(then)
I didn't wanna have to be the way I was with him. I had to. He was always crying about every little thing. Remember? You either learn to deal with pain and disappointment in this life or you don't. Those are hard lessons, and I knew nobody else was gonna teach him.
(MORE)

GENE (CONT'D)

You surely didn't have the stomach
for it. So it came down to me.

Helen struggles, trying not to wilt in the face of Gene's
rancor. Gene shakes his head in disgust.

GENE (CONT'D)

Yeah, you play it off so innocent.
When, really, you're no different
than the rest of us. And I guess it
must be some kinda family trait.
Because it seems like nobody around
here can do their own damn dirty
work.

Gene's fingers clench tightly around his gun handle.

GENE (CONT'D)

Well, almost nobody.

Gene raises his gun in Helen's direction. But, before he can
take aim, Duane lurches up from behind him with some pruning
shears and plunges them deep into Gene's back.

GENE (CONT'D)

Ow. Fuck...

Gene's arm drops, firing a round into the floor, just in
front of where Helen stands. He staggers forward a few steps,
ineffectually reaching for the shears still stuck between his
shoulder blades. Stumbling, he turns to face Duane, who looks
back terrified. Surprisingly, Gene begins to nod and chuckle.

GENE (CONT'D)

Good. Good for you, son...

Gene coughs and wheezes, blood pouring down his back.

Then, in one quick motion, he summons what little strength he
has left to raise his gun toward Duane, and--

BAM!

A loud shot rings out. Duane flinches. But it's Gene who goes
limp and falls to the floor in a heap. And as he clears
frame, we see Helen standing behind him, holding the smoking
rifle shakily. She and Duane both stand there, shocked,
staring down at Gene.

Finally, Helen turns quietly and exits the shed.

EXT. SHED-MOMENTS LATER

Helen drops the rifle into the grass and stares off into the distance. Moments later, Duane exits the shed and sees her like that.

DUANE
(tentative)
Mom?

Helen doesn't turn back, just keeps staring off.

DUANE (CONT'D)
You okay?

This time, Helen turns to him. She has a blank expression. She forces a smile.

HELEN
Sorry. I was just thinking...
(beat, then)
I'd been meaning to tell you -- I found some of your old artwork in the basement a while back. Those charcoal sketches of yours...
(shakes head, wearily)
You were so talented.

Duane just stares at her without replying.

HELEN (CONT'D)
That was our special thing we had together. I remember it made you so happy.
(sad smile, then)
And that made me happy. To feel like we shared something. Like, maybe, I'd passed something of mine down to you.

Duane remains quiet and still.

HELEN (CONT'D)
I love you, you know?

Duane stares back at her sadly.

DUANE
Love you, too, Mom.

These words seem to pierce Helen's heart. A couple of stray tears fall from her eyes.

HELEN

I haven't been able to say it to you for so long that I started to wonder if you actually even knew it anymore.

DUANE

No, I knew it. I always knew.

She smiles through her tears, finding some sad solace in this. Duane looks at her uncomfortably.

DUANE (CONT'D)

I'm not what you want me to be, Mom. I know that. And I'm sorry. I think maybe it's ingrained in me or somethin'. But the fact is, I'm always gonna let you down. I'm never gonna do the right thing.

Helen nods, thinking about everything that's happened, looking overwhelmed.

HELEN

I don't know that there is a right thing anymore. Or if we all just end up broken by the time it's over. I'm starting to think that may be the case. That we all get damaged. And we all end up doing damage to others, too. In big ways and little ways. Even if we got the best intentions at heart.

She sighs, deeply saddened by this thought. She sees the Dollar Store bag in the grass nearby, picks it up, and holds it out to Duane. He looks at her, hesitating.

DUANE

No, I don't...

HELEN

It's okay. Take it.

He does, nodding, appreciative.

DUANE

Thank you.

A beat, then he crosses off. Helen watches him go. Once he's gone, she turns back to the shed.

INT. SHED-MOMENTS LATER

Helen enters through the open door and stops, staring at all the awful carnage inside. It's painful to look at. And painful for her to think about the role she played in all of it.

After a beat, she steps over Gene and crosses slowly to Rodney. She stares down at him, filled with guilt and regret.

Gently, she lifts the canvas tarp and covers him back up.

She turns away and looks toward her easel, where, alongside her oil paints and brushes, there are various containers of paint thinners and solvents. She picks up a large metal can of TURPENTINE and starts pouring it all over the interior of the shed.

INT. OLDSMOBILE-MOMENTS LATER

Duane sits in his car, looking down at the money in his passenger seat. An infinite number of possibilities racing through his mind -- some good, some bad. Finally, he turns the key and the ignition sputters to life.

EXT. SHED-LATER

Helen stands in the backyard watching orange flames begin to overtake the shed, lighting up the night sky. She wipes at the tears that fall down her cheeks. She knows she's on a new path now, and that life will be different from here on out. For better or worse.

INT. SHED-MEANWHILE

The flames quickly proliferate due to all the various chemical accelerants inside the shed. The fire spreads, not just to the bodies, but to Helen's artwork, too.

We cut CLOSE ON that smiling self-portrait of hers -- the one from the very beginning -- as it's slowly engulfed, blackening from the edges inward, until her smiling face is gone completely.

INT. MINNIE'S APARTMENT-THE NEXT MORNING

Beau is on the floor, in front of a little TV, watching cartoons. Minnie's in the kitchen, frying an egg on the stove, when the doorbell RINGS. Minnie stops what she's doing and looks at the door nervously.

The doorbell RINGS again.

Minnie wipes her hands on a dish towel. She grabs a chef's knife out of a drawer and cautiously heads for the door.

Slowly, she opens the door, but nobody's there. It's just a plastic bag from the Dollar Store sitting on the porch. She picks it up and opens it. She's stunned to see all the cash inside.

She steps out onto the porch and looks down the street, where Duane's car is driving off. She smiles in disbelief and heads back inside.

After closing the front door, she stops and takes a moment to look over at Beau, sitting in front of the TV. She sees that he's grabbed a crayon and a piece of paper, and he's happily scribbling away.

INT. POLICE STATION-LATER

Helen sits in an interrogation room, at a table, across from Ralph. She looks tired, emotionally drained. A glass of water sits on the table in front of her.

RALPH

Lookin' like Gene, a couple other unidentified fellas, and a man we believe may have had some pretty significant ties to the local drug trade here in town.

(then)

Help me out here, Helen.

HELEN

Not sure what difference it'd make at this point, Ralph.

RALPH

Well, it could mean the difference between achievin' some sense of justice or not.

She nods, absently, considering this.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I understand that these things can be complicated. But I know you, Helen. No matter what happened, you have an ally in me.

Helen continues to stare off, silently.

RALPH (CONT'D)
Have you spoken to your son
recently?

Helen hesitates, not sure if, or how, to respond.

RALPH (CONT'D)
I see he's got a few priors on his
record. Possession charges. I'm
wondering if maybe he fits into
this somehow.

Helen still doesn't say anything. Ralph knows he's not
getting the full story.

RALPH (CONT'D)
This won't just go away, y'know. I
gotta keep on looking.

Helen nods. He puts his hand over hers tenderly.

RALPH (CONT'D)
I can help you though.

Her eyes fill with gratitude.

RALPH (CONT'D)
Let me help you.

HELEN
I appreciate that, Officer. I
really do.
(then)
But I'm not sure anybody can help
me anymore.

She gently pulls her hand away from his. She smiles as a
couple tears roll down her cheeks.

RALPH
(sadly)
Helen, please.

She wipes her eyes, regaining her composure.

HELEN
Remember that thing you told me
that night at the gallery?

RALPH
What's that?

HELEN

Movin' on is inevitable. So I'm
just doing my best to get the
timing right.

Ralph sighs, then nods, understanding that he can't stop her.

EXT. BOGGS BACKYARD-LATER

Helen stands in the backyard looking down at the charred rubble on the ground. After a beat, she squints, seeing something poking up out of the ash.

CLOSE ON: a key.

INT. BOGGS HOME-SPARE BEDROOM-LATER

Helen stands in Duane's old bedroom, in front of Gene's gun cabinet. She looks down at the key in her hand, then fits it into the lock and turns it. She pulls open the cabinet doors and stares at all those guns inside. Her expression is blank, so we can't quite tell what she's got in mind yet...

INT. SQUAD CAR-LATER

Ralph drives, looking out the window of his squad car. Finally, he pulls up in front of Duane's apartment, parks, and looks out.

EXT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-MOMENTS LATER

As Ralph approaches the apartment, he passes Duane's car in the driveway. The driver's side door has been left wide open, and inside, Ralph can see that the cassette deck has been forcibly removed, leaving a gaping hole in the dash.

Ralph continues past, to the front door, and rings the bell. As he's waiting, he looks down at a satirical welcome mat that reads: NOT YOU AGAIN.

And that's when he notices something else. The whole front porch seems to be conspicuously stained with something. Something dark that was unsuccessfully scrubbed in an attempt to clean it. Ralph doesn't know that it's Benji's blood from when he was shot by Laurence. But he knows enough to understand that something bad happened here.

Ralph unholsters his sidearm and crosses around to the back of the apartment.

EXT. DUANE'S APARTMENT-BACKYARD-MOMENTS LATER

Ralph walks around the side of the house to find Duane at the far end of a deep backyard, covered in sweat, shoveling the last scoop of dirt on top of what appears to be a large grave. Ralph readies his firearm as he approaches.

RALPH
Duane Boggs?

Duane looks up, wipes the sweat from his forehead.

RALPH (CONT'D)
Patterson PD. What are you doin'
back here, son?

Duane stares back silently, defeated.

INT. SQUAD CAR-MOMENTS LATER

Duane sits in the back of Ralph's squad car, wrists shackled. Ralph drives, glancing at Duane in the rearview mirror.

RALPH
You got a chance here, son. To do
the right thing. That's always a
choice.
(beat, then)
Most of the evidence of what really
happened burned up with that
shed...

No reply from Duane. Ralph sighs and looks out his window at the passing forest of tall, longleaf pines.

RALPH (CONT'D)
Y'know, a hundred years ago, this
was a turpentine town. Naval stores
they called 'em. All these forests
here were harvested to get their
pine resin. Problem was, there was
no fertilizer back then to rebuild
the soil. And the extraction
methods themselves were too harsh
for most of the trees to survive
the process. So you had all these
old turpentiners, without even
knowing it, killing the very thing
that they depended upon.
(then)
Industry died not long after.
(MORE)

RALPH (CONT'D)

And it would be a number of years before the trees started coming back. But eventually they did. They started growing again.

Duane stares out at the trees, whipping by his window.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Anyway, like I said, that fire didn't leave us much to work with. But maybe you can help.

(nods, then)

Otherwise, in the absence of the truth, people start tellin' their own stories. And you can't always control what happens after that. Maybe they'll tell a story about your dad. How he was runnin' in some dangerous circles. Or maybe they'll tell a story about that poor mother of yours. How she endured a whole lifetime's worth of abuse and then finally decided to do something about it.

Duane looks up at Ralph for the first time. Ralph shrugs.

RALPH (CONT'D)

You never know is my point.

Duane sits in silence, thinking, then--

DUANE

She didn't do anything wrong.

RALPH

No?

DUANE

It was me. All that trouble...

(thinks a beat, nods)

Nobody deserves nothing for what happened, 'cept me.

The two men glance at each other in the rear view mirror for a fleeting moment. Then Duane's eyes trail back out the window toward the trees, a look of relief settling on his face.

INT. PAWN SHOP-DAY

Helen heaves a heavy suitcase up onto the glass counter in front of an awaiting PAWN SHOP OWNER. The suitcase is unzipped and pulled open, revealing all of Gene's guns.

MOMENTS LATER

A stack of cash is pushed across the counter, the transaction complete. The pawn shop owner nods.

PAWN SHOP OWNER
You have yourself a good day now.

Helen nods back.

HELEN
Yeah, I'll do my best.

EXT. PAWN SHOP-MOMENTS LATER

Helen exits to the sunny sidewalk, the door jangling a bell as it opens and closes behind her. She exhales, relieved, and looks down at the money in her hand. A beat, then she looks up again at the little ART SUPPLY STORE across the street.

EXT. FOREST-LATER

Helen walks with some brand new art supplies through a forest of tall, longleaf pines. A portable easel is strapped to her back. When she reaches a clearing, she sets up the easel, sits down on a little folding chair, and takes out her new paints. Birds trill in the treetops. Late afternoon sun filters down in soft white columns. Helen stares forward at the blank canvas before her. Her face, in this moment, looks a lot like that self portrait that burned up in the fire -- the one where she imagined herself smiling.

Only this is real life...

And now she really is.

BLACK.

END.