

1 INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A teenage boy - VERNON - stares straight at us, sitting on a bench wearing nothing but underpants and trainers.

VAINE (O.S.)
Full name?

VERNON
Vernon Gregory Little.

VAINE (O.S.)
Habitual place of residence?

VERNON
17 Beulah Drive.

VAINE (O.S.)
Who else resides there?

VERNON
Nobody. Just my mom.

Deputy VAINIE GURIE sits behind her desk, eating barbecue ribs while writing mechanically -

VAINE
Right. Doris - Eleanor - Little.

VERNON
Ma'am... will this take long?

Vainie looks up, her eyes widening.

VAINE
Vernon, we're talking accessory to murder here. It'll take as long as it takes.

VERNON
Yeah but...

VAINE
Don't tell me you weren't close to the Meskin boy. Don't tell me you weren't just about his only friend, don't you tell me that for one second.

VERNON
Ma'am, there must be plenty other witnesses who saw more than me.

VAINE
Well I don't see anyone else here - do you, Vern?

VERNON
No ma'am, but....

VAINE
Can you account for yourself at a
quarter after ten last Tuesday?

VERNON
Sure thing - I was on my way back
from running an errand for Mr
Nuckles - he's our physics teacher.

VAINE
(presses intercom)
Sheriff? Vaine. You might want to
attend the interview room.

VERNON
Ma'am, I have witnesses - like Mr
Nuckles -- ask *him*...

VAINE
And who else?

VERNON
A whole bunch of people.

VAINE
And where are those people now?

VERNON
Well they... they ...

VAINE
Exactly. Not real gregarious, are
they. So, Mr Little - let me ask
you two simple questions. One: are
you involved with drugs?

VERNON
Uh - no, ma'am.

VAINE
And two: do you possess a firearm?

The door opens and SHERIFF PORKORNEY slides into the room.

SHERIFF
This the boy?

VAINE
Mr Vernon Gregory Little.

SHERIFF
Co-operational, is he?

VAINE
Can't say he is, sir.
(to Vernon)
You were going to tell me whether
or not you possess a firearm?

VERNON
Uh - no, ma'am.

SHERIFF
Witnesses say the Meskin boy used
two handguns, but only one was
found. Any idea what might have
happened to the second gun, Vern?

VERNON
Uh - no, sir.

The Sheriff closes the door and approaches Vernon, leaning
into his face to confide -

SHERIFF
Bothered folk outside, son.
Bothered folk are quick to judge.
Jesus talked to you. Didn't he.

VERNON
No, sir... I mean I didn't know he
was going to kill anybody.

SHERIFF
But you were close though -- admit
that -- damn close.

VERNON
He was my friend.

SHERIFF
Just about his only one. Just about
your only friend too, so they say.

The Sheriff turns to Vaine, helping himself to a rib.

SHERIFF
Examine his clothes, did you Vaine?
(she nods)
Any frills on the underwear? Seems
our gunman was in some kinda panty
cult.

Vernon looks shocked.

VAINE
Regular whiteys.

SHERIFF
Check the back of them, did you?
(evidently not)
(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
 Stand up, Mr Little.
 (Vernon stands)
 Now turn around.

The Sheriff pulls back his briefs and looks inside.

SHERIFF
 You see, Vaine, a certain type of
 practice can loosen a man's
 pitoota, if you catch my drift.

He lets the elastic snap back.

VERNON
 Sir, I ain't gay, if that's what
 you mean.

The Sheriff raises a doubtful eyebrow, then turns to Vaine.

SHERIFF
 Take his statement, then hold him.

The Sheriff tosses his bone into the box and is gone.

VAINE
 You heard the Sheriff. I'll be back
 with another officer to take your
 statement. Get your clothes on.

Vaine heads off, leaving Vernon alone. He starts to put his clothes back on - then draws closer to a series of photos pinned up behind her desk: fifteen teenage high school kids, sunny and smiling, taken from a school year book. We WHIP PAN away from the photos...

2 EXT. MARTIRIO HIGH SCHOOL - FLASHBACK - DAY

... and in fast and bloody succession, FIVE TEENS are SHOT DEAD in SLO MO while others dive for cover.

We WHIP PAN onto JESUS NAVARRO, a crazed Mexican kid, firing wildly with two shot guns, unemotional, robot-like.

One of the guns is out of ammo: Jesus flings it aside along with a sports bag, reloads the other gun and starts firing again -- TWO more teens go down as they dive for cover.

3 INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Vernon turns sharply away, recoiling from his memory.

EILEENA (O.S.)
 Vernon's in here, Pam -- you'd
 better wait outside.

The door flies open and the hefty PAM pushes past the uniformed EILEENA.

PAM
Vernie, did they feed you today?

VERNON
Not yet.

PAM
Oh Lor, we'd better go by the Barn.

VERNON
I can't, Pam - I have to stay.

PAM
Malarkey, come on now!
(tugs his elbow)
Eileena, I'm taking Vern - you tell
Vaine this boy ain't eaten, I'm
double-parked out front, and she
better hide some pounds before I
see Barry. We're outta here -- love
the hair.

Pam grips Vernon's hand and they're gone.

4 INT/EXT. PAM'S MERCURY/HIGH SCHOOL - TRAVELING - DAY

Pam driving lustily, tucking into a fried chicken takeaway wedged between her and Vernon. Glen Campbell's *Galveston* blares out from the car stereo.

PAM
Your mom couldn't pick you up -
she's minding an ovenful of joy
cakes for the Lechugas - hey Vern,
eat the bottom pieces before they
get soggy.

VERNON
Then the top pieces will be on the
bottom...

Pam swerves onto Liberty Drive -

PAM
Oh my Lord, Vernie - oh my God -
all those flowers - all those tiny
crosses - I shouldna come this way!

They slow down as they pass in front of Martirio High School -
flags at half mast - piles of flowers - MEDIA hovering.

5 EXT. MARTIRIO HIGH SCHOOL - FLASHBACK - DAY

Vernon watches in horror as Jesus spots another teen coming into view around the corner --

JESUS
Hey, Teddy Lechuga!

TEDDY swings round - and Jesus SHOOTS, hurling him backwards.

Vernon catches sight of the gun Jesus flung aside. As he slowly edges towards it --

-- Jesus turns to him - Vernon freezes - their EYES meet --

Jesus gazes at Vernon, utterly calm. He points the gun at Vernon, edging towards him... then suddenly turns the gun on himself --

VERNON
No!!

-- and FIRES!

6 EXT. BEULAH DRIVE - DAY

Pam's Mercury turns into a suburban road of peeling wood houses interspersed with nodding oil pump-jacks. A number of other media types hover about, armed with VCRs.

Pam pulls up outside a house next to a much grander one, separated by a willow tree, a pump-jack and a garden bench. The grander house has flowers, wreaths and teddy bears stacked on the front lawn.

A Media Man with a video camera - LALLY - lolls against a red van parked opposite. Vernon catches his eye. Lally smiles.

Suddenly a patrol car pulls up sharply behind Pam's Mercury and Vaine hops out. She marches up to Vernon, arousing Lally's curiosity --

VAINE
So who do we have here?

Now another woman scurries down the porch with a tray of little joy cakes - Vernon's MOM, Doris.

MOM
Well howdy pardner!

VERNON
Hi mom...

Vaine steps between them -

VAINE
Afraid your pardner here absconded
from our interview.

MOM
Well call me Doris, Vaine! Have a
joy cake?

VAINE
Mrs Little, let me explain where
things stand...

MOM
These little cakes are just singing
out to be tasted...

VAINE
I'm afraid I don't make the laws,
ma'am. I'm afraid Vernon will have
to come with me, and then we'll
need to search his room.

Vernon looks anxious.

MOM
Well, God, Vaine - Vernon hasn't
done any wrong!
(to Vernon)
Did you use the bathroom today?

VERNON
Hell, Momma...!

MOM
Well you know how you get overtook
by that little - inconvenience...

VAINE
He still can't account for himself
at the time of the tragedy...

MOM
He wasn't even there! The *news* says
it's an open and shut case...

VAINE
The news says a lot of things,
ma'am. Fact is we've run this county
dry of body bags, and I for one hold
the opinion that it'd take more than
a single unaided gunman to do that.

Mom stumbles to the little bench and flakes down while Vernon
catches Lally's eye across the road, filming them.

MOM
We have witnesses, Vaine -
witnesses!

VAINE
Not exactly talkative, are they
now. Fact is, your boy absconded
before our interview was over.
People with airtight alibis just
don't do that, Doris.

PAM
I took him, Vaine - found the poor
child half dead from starvation!

VAINE
He was offered food...

PAM
Oh fiddledy-boo.

VAINE
I'm taking him back to the station.

She takes Vernon by the arm and leads him to the patrol car
just as a shiny Eldorado hoves into view. It pulls up behind
the patrol car and a TRIO of middle-aged women pile out: the
blonde driver, LEONA, her older friend GEORGETTE Porkorney,
and an also-ran, BETTY.

LEONA
Hi Vaine, hi Doris...

GEORGETTE
What, Vaine? My ole man grow weary
of you down the station?

MOM
Vaine's just doing a routine check,
girls - come on up for a soda. Well
gosh, these cakes are perspiring!

Just as Vaine is about to lead Vernon to the patrol car,
Lally intervenes.

LALLY
A few words for the camera, Captain?

Pam, Georgette, Leona and Betty form an audience around them,
while other media people try to get a look in.

VAINE
Firstly, sir, I'm a deputy, and
secondly you should consult the
media room for updates.

LALLY
Actually, I'm doing a background
story, ma'am.

He winks at Vernon as he sets up a tripod on the sidewalk.

VAINE
And you are?

LALLY
Eulalio Ledesma, CNN.

Pam and the trio are visibly impressed and draw closer.

VAINE
The world's a long way from
Martirio, Mr Ledesma.

LALLY
Today the world *is* Martirio, ma'am.

Lally steps in front of the camera, mike in hand.

VAINE
(to Georgette)
But I can't just go on like this -
can I?

LEONA
Get a grip, Vaine - you look great.

GEORGETTE
Your Barry'll be so proud of you!

Lally's voice ripens as he addresses the camera.

LALLY
Once again we don the cloak of
mourning - a cloak worn ragged by
the devastating fallout of a world
in change. Today the good citizens
of Martirio join me is asking - how
do we heal America? We start on the
front line, with the souls who deal
with the aftermath of tragedy: our
law enforcement professionals. Tell
me, Deputy Gurie, does the community
relate differently to you at a time
like this?

VAINE
Well, this is our *first* time - for
a high school massacre anyway.

LALLY
But aren't you increasingly called
upon to counsel, to lend moral as
well as civil support?

VAINE
There are more counselors in this
town than police officers today, Mr
Ledesma. Now if you'll...

She's about to grip Vernon, but Lally gets in first, clasping Vernon's arm.

LALLY
Freeing up valuable time for you to
spend with survivors?

VAINE
Sir, the survivors have survived.
My job is to find the cause.

LALLY
So it's not an open and shut case?

Pam digs out her mobile -

PAM
(aside, into phone)
Hey, Sheriff? Vaine's on TV!

VAINE
I'm just saying we have to find the
underlying cause.

LALLY
And you believe this young man is
that underlying cause?

VAINE
I didn't say that.

LALLY
Then why should the American tax-
payer bankroll you to detain him?

VAINE
That'll be all for now, Mr Ledesma.

She again takes Vernon by the arm -

LALLY
Deputy, this is the public domain -
God himself can't stop the camera.
So has this boy broken the law, yes
or no?

VAINE
That's what we're working to
establish...

LALLY
So you're detaining him just in
case? On whose orders may I ask?

PAM
(aside, into phone)
Are you hearing this??

LALLY

Would you please tell us the name
of the sheriff who briefed you?

GEORGETTE

Lord, no!

Georgette scowls at Vaine, shaking her head. Just then
Vaine's phone rings.

VAINE

Yes, Sheriff? (beat) No, I didn't
say - no, I swear to God. (beat)
Yes, sir - right away sir.

(to Vernon)

I'll be back, be very sure of that.

She piles into the police car, fires up and is gone. Lally
whispers as he passes Vernon -

LALLY

I'd say you owe me one.

Lally smiles, then crosses the road back to his red van,
leaving Vernon staring after him.

7 INT. VERNON'S BEDROOM - DAY

Vernon gazes round his bedroom: a computer with a keyboard
covered in homework, a closet spilling clothes across the
floor, a stack of socks and underwear heaped on his bed.
Above the bed are several photos of a glamorous beauty queen -
"Miss Martirio: Taylor Figueroa". Another of the same girl in
a bikini is captioned: "Taylor makes a big splash!"

Glancing round, he notices something poking out from under
his mattress. Lunging forward he extracts a *Victoria's Secret*
lingerie catalogue. Several of the pages are stuck together.

VERNON

Shit!

Diving into the closet, Vernon pulls out a Nike shoe box -
opens it to find a small bag of grass -

VERNON

Shit! Shit!

-- and an envelope with "Taylor's" scribbled on it. Inside
are three brownish tabs.

VERNON

Shit! Shit! Shit!

MOM (O.S.)

Vern? Ver-non?!

8 INT. VERNON'S HOME - HALL & KITCHEN - DAY

Vernon leaves his bedroom and heads down the hall, pausing by the doorway to the kitchen to watch Leona, Pam, Georgette, Betty and his Mom. Their chatter seems endless.

GEORGETTE

Six pounds if it's an ounce, and I only saw her last week. Six pounds in a week.

LEONA

It's that diet, all those carbs.

BETTY

Why didn't she stick to Weight Watchers?

GEORGETTE

Honey, Vaine Gurie's lucky to stick to the seat of her damn shorts.

PAM

Barry threatened to walk. Ole Vaine has one calendar month to ditch her flab or he's gone.

MOM

(spotting Vernon)

Well *there* you are! Go ask that nice-looking TV man if he'd like a Coke - it must be ninety degrees out there.

GEORGETTE

You're going to ask a total *stranger* inside, just like that?

MOM

Well Georgette, we Martirians are known for our hospitality...

Vernon heads for the door.

9 EXT/INT. BEULAH DRIVE/VAN - DAY

There's heat shimmering off the road. Vernon saunters over to the red van, now parked under the Lechuga's willow tree.

He walks round it, cupping his hands to look through the net curtains. There's a naked man inside, head resting on a pair of boots, dozing. He jackrabbits when he spots Vernon.

LALLY

Hey, big man - come to the door.

Vernon ambles round to the back, picking up a stray teddy bear and adding it to the pile on the Lechuga's front lawn. "To Teddy" it says, like all the others.

The back doors open and Lally appears, pulling on a shirt.

VERNON

Mom says come up for a Coke.

LALLY

Well... I sure could use your bathroom - and maybe a bite to eat.

VERNON

We have joy cakes.

LALLY

Joy cakes?

VERNON

Don't ask.

Lally grabs a handful of tiny glass phials that have rolled across the floor when he grabbed his jacket.

LALLY

Your mom's stressed today?

VERNON

This is one of her better days.

Lally laughs, gives Vernon a friendly slap on the arm.

LALLY

You're okay, Vern, you know that?
You're innocent, right?

VERNON

Sure I am.

They start walking towards Vernon's house.

LALLY

You should tell your story, big man - clear your name. The world loves an underdog. Don't underestimate your general public, Vern - they want to see justice done, and I say give them what they want. I can maybe help you with that.

VERNON

But, like - I didn't do anything.

Lally pauses by the flowers and teddies.

LALLY

People decide with or without the facts, Vern. If you don't get out there and paint your paradigm, someone'll paint it for you.

VERNON

Paint my *what*?

LALLY

Pa-ra-dime. Never heard of a paradigm shift?

(evidently not)

Okay, example. You see a man with his hand up your granny's ass. What do you think?

VERNON

Um - I dunno -- Pervert?

LALLY

Right. Then you find out a deadly bug crawled up there, and the man has in fact put aside his disgust to save your granny. What do you think now?

VERNON

Um - hero, I guess.

LALLY

There you go, a paradigm shift. The action doesn't change - just the information you use to judge it by. You were ready to crucify the guy because you didn't have the facts. Now you wanna shake his hand.

VERNON

I don't think so. You ain't met my granny.

Lally laughs, punching Vernon as they reach the front door.

LALLY

I mean figuratively, asshole. You need positioning, just like a product in the market. Jails are full of people who didn't manage their positions. Public opinion will go with the first psycho who points a finger. You're butt-naked, big man.

The screen door opens and there's Mom with a big smile.

MOM

Welcome to Martirio, Mr....?

LALLY
Eulalio Ledesma, ma'am - CNN.

Mom ushers Lally inside while Vernon hangs on the porch a moment, chewing on Lally's advice.

MOM
Hey, girls - this is Mr Smegma from CNN.

LALLY
Ledesma, ma'am - though educated people call me Lally.

10 INT. VERNON'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Mom's eyelashes flutter like dying flies as Lally enters.

MOM
So what's it to be, Mr Lesma?
Regular, diet, or diet decaf?

LALLY
Just water for me, thanks - and maybe one of these - uh - joyful looking cakes?

Vernon wanders over while Mom passes the joy cakes.

LALLY
Actually I have something exciting to share with you ladies, if you're interested -
(pulls phial from pocket)
- Siberian Ginseng Compound -
(hands one to Vernon)
Better than Viagra.

The women giggle, except for Pam who mutters to Betty -

PAM
Wake me when it's over.

MOM
So, Lally - do you sleep in your van, or... what?

LALLY
Don't have any choice. Motels are full between here and Mexico. I hear some generous townsfolk are taking in guests, but I haven't come across them yet.

Vernon opens the phial of ginseng.

GEORGETTE

Doris, you're not going to let
Vernon drink that stuff, are you?

LALLY

Hey, harmless. Great stress-buster.

LEONA

Oh sure, like Vern's *real* stressed.
Got a job for the summer, Vernon?

GEORGETTE

All the boys I know have summer
jobs. They all have *haircuts* too -
that's how we tell them apart from
criminals, Vern, in case you didn't
know...

Lally winks at Vernon, downs his ginseng.

LALLY

I appreciate your help, big man.

(to Mom)

I hope it's no problem, Mrs Little -
Vern's agreed to collate some local
data for me.

Vernon gives him an "oh really?" look.

MOM

Oh, no problem, Lally - gosh. Hear
that girls? It's a job for Vern -
he's colliding data for Lally.

LEONA

Only job he'll get looking like
that.

11 INT. VERNON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Vernon lies awake, staring up at the ceiling. A police siren
WAILS in the distance, prompting him to suddenly leap out of
bed, dive inside his wardrobe, retrieve the bag of dope and
stuff it under his pillow. Then he lies back as before,
staring up at the ceiling.

12 EXT. KEETERS WASTELAND - FLASHBACK - DAY

What briefly looks like a human head on top of a toilet bowl
BLOWS apart!

Jesus lies on his stomach next to Vernon, who reloads his own
handgun. Jesus points to the initials "VAL" on the butt --

JESUS

Who's VAL?

VERNON

My dad - Vincent Asshole Little --
ditched mom and me and fucked off.

Vernon takes aim at another water melon - one of several on top of a stack of old toilet bowls -- BAM!

Covertly watching them from a distance is a teenage girl with big blue eyes like a doll's, and a short blue cotton dress over her flat body: ELLA.

There's an angry SHOUT, and a Vietnam Vet with one leg appears from round the back, pants around his ankle, waving his fist and screaming incoherent obscenities of rage.

Vernon and Jesus burst out laughing, then turn tail and run as he hobbles after them.

ELLA

Hey, Vern - wait for me!

Ella appears from the other direction, but Vernon and Jesus keep running. They leap over a broken piece of wall --

-- and land in a heap on the other side, still laughing. Jesus has slightly grazed his cheek. Vernon wipes away the trickle of blood -- then Jesus holds his wrist, keeping his hand still. Vernon looks puzzled. Jesus smiles.

From nearby, Ella watches them enviously.

13 INT. BARBER'S SHOP - DAY

Vernon awaits his turn with his Mom while the BARBER cuts old MR DEUTSCHMAN's hair.

BARBER

Barry was here, says there could be
a drugs link.

Vernon's ears prick up.

DEUTSCHMAN

A drugs link, yes.

BARBER

A drugs link, and a second firearm.

DEUTSCHMAN

I heard it was a panty cult. You
hear it was a panty cult?

BARBER

The Meskin kid was wearing girl's
panties is what I heard.

The Barber removes the white sheet from Mr Deutschman, and Vernon takes his place.

BARBER
What's it to be, Mrs Little?

MOM
I want him to look like the decent,
upright young man he is...
(to Vernon)
Harris' store might take you on.
That would suit fine.

VERNON
Mom!! Anyway I'm working for Lally.

MOM
Only for a day or two. I mean, Vern -
you're the man of the house these
days, so I'm counting on you to make
good. All the boys I know have jobs.

VERNON
Like which boys, Ma?

MOM
Well - Randy and Eric...

VERNON
Randy and Eric are dead.

MOM
I'm just saying be a *man*.

VERNON
Yeah, right.

MOM
And don't you get smart with me
either in front of everybody.

BARBER
Here comes Vaine...

Vernon spins out of the chair, pulling off the white gown
over his head and tears out...

MOM
Well go ahead, Vernon - go right
ahead and humiliate your mother --
after all that's happened to her!

The screen door bangs shut.

14 EXT. MARTIRIO - STREET - DAY

Vernon heads off down the street as Vaine parks her squad car outside the Barber's shop.

Rounding a corner, Vernon approaches a piece of wasteland. Dogs bark in the distance. He digs in his pocket, extracts the bag of dope and is about to drop it among the weeds when a horn HONKS.

Spinning round, Vernon sees Lally waving from his red van.

LALLY

Hey, big man Little!

Vernon freezes. Lally beckons him over, pointing further down the street --

LALLY

See those cops? They just came from your place. Jump in.

15 INT. LALLY'S VAN - TRAVELING - DAY

Lally moves off, ginseng phials rolling around the floor at Vernon's feet.

LALLY

Help yourself. A shot of ginseng'll help keep your strength up. So... what do you suppose the cops were looking for?

VERNON

Don't ask me.

LALLY

Nothing to hide, huh?
(Vernon shakes his head)
Don't you think it's time you told your story, little big man? Your real, true story. I could cut a report and it could air tonight.

VERNON

Mr Nuckles oughta tell *his* story. It was his period, he saw what happened - he's who sent me on the errand out of class...

LALLY

They say he's too shaken up to talk right now. So what kind of errand we talkin' about?

VERNON

He sent me down the lab with some physics notes.

LALLY

Don't they corroborate your alibi?

VERNON

Well I - uh - kinda never made it there.

LALLY

To the lab? How come?

VERNON

I got - uh -- distracted.

Vernon glances awkwardly out of the window.

16 EXT/INT. BEULAH DRIVE/LALLY'S VAN - DAY

Lally swings onto Belulah Drive, where various stalls have been set up on the sidewalks to cater to the media, and parks under the Lechuga's willow next to Vernon's home.

LALLY

Take my advice, little big man - things won't get any easier until you tell the world your story.

(picks up ginseng)

Here - keep your strength up.

Lally stuffs several phials into his pocket. In doing so he feels something, and brings out the bag of dope.

VERNON

Uh, it ain't mine actually.

LALLY

Let me keep it for you.

VERNON

Thanks, Lally - I'll be right back!

Vernon bails out of the van and sprints across the lawn -

17 INT. VERNON'S HOME - HALL & KITCHEN - DAY

- crashes through the kitchen, up the hall -

18 INT. VERNON'S BEDROOM - DAY

- and into his bedroom. Breathless, he twists the cap off the ginseng, takes "Taylor's" two acid tabs from the envelope and pokes them into the phial, then replaces the cap and drops it into his Nike shoe box, hiding it at the back of the closet.

19 EXT. BEULAH DRIVE - DAY

Vernon strolls onto the porch just as Vaine, a Police DOG HANDLER and his MOM emerge from the truck.

As they head towards him, Leona's Eldorado pulls up in front of Lally's van and Betty, Georgette and Leona pile out. Leona calls out to Mom -

LEONA
Another set-back, Doris?

MOM
Well it's nothing, girls - head on in, there's some fudge inside...

Meanwhile Vaine cuts across the lawn to Vernon.

VAINE
Vernon, you and I are going for a little ride.

The women are oblivious to what's going on.

LEONA
We don't have long, they're coming to lay the sunken patio at three.

VERNON
Ma'am, I swear to God I wasn't even there when things started...

MOM
Well I'm expecting my Special Edition fridge - walnut on walnut.

VAINE
Is that right. Makes it difficult to explain the prints we found on the Meskin boy's sports bag, doesn't it. Your prints, Vernon.

Georgette notices that Vernon is being led away.

GEORGETTE
Honey, of course they'll come after him if he insists on looking like that - that haircut's the pits.

Vernon follows Vaine back to the truck while the ladies head inside the house. As he passes the red van, Lally calls out -

LALLY
Just say the word! Camera's ready
to roll, Vern!

Vaine holds open the door and Vernon climbs in. As she starts up, Vernon suddenly yells through the window -

VERNON
Do it, Lally - *tell 'em the fucken
truth -- I wasn't even there!*

His cry echoes as the truck drives off in a cloud of dust, flowers and teddy-bears.

20 INT. DEN - WASTELAND - FLASHBACK - DUSK

Vernon lies back on an old mattress, smoking a joint and idly trying to blow smoke rings. Jesus lies nearby, sharing the joint with him and reading while Pearl Jam plays "Better Man" on a clapped out cell phone.

VERNON
Whatcha reading?

Jesus holds up the book: Juan Rulfo's surrealist novel, *Pedro Paramo*, with a skeletal bride and groom on the cover.

VERNON
What's it about?

JESUS
Dude goes looking for his dad - only when he finds him he's a ghost, like everyone else in town.

VERNON
Sounds weird.
(affectionate)
Like you.

Vernon passes the joint to Jesus. He takes a hit, then gives the joint back to Vernon. Their hands touch -- their eyes briefly lock ...

BARRY (O.S.)
You ain't pullin your rod in there,
are you Little?

21 INT. POLICE STATION - CELL - NIGHT

Vernon lies on a metal cot, staring ahead of him.

VERNON
No, Barry.

Light through the grille outlines a maw crowded with teeth.

BARRY

That's Officer Gurie to you, boy.
You ain't chokin' your chicken all
night long are ya? Spankin' the
monkey? Porkin' the preacher
thinkin about your Meskin boy, are
ya Little?

He laughs a smutty laugh, then moves on. Vernon stares up at the ceiling, closing his eyes. A WHIP PAN away from him...

22 EXT. PARKING LOT - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

... to a parking lot, where is crouched down, smoking a joint with Jesus.

A teenage girl - TAYLOR - staggers out of a party in a church hall, gropes her way towards a convertible Buick, and topples into the back seat without even opening the door.

Jesus shrugs, but Vernon is curious. He cautiously moves towards the Buick where Taylor is retching, like she's about to throw up. Vernon sees an envelope lying on the ground.

VERNON

I - uh - think you dropped this?

TAYLOR

(slurred)

Who the fuck are you?

VERNON

Uh -- Vernon... Gregory Little.
You're Taylor Figueroa, right?

TAYLOR

What's it to you?

VERNON

We go to the same school.

TAYLOR

Whatever. Hey, do me a favor and,
like, keep them safe some place,
case I pass out or whatever.

VERNON

Sure. What are they?

TAYLOR

You don't wanna know. Nasty acid
tabs, take you higher than...
higher than, like -- fuck, I'm so
wasted I can hardly breathe... help
me get outta these...?

Vernon's eyes widen as Taylor pops open the top button of her shorts and wriggles about.

TAYLOR
C'mon Greg, whatcha waitin for?

VERNON
It's Vern...

TAYLOR
Whatever, help me outta these
goddam shorts or I'll suffocate.

Vernon opens the door and Taylor almost spills out. He grabs her under the arms and helps heave her back inside, his face squidged into her breasts.

TAYLOR
Hey that feels good - help me off
with these shorts will ya?

With nervous hands he starts to unpeel her shorts -- his fingers tangle with gray cotton tangas beneath --

TAYLOR
Mmmm -- oh yeah....

MAN (O.S.)
Taylah! Where the hell are you?!

Taylor struggles up, whispering --

TAYLOR
You'd better, like, disappear.

Vernon needs no further prompting -- he opens the door and crawls away into the bushes as the Man stumbles closer.

23 INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Vernon is sat across a desk from a white-suited Armenian attorney, Mr ABDINI, who occasionally makes notes in a file.

ABDINI
You touch bag? Make fingerprince?

VERNON
Uh - I guess so.

ABDINI
So Bernom, you tell me whappen in
school?

VERNON
Well, see, I was out of class, and
when I came back I....

Abdini holds up a hand -

ABDINI
Your Mom say you went batroom on
way?

VERNON
(embarrassed)
Uh - yeah, but so what?

ABDINI
(scribbling in file)
Very impotent evidence, Bernom.

Vaine clanks at the door - Abdini pats his arm.

ABDINI
You don't setse fly today. We try
bail.

24 INT. POLICE STATION - CORRIDORS - DAY

Vaine leads Vernon and Abdini along corridors -

25 EXT. STREET & COURT HOUSE - DAY

- out across the road, where a posse of media people are waiting. They crowd forward as Vernon appears, but Abdini fends them off with multiple "No commen"s...

26 INT. MARTIRIO COURT - DAY

Vaine, Vernon and Abdini enter a small courtroom, where Eileena, a Typist and various court officials are waiting.

OFFICER
All a-rise.

A bright-eyed lady with short gray hair and bifocals swivels round. A sign introduces her as *Judge Helen E Gurie*.

JUDGE
Deputy Gurie, I doubt you'll cook
up a grand jury on a single set of
prints. Won't even defrost 'em.

VAINE
It's more than one set, your honor.

JUDGE
But they're all from the same
sports bag. I mean *p-lease*! Now if
it was the other *gun*, you might
hold my interest...

VERNON

Ma'am, this whole thing can be cleared up by my teacher Mr Nuckles.....

JUDGE

Counsel, please inform your client that he's not on trial here. Deputy - have you checked with the boy's teacher?

VAINE

Marion Nuckles didn't mention the suspect's whereabouts at the time of the tragedy.

JUDGE

He didn't mention, or you didn't ask?

VAINE

His doctors say he won't be able to talk for at least six months.

ABDINI

We apply bail your honor.

VAINE

Judge, the boy has a history of absconding... it's a single-parent family, and I don't see how a mother on her own can override the will of a teenage boy.

JUDGE

It's nothing short of tragic. And his mother couldn't make it to court today?

VAINE GURIE

No, ma'am - her car's under repair.

JUDGE GURIE

Well, well, well.

(to Vernon)

Vernon Gregory Little, in light of the facts here presented, I am releasing you...

VAINE

Objection, your Honor!

JUDGE

Let me finish! I'm releasing you into the care of Dr Oliver Goosens on an outpatient basis, starting Monday.

(MORE)

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Failure to comply with the doctor's schedule of treatment will result in your further detention, do you understand?

VERNON

Yes, ma'am.

Down comes her gavel - BAM!

27 EXT. MARTIRIO HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Media people are listlessly gathered in the street outside the school, waiting for something to report.

Vernon hurries past the school, where kids are out hawking T-shirts for \$20 a piece: "I survived Martirio" -- and another, with a huge bullet hole: "I went to Martirio and all I got was this lousy exit wound."

28 EXT. BEULAH DRIVE - DAY

Vernon avoids a knot of reporters outside the Lechuga home, hurries across his Mom's lawn, through the side door and into the backyard.

29 INT. VERNON'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Vernon opens the back door and slips inside the kitchen.

MOM (O.C.)

Ungh - ahh -- unghh - wait - I'm sure I heard the door... God, Lalito - unghh - Lally - wait!

As Vernon heads for his bedroom, his dishevelled Mom appears in the doorway in a filmy pink robe and fluffy slippers.

MOM

Well hi, baby - I didn't expect you back so soon. Vaine says they gave you a conditional discharge?

VERNON

What's Lally doing in there?

MOM

Is that any business of yours?

The front door flies open -

PAM

Y'all die and nobody told me? I bin calling you since Adam and Eve!

BETTY
 Hey Doris - I think the Special
 Edition just arrived!

Betty, Georgette and Leona spill into the living room.

MOM
 Oh my - and I'm not even *dressed*!
 Let me take a picture -- this is a
 moment to be cherished...

Mom pulls out her cell phone -

LEONA
 Doris, get a grip - they're trying
 to deliver your fridge to Nancie's!

LALLY
 Well if it isn't Martirio's Angels!

Lally has appeared at the door, wearing a blue robe and
 Timberlands on his sockless feet. Leona raises a caustic
 eyebrow while Georgette and Betty flutter their eyelids.

Mom glances through the window to see a large crate being
 unloaded from a truck, a teddy bear pinned under its back
 wheel. She hurries to the door, the others following her out
 onto the porch, from where she shouts to the driver.

MOM (O.S.)
 Hey, that fridge is for here, not
 the Lechugas!

Alone, Lally slides up alongside Vernon, puts his arm around
 Vernon's shoulders.

LALLY
 I hear talk of a second firearm
 that disappeared. It's not too late
 to shift the paradigm, little man.
 I'm waiting to hear if I've been
 commissioned to do a whole series,
 in-depth. Could cross over into
 feature rights, web events. We
 could turn your situation around
 360 degrees.

VERNON
 Learn some fucken math.

Vernon pulls free and heads out of the room.

30 INT. VERNON'S HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

Vernon locks the door to his room, glancing round at the mess
 left by the police search. He roots about for something,
 then sticks his head round the bedroom door and calls out -

VERNON
Mom? Where are my Calvins?

MOM (O.S.)
Still in the basket... haven't had
time for laundry.

31 INT. VERNON'S HOME - LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Vernon pulls out a tangled clump of clothes, unpeels a pair of red Calvin Klein underwear - then holds up a saggy Fruit-of-the-Loom Y-front in faint disgust. Unravelling the knot of clothes further, he extracts a pair of baggy pants -

-- and a grubby wad of paper pulp falls out - among them a couple of crumpled cards:

VERNON
(reading)
CMN - Eulalio Ledesma Gutierrez
- President & Cameraman-in-Chief
Care Media Nacogdoches - Weddings &
Graduations a Speciality...
(re-reading)
C M N??!

32 EXT. PHONE BOOTH - ROAD TO KEETER'S - DAY

Vernon cycles from suburban streets into a wilderness of decaying prefabs and overgrown building lots.

VERNON
O Eulalio, yo! Lalio, yo! Lalio,
share this challenge now! Shift
this fucken powerdime now!

The last disemboweled pay-phone in town stands next to a corrugated metal fence. Beyond it, empty scrubland stretches away to the horizon. A sign saying "Welcome to Martirio" stands 50 yards away. Someone has crossed out the population number and written "Watch This Space" over it.

Vernon dials the number on the business card.

VERNON
Um, hello -- I'm wondering if a
Eulalio Ledesma works there?

A little old lady catches her breath at the other end.

OLD LADY (ON PHONE)
I only have what's left in my purse!
Seven dollars and thirty cents is
all I have -- for groceries.

VERNON

I didn't mean to trouble you, ma'am
-- I thought this was CMN.

OLD LADY (ON PHONE)

Si si, Care Media Nacogdoches - but
the president is no here right now.

VERNON

I know, he's down here in Martirio.

OLD LADY (ON PHONE)

Have you seen my Lalo?

VERNON

Sure -- matter of fact he staying
at my -- uh -- friend's house.

OLD LADY (ON PHONE)

Please, tell Lalo his mama says the
finance company took everything,
they wouldn't wait for payment on
the van, and now they sue for the
camera - and it is all in my name!

VERNON

I'll be sure to tell him, ma'am -
you just leave it to me. Gimme a
call tonight - say around nine --
and you can talk to him yourself.
Gotta pen?

33 EXT. KEETERS - WASTELAND - DAY

Vernon wheels his bike between spiky thorn bushes and
concrete slabs towards a depression in the ground. At the
steepest end is the entrance to an old mine shaft, with a
rickety door made out of sheets of tin with a padlock on it.

He has almost reached the door when he hears the sound of
DOGS BARKING in the distance as a SEARCH PARTY moves through
the undergrowth.

Vernon throws himself to the ground and stays down.

ELLA (O.S.)

Bernie?

He spins round --

VERNON

Who's that?

ELLA (O.S.)

It's Ella - Ella Bouchard...

Vernon sees Ella crawling towards him through the bushes.

VERNON
Shhh, willya! I'm trying to rest up
a little -- God!

She shuffles closer.

ELLA
Looks like you're trying to get to
yours an' Jesus den, that's what it
looks like to me.

VERNON
Ella - it's real urgent that nobody
disturbs me right now -- okay?

Her smile falters. She watches him a moment.

ELLA
Wanna see my South Pole?

Her dusty knees part a little and a flash of panty shines out.

VERNON
Shit, come on, will ya? *Hell...*

ELLA
Can I just hang out Bernie?

VERNON
Shhh! Anyway my name's not even
Bernie, *duh*.

ELLA
It is *too* Bernie, or somethin' like
that, it's Bernie or *somethin'*.

VERNON
Listen, can't I owe you or somethin?
Can we hang out another time?

ELLA
Promise?

VERNON
Yeah, I promise.

Vernon turns his back, inviting her to crawl away, but she
doesn't. He spins round on her --

VERNON
Fucken *what*?

She throws him a weak smile -

ELLA
I love you Bernie...

The BARKING dogs draw closer. Vernon slithers away as TWO MEN with dogs appear, moving toward the mine entrance.

ELLA

You don' wanna go down there -
there's nothing down there but
snakes. *Rattlers. Bunches* of em!

With a thump of plastic sandal and a swish of blue cotton,
she's gone.

34 INT. VERNON'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Leona, Betty, Georgette, Lally and Mom are all gathered round the TV, watching the Local News, while Leona pours coffee.

Vernon stands in the background, his eye on the wall clock that is coming up to nine o'clock.

LEONA

Lalito, how do you like your coffee?

LALLY

Hot and sweet, Leona -
(cuddling Mom)
-- like my woman.

On TV: an extravagant funeral is taking place: a coffin shaped like a teddy bear, laden with stuffed teddys.

LALLY (ON TV)

Teddy Lechuga is the last of the
young people to be laid to rest,
here in Martirio's beautiful Warren
Finlay Memorial Park...

Lally on TV holds a mike to a grieving relative -

RELATIVE (ON TV)

Teddy was a fine example of
American youth, the best - and he
was gunned down like it was a war
zone...

TV CAMERA PANS onto Lally as the teddy bear coffin is lowered into the ground --

LALLY (ON TV)

Teddy was one of the beautiful
children whose lives were brutally
cut short by pervert killer Jesus
Navarro, whose only known friend,
Vernon Gregory Little, has now been
released on bail pending further
enquiries.

An unflattering photo of Vernon CUTS to his weeping Mom.

MOM (ON TV)
My boy's done no wrong!

LALLY (ON TV)
But they say his prints were on the
killer's ammo bag...

MOM (ON TV)
That don't prove [bleep] - my boy's
a good boy, he wouldna harm a fly.

The picture CUTS to a TEEN being interviewed.

TEEN (ON TV)
I only spoke with Vernon once or
twice. He's kinda weird.

LALLY (ON TV)
What kinda weird?

TEEN (ON TV)
I dunno. Just - you know - weird.
Like he don't hang out with the
rest of us. Just that Jeezus kid.

Lally enters SHOT --

LALLY (ON TV)
Stay tuned for more on this
exclusive story. This is Eulalio
Ledesma, reporting from Martirio --
a town in the grip of tragedy...

As the TV CUTS to station ID, all but Mom turn to Lally -

LEONA
You were great, Lally - so poised.

MOM
But why did you have to say those
things about Vernon?

LALLY
Hey Doris - ladies - did you hear
me say anything about Vern?

Before anyone can answer, Vernon pulls out the crumpled
business card and holds it triumphantly in the air.

VERNON
Okay, so listen up everybody -- I
called Yoo-lalio's office today,
and guess who answered? His old mom,
who just had her house emptied by a
finance company on account of his
van repayments. Did you know he
makes wedding films, and works out
of his mom's bedroom in Nacogdoches?

LALLY

Oh *please*.

MOM

But Vern, we just saw him on the TV...

PAM

The Martirio Home Cooking channel - big deal Doris...

VERNON

(to his Mom)

You don't believe me? I guarantee his mom's gonna call here any minute, hunting his ass -- I guarantee it. Just ask *her*!

LALLY

That's *preposterous*. The evil lies coming from this boy's mouth ...

(the phone rings)

I'll get that --

VERNON

I don't think so -- Mom, take this call!

Vernon throws the phone to his startled Mom.

MOM

Hello? Mr Ledesma?? Why sure you can -- may I say who's calling?

(to Lally)

I think she said CNN...

Lally goes to take the phone, but Vernon grabs it --

VERNON

Mrs Ledesma? Remember me?? From Martirio??

Lally snatches the receiver and turns to the wall.

LALLY

Hello? Oh Renée! Sorry about that, things are a little crazy down here. I got the series? Awesome!

(raises thumb to Mom)

Conditional on what? No problemo, not a challenge - we still have the second firearm piece, the suspect, and the townsfolk coming to terms with their grief -- it can spin-off in a thousand directions. Thanks, Renée - catch you later.

Lally hangs up. He dangles the receiver over the cradle, taking a moment to gaze at Vernon.

LALLY
Pretty outlandish behavior we saw
there, Vernon. Damn scary actually,
in the light of everything.

VERNON
Fuck you!

MOM
Vernon *Gregory*!

LALLY
Simple compassion dictates that
it's time to turn this boy over to
someone who can help. If we cling
when he needs professional care, we
may damage his chances of recovery.

VERNON
You're the one who needs care, Lalo.

LALLY
But *you're* the one under a
psychiatric order -- *Vern.*

Again the phone rings. Vernon reaches for the handset, but Lally beats him to it.

LALLY
The Little residence? I'm sorry,
you must have the wrong number.

Vernon hits the speaker button as the Old Lady wails out --

OLD LADY (ON PHONE)
Lalo, my God, Lalo? I ran out of
groceries, Lalo, please -- how
could you leave me so long? *Es que
no queda nada Eulalio, hasta mi
cama se lo han llevado...*

VERNON
(shouting into speaker)
Say it in English!

Lally's foot catches Vernon behind his knees and he falls backwards onto the rug as Lally snaps off the speaker.

LALLY
(into handset)
Oh you poor souls! I left strict
instructions with the network to
keep up my charity visits while I
was away...

Vernon goes for the speaker button again, but Lally keeps him at bay with his leg.

LALLY

Yes, I know sweetheart - but mental illness can be cured -- that's why I share myself with your cause - you and all the other beautiful ladies at the home...

Vernon slides forward on his belly -- reaches the speaker button and pushes it --

OLD LADY (ON PHONE)

Lalo, have you gone crazy...? *Que te pasa mi hijo?*

Lally rips the cord from the wall, but only Vernon can see.

LALLY

Now don't you worry about a thing - I'll take care of it just as soon as I can. God bless you sweetheart.

He hangs up. Mom and the ladies stare at him, open-mouthed.

LALLY

I guess I have - something to share.

VERNON

Damn right, asshole!

MOM

Vernon!!

LALLY

Some time ago, I decided to share my limited resources with the less fortunate. I'd been so ambitious, so wrapped up in *Me* - so I became involved with real people with real problems. The voice you just heard is one of my ladies -- one of my Sunshine Souls.

GEORGETTE

Wow, she sounded so *together*.

LALLY

Tragic, isn't it? Confined through no fault of their own. They all are.

VERNON

Bull-*shit*.

MOM

Vernon Gregory, that's *enough*.

LALLY
I guess the real tragedy is -- they
now know where I'm staying.

MOM
So?

LALLY
The home's strictest rule is non-
disclosure of carers' identities.
If they found out about this, I
could be prevented from giving. It
means I have to be moving along.

A stunned silence before Mom implodes --

MOM
Well God, Lally, no, I mean --
where will you go? There's not a
room to be had anywhere.

LEONA
There's space at my place.

LALLY
My God, the pure charity of this
town!

MOM
But -- that woman could just as
easy find you at Leona's as here.

LEONA
I'm unlisted. I have call-screening.
And I have closed-circuit security -
with armed response.

Leona smiles at Lally, dangling her car-keys.

35 EXT. BEULAH DRIVE - DUSK

Vernon stands on the porch with his Mom, watching Lally
following Leona out to her car, with the other ladies in tow.

Mom walks over to the wishing bench and collapses into it.

MOM
O Lord God, bring Lally back, bring
Lally back, bring Lally back ...

Vernon moves nearer, standing beside her.

VERNON
Wishing bench is airborne this end,
Mom -- like the dirt's caving in
underneath.

MOM

Well Vernon just *shut up!* -- you did this to me, all this shit.

VERNON

I'm sorry, Ma.

She looks at him a moment, then dissolves in tears.

MOM

Daddy always told me I wouldn't amount to anything.

VERNON

Don't say that, Ma.

MOM

Well it's true - look at me. It's always been true. "Just plain ungainly," as he used to say. You're all I have in the world, Vern. If you could have seen your daddy's face when he knew you were a boy -- there wasn't a taller man in town. All the great things you were going to do when you grew up -- and now look at you. Most of the boys I know have jobs already. They make money. They contribute.

VERNON

Like which boys, Ma?

MOM

Like Randy and Eric....

VERNON

Randy and Eric are *dead*.

MOM

The point is, Vernon - I'll bet *their* mothers won't be out waiting for the power truck to cut their power - not like *your* mother, after all the trouble she's been through. Not that you have to care, at least you'll be warm in jail...

VERNON

I'm not going to jail, Ma -- I didn't *do* nothing.

MOM

Lally says you smoke mari-jew-ana.

VERNON

All the kids smoke weed. Lally's a dickhead. How could you let him... get a hold on you like that?

MOM

He loves me, Vernon. You wouldn't understand that.

VERNON

Yeah, right - you and Leona and anything else with half a pulse...

Mom slaps his face. Vernon stares back at her, suppressing his hurt.

VERNON

Goodnight, Ma.

He kisses her, gets up and walks back inside the house. The pump Jack starts nodding in the garden beyond.

36 35A INT. VERNON'S HOME - KITCHEN, NIGHT

Vernon's MOM Doris sits forlorn and lonely in the kitchen. The cooling system of the new fridge kicks in and starts to hum. Doris studies the phial with Lally's ginseng which is spread out on the table. Having brewed herself a tea with it, she removes part of the ginseng and starts sipping.

Her face begins to glow. The fridge hums and begins to glow as well. The glow becomes so intense that the fridge radiates an inner light. It begins to speak.

FRIDGE

Doris.

Mom looks briefly astonished.

FRIDGE

Doris, you are so beautiful.

MOM

Really? You mean it?

FRIDGE

Yes, I do. Doris...

MOM

Yes?

FRIDGE

I love you, Doris. Doris, mi vida. Amor de mi vida, Doris.

MOM

Oh...

FRIDGE

I'll never leave you. I am here for you - always filled with goodies.

MOM

Ice-cream?

FRIDGE

Ice-cream, and fudge, and coke, and sweeties, and TV dinners... and... and... and...

MOM

I love you too!

37 INT. GOOSENS OFFICE - DAY

Vernon sits in front of Dr GOOSENS, who leans back, twiddling his thumbs under his nose.

GOOSENS

So Vernon Gregory Little, how are we today?

VERNON

Okay, I guess.

GOOSENS

Alrighty. And what can you tell me about why you're here?

VERNON

Dunno. Judge must think I'm crazy.

GOOSENS

And are you?

VERNON

I guess it ain't up to me to say. First everybody dissed me cos my buddy was Mexican, then cos he was weird, but I stood by him cos I thought friendship was a sacred thing -- then it all went to hell.

GOOSENS

(raises hand, smiles)

Alrighty, let's see what we can discover. Now, tell me -- how do you feel about what's happened?

VERNON

Wrecked. Just -- wrecked. And now I'm being punished for it, they're twisting every regular little fact to frame me up...

Goosens makes a note in his file.

GOOSENS
Alrighty. And what can you tell me
about your family life?

VERNON
It's just... regular.

GOOSENS
The file notes that you live with
your mother. No -- brothers? No
uncles, or -- other male influences
in your familial network?

VERNON
Not really.

GOOSENS
But you had a friend in Jesus?

Vernon's eyes drop to the floor. Dr Goosens reaches over to
rest his hand on Vernon's leg.

GOOSENS
Believe me, Jesus touched me too.
(Vernon looks bemused)
So tell me, what happened that day.

VERNON
Well - uh -- things had mostly
finished when I got back.

GOOSENS
Where had you been?

VERNON
Running an errand for Mr Nuckles...
but I kinda got held up.

GOOSENS
Vernon, you're not on trial here --
please be specific.

VERNON
I -- uh -- needed the bathroom.

GOOSENS
The school bathroom?
(Vernon shakes his head)
You took a leak outside school?

VERNON
Uh -- not a leak, actually.

GOOSENS
You had a bowel movement outside
school? At the time of the tragedy?
(MORE)

GOOSENS (CONT'D)
(Vernon nods meekly)
You told the court this?

VERNON
Hell no. It's no big deal.

Vernon draws circles on the floor with his Nikes.

GOOSENS
Is it a diagnosed condition --
sphincter weakness, or suchlike?

VERNON
Nah. Anyway, I almost don't get it
no more.

GOOSENS
Alrighty. So tell me, Vernon --
do you like girls?

VERNON
Sure.

GOOSENS
Can you name a girl you like?

Vernon takes a deep breath.

VERNON
Taylor Figueroa.

GOOSENS
Have you had any physical contact
with her?

VERNON
Well, kinda. But she moved to the
city awhile back.

GOOSENS
What do you remember most about
your contact with her?

VERNON
Her smell, I guess.

GOOSENS
Vernon -- have you ever felt
attraction towards another male?

VERNON
No way!

GOOSENS
Alrighty. Let's see what we can
discover.

Dr Goosens reaches for the stereo and presses Play. A military drum beats out, softly at first, but growing in power, threatening ...

GOOSENS

Gustav Holst -- *Mars*. This should rouse some glory in a boy's soul.

He walks to the bed and smacks it with the flat of his hand.

GOOSENS

Get undressed for me please, and come lie up here.

VERNON

Un-dressed??

GOOSENS

Sure -- to finish the examination. We psychiatrists are medical doctors first, you know...

Vernon strips down to his Calvin Klein's while Goosens pulls on a pair of clear welding goggles. As Vernon climbs onto the bed, Goosens points to his underwear --

GOOSENS

Off, please.

Vernon has no option but to slide out of his underpants.

GOOSENS

On your stomach, spread your legs.

The music heats up as Vernon gingerly moves his legs apart. Goosens traces a finger down his backbone...

GOOSENS

Relax. Does this make you think of Taylor? Or -- someone else?

VERNON

Doctor, this don't seem right...

GOOSENS

Just relax, this next procedure won't hurt - in fact don't be embarrassed if you experience arousal...

Goosens waits for the music to climax, then grabs a pair of steel salad tongs, adjusts his goggles, and lowers his face towards Vernon's ass --

VERNON

I don't fucken think so...!

Vernon spins upright and scrambles back into his clothes.

GOOSENS
Think carefully Vernon -- think
very carefully before jeopardizing
your bail application.

Vernon hightails out of the surgery and is gone.

GOOSENS
Okay ... *al-righty*.

38 INT. VERNON'S HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

Vernon roots through his closet, hurriedly stuffing clothes
into his back-pack. He takes down the pin-up of Taylor -

-- then grabs a Piggy bank, gives it a shake, pulls a rubber
stopper out of its ass and shakes out -- a couple of dimes.

VERNON
(calling)
Hey Mom? What happened to the fifty
bucks I had in here? Mom?

39 INT. VERNON'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Vernon stands in the doorway with his empty piggy bank while
his Mom makes herself a sandwich.

MOM
I'm sorry Vern, but I had to help
Lally out.

VERNON
Help Lally??! With *my* savings?!

MOM
The camera equipment wiped the code
from his Visa card.

VERNON
I thought we owed money to the
power company?

MOM
Well Vernon, think of others for a
change. Lally's needs are more -
pressing than ours.

VERNON
Yeah *right*.

MOM
He'll pay it back - why, look how
much he stands to make from the TV
people, in fact he was just telling
me that CNN are....

VERNON

Ma - I just *skipped bail*! This is
life or frickin death!

Mom looks at him a moment --

MOM

Don't you cuss at your mother,
Vernon Gregory - not after all she's
been through! Show some *compassion*!

VERNON

But Ma - I'm in shit so deep I
don't know what to do!

MOM

Well if you must *insist* on putting
yourself first all the time Vernon,
why don't you take your guitar into
town - Seb Harris might give you a
few dollars for it. Or your daddy's
old polaroid, look... show some
initiative, for the love of God...

She pulls out the polaroid from the cupboard.

VERNON

(witheringly)

Thanks a whole lot, mom.

He grabs the camera, gives her a peck and is out the door.

MOM

Vern -- don't be so hard on Lally --
he's on our side, you know!

40 INT/EXT. LALLY'S VAN/BEULAH DRIVE - DAY

SHOOTING THRU a gap in the net curtains towards Vernon's
house, we see Vernon's Mom appear at the top of the drive.

MOM

(calling)

Vern! Where are you going?!

LEONA (O.S.)

Unngh - mmmmm -- aaaah shit Lally,
you're so damn hard....

Vernon pedals furiously down the drive as Lally's hand draws
back the curtain - then grabs a pair of boots --

LALLY (O.S.)

Gotta go, babe. Seems our Little
friend is finally shifting his
paradigm.

41 EXT. KEETERS ROAD - DAY

Vernon pedals hard to Keeters, back-pack slung over his back.

42 EXT. KEETERS - WASTELAND - DAY

Vernon lies by the stack of overgrown toilets, slugging back a can of beer and checking out the Polaroid.

ELLA (O.S.)
Hi Bernie. Whatcha doin?

VERNON
(startled)
Just... hanging out.

Ella slithers down a dusty mound.

ELLA
Whatcha doin *really*?

VERNON
Just hanging out, I toldja -- you shouldn't even be here. And my name's not Bernie.

ELLA
It's something like Bernie, I know that ...

VERNON
Ella, I don't want to make a big deal out of anything today okay? I'm just trying to chill on my own, and figure some shit out, okay? I need to make some dough - fast.

ELLA
I knew it was Bernie.

VERNON
Whatever.

Ella messes with the hem of her dress.

ELLA
Fuck, it's hot out here.

VERNON
Ella, *c'mon* will ya?!

ELLA
What you need dough for?

VERNON
I... I gotta get outta here. Maybe head down to Mexico for a while.

ELLA
I love Mexico!

VERNON
What you know about Mexico? You
never been to Mexico in your life.

ELLA
Jesus told me about it.

VERNON
Oh yeah?

ELLA
Said he'd take me there one day.

VERNON
Like shit he did. He didn't even go
with girls.

Ella stares at Vernon, smiles at him, but he turns away.

ELLA
Bernie, how come you don't fool
around? Are you a pillow biter too?

VERNON
Hell no! I just think you're too
young, that's all. Your equipment
ain't even arrived yet.

ELLA
Guys a whole lot older than you
want to fool around with me.

VERNON
Yeah, *right*. Like who?

ELLA
Like Danny Naylor.

VERNON
Yeah, *right*, I don't fucken think
so. Anyway, Danny Naylor's dead.

ELLA
So? He still wanted to fool with me
-- and a whole shit-load of other
guys. Mr Deutschman'd even pay for
it, I know that well enough.

VERNON
Fuck, Ell - Mr Deutschman's around
eight hundred years old. Anyway,
how do you know? You been over
there and *asked* him?

ELLA

He gave me a Coke once, and touched me a little.

VERNON

He *touched* you?

ELLA

On my ass... so there.

43 EXT. KEETERS - WASTELAND - DAY

Vernon pedals his bike with Ella clinging to him from behind. They ride between flaky shacks and trailer homes until -

44 EXT. DEUTSCHMAN'S PLACE - DAY

-- they come to a cheap wooden house, painted clean with a neat little lawn.

VERNON

I don't know this is such a great idea, Ell...

ELLA

You need the dough dontcha? Leave it to me...

Vernon lays his bike in the gravel beside the house, then takes hold of Ella's shoulders.

VERNON

Ella, it's just look and touch, okay? I mean nothing heavy, okay? Call me if he goes too far.

ELLA

Chill out, Bernie -- I'm the one with the poles, *remember*?

She crunches around to Mr Deutschman's door while Vernon crouches in the gravel, out of sight. He hears the door open and Mr Deutschman's sad, kindly voice --

DEUTSCHMAN

Who's this here?

ELLA

Hi Mr Deutschman, it's li'l Ella -- remember me, Mr Deutschman?

DEUTSCHMAN

Why Ella -- come in, come in...

The door closes behind her. Vernon unloads his backpack and moves around to the door, scanning the streets and neighbors, but there's nothing to see except an old Jeep out front.

Cautiously he tries the front door -- it opens. From somewhere deep in the house, Ella's voice chimes out --

ELLA (O.S.)
Mama buys them cos cotton is
supposed to be.... wow, your hands
are so *cold* Mr Deutschman...

45 INT. DEUTSCHMAN'S PLACE - DAY

Vernon creeps into the living room, then down a narrow hallway towards Ella's voice -- past the bathroom to where a door stands ajar.

Vernon flattens himself against the wall and cranes for a peek through the gap. Deutschman is sitting on a bed, while Ella stands in front of him with her dress held under her chin. Next to the bed is a wooden table where a lamp stands on a lace doily. A wallet, a Bible, and a black-and-white picture in a heavy brass frame sit alongside. A friendly lady shines out of the picture with clear, trusting eyes.

ELLA
Ha! That *tickles* -- wait up, Mr
Deutschman, you wanna see my South
Pole -- or my *North Pole*?

She pulls her panties down to her knees.

DEUTSCHMAN
My, what's this here?

Vernon is suddenly through the door, brandishing the Polaroid -- FLASH!

Deutschman cries out in momentary terror --

VERNON
Mr Deutschman, it's okay -- we're
not here to make any trouble. The
young lady is here by choice, and I
am just here with her, y'understand?

Deutschman looks at him aghast -- then at Ella. She smiles sweetly at him.

VERNON
Mr Deutschman, I'm real sorry to
barge in like this, but -- you see
the young lady here? I bet you'd
like to spend some time with her...
(MORE)

VERNON (CONT'D)

a little cash is all we need - and
Mr Deutschman, you can have this
picture and we'll never say a word.
That's our solemn promise to you,
ain't it Miss?

ELLA

Sure thing, Mr Deutschman.

Deutschman stares at the floor awhile, then reaches for the
wallet on his bedside table. He takes out a wad of banknotes
and hands it to Vernon without a word.

VERNON

Sir, is this all you have? Just
this money here? \$160?

Deutschman nods. Vernon opens out the wad and peels off a 20.

VERNON

Here, sir, we don't want to clean
you out or anything.

Deutschman takes the note without looking up.

ELLA (O.S.)

Who the fuck are you??

Vernon spins round to see Lally at the open window, video
camera in hand.

LALLY

Hey don't stop -- you were doing
great!

Vernon grabs Ella, her dress half scrunched into her panties,
and pulls her out to the hallway, dropping the camera along
the way while Deutschman clatters into the bathroom ahead of
them. Vernon flicks the photo through the door --

VERNON

Destroy it, sir -- and whatever you
do, don't talk to that guy!

Floorboards bounce as they charge to the front door and out
over the steps. Vernon yanks Ella around the corner in a
spray of gravel to where his backpack is tucked beneath his
bike. And there stands Lally with his video camera.

LALLY

Whoa, kids -- wait up.

Vernon grabs Ella's shoulders and shoves her away. Lally
swaggers over to Vernon's backpack, planting himself between
Vernon and his bike.

LALLY

My, but you're such a little *career*
man these days.

Vernon lowers his head and launches himself into Lally's guts -- DHOOF! Lally flies back onto the bike, the camera spinning through the air and glancing off his head with a CRACK.

LALLY

Sack of shit...!

He unpeels his spine from the bike frame, then takes a swipe at Vernon's ankle.

LALLY

Wanna play in the real world, cock
sucker?

Vernon snatches up the camera and rips out the cassette -- then takes aim and kicks him in the shins. Lally crashes back across the bike, dazed and bloody in a shower of gravel.

Vernon hauls up his backpack, grabs Ella and together they tear off down the road hand-in-hand --

46 EXT. KEETERS - WASTELAND - DAY

-- racing along rows of warped shacks through the splattering rain, past makeshift porches dangling yellow light, along creekbeds, until they reach an overgrown ally that runs between two decrepit shacks.

In the distance, a police siren WAILS.

VERNON

Ella, I have to trust you with
something important.

ELLA

You can trust me, Bernie.

VERNON

We got \$140 -- that's 70 apiece.

He pulls the cash out, rifles through it for a \$10 bill which he stuffs in his pocket, and passes the rest to Ella.

VERNON

Can you take 60 of this to 17
Beulah Drive? Can you do that for
me? You'll have to change your
clothes, and sneak down there like
a shadow. Can you do that?

ELLA

Sure I can. What're you gonna do?

VERNON
Disappear awhile. Maybe head down
to Mexico like I told you...

ELLA
Take me with you!

VERNON
Hell no - they'd catch us right
away.

A truck growls closer. Vernon tenses until it passes, but Ella just stares at him. Then a door bangs and a woman's voice screeches out --

WOMAN
E-lla!

ELLA
Co-min!

Vernon squeezes her hand --

VERNON
If you see my old lady, tell her
I'm sorry and I'll be in touch. Or -
- no -- better -- don't tell her
anything, just slide the cash under
the door - okay?

He's about to head off when Ella peels off \$70 and stuffs it into his hand.

VERNON
Hey Ella, that's your share...

ELLA
I ain't in this for the money.

She leans up and plants a clumsy kiss on his mouth -

ELLA
I love you Bernie ...

-- then springs to her feet and swishes away down the alley like a cotton ghost.

47 INT. GREYHOUND BUS - TRAVELING - DAY

Vernon is nestled into his back-pack on the bus, gazing at his pin-up of Taylor, which he folds so that only her face is showing.

On the TV screen, a gangster soap is under way. A young James Dean look-alike strolls along with his weedy pal --

JAMES DEAN (ON TV)
Everybody knows it, even if you
ain't allowed to say it no more --
girls just can't resist bad boys.

WEEDY PAL (ON TV)
I ain't so sure....

JAMES DEAN (ON TV)
Okay, so listen up. Say there's
this hot chick you wanna pull...

Vernon glances up with vague interest.

JAMES DEAN (ON TV)
You bring her roses, and tell her
you have this plan to go to Mexico,
and would she like to come along.
The other dude - that's me - turns
up with a quart of tequila and two
tickets to the border. I don't show
her the tickets right away, I just
say, "Listen up babe, I have a few
hours left to live -- help me kill
the pain." I get her wasted in
three minutes flat, suck her
tonsils out of her throat, then
pull out the tickets and say "Let's
jam." Which one does she go with?

The Weedy Pal's eyes widen.

48 EXT. GREYHOUND BUS TERMINAL - CITY - DAY

The Greyhound bus pulls into a large city terminal and Vernon
steps out, dishevelled and bleary eyed.

49 EXT. PHONE BOOTHS - TERMINAL - CITY - DAY

Vernon heads to a row of public telephones, picks up one and
dials a number.

GIRL'S VOICE
Hello?

VERNON
Taylor, hi -- it's Vern. Listen up,
babe, I....

GIRL'S VOICE
Wait up, I'll get her.
(calls out)
Tay! Taylor -- it's some guy called
Burns.

50 49A INT. TAYLORS ROOM

A typical teenage girl's room with posters of rock stars. A Girl - CHRISSY - lies sprawled on an unmade bed, browsing a magazine. Taylor wanders over from the bathroom.

TAYLOR

Who?

Chrissy grins, hands her the phone. The conversation is INTER-CUT between Taylor and Vernon.

TAYLOR

Tayla.

VERNON

Hi babe, it's Vern. Listen, I....

TAYLOR

Vern *who*?

VERNON

Vernon Little -- remember me?

TAYLOR

Vernon *Little*? Like, gee...

Chrissy is in quiet hysterics.

VERNON

You might have seen me on the news?
Vernon Gregory Little -- from
Martirio?

TAYLOR

Like, I'm real sorry -- I heard
about the massacre there and all,
but I usually only, like, watch
cable, you know?

CHRISSY

(squealing with laughter)
Anal Intruder Channel...

TAYLOR

Fuck off, Chrissy, God!

VERNON

-- well, I'm the messy-haired dude
from outside the senior party that
time -- I kept back some - stuff -
of yours -- some acid tabs...

TAYLOR

Oh hey, Vern. I'm *sorry* -- you took
care of me that night, like, boy,
did I overdo it or *what*!

VERNON
Hell, no big deal.

TAYLOR
So how come you're in town?

VERNON
I'm - uh - on my way to Mexico --
and I thought maybe we could grab a
coffee or something?

TAYLOR
Dude, I'm like -- wow, you know?
See, my cousin's coming over, and
it's just like, whatever, a girl
thing, you know? Anyway, it's real
sweet of you to call...

A pause - Taylor's about to hang up, and Vernon's panicking.

VERNON
Taylor, listen -- I just got out of
jail -- I'm on the run. I wanted to
tell you some stuff before I
disappear, you know?

TAYLOR
Holy *shit*, like -- what happened?

VERNON
I can't really talk on the phone.

TAYLOR
God, but you seemed like, wow, you
know, such a quiet guy - and only
like 14, no?

VERNON
Uh, 18 actually, these days. So
yeah, I guess I just snapped,
against the injustice and all.

TAYLOR
Oh my God ... Gee, Vern, maybe I
could, like -- whatever, you know?
Do you know the Galleria?

VERNON
Not a whole lot.

TAYLOR
See, I have to be at *Victoria's
Secret* around two -- I could, like,
catch you out front on 24th?

VERNON
Victoria's Secret?

TAYLOR

I know, it's so *embarrassing* -- I'm like, *underwear* shopping, I can't believe I just invited you.

VERNON

I'll wear shades.

TAYLOR

Are you, like -- in a car?

VERNON

I'll take a cab.

TAYLOR

Whatever, look -- there's like this inflatable octopus out front of the Galleria -- I'll keep an eye out around quarter of two.

Vernon hangs up with a big, self-satisfied grin. He pulls out a pair of shades, cleans the lenses, puts them on, and addresses his reflection in the mirror --

VERNON

See the awesome power of *trouble*,
Jeez? Trouble fucken rocks!

51 EXT/INT. GREYHOUND TICKET OFFICE - DAY

Vernon strides up to the booking window --

VERNON

Two tickets to Mexico. One way.

52 INT. CAB - TRAVELING - DAY

Vernon adjusts his shades in his reflection then lounges back, fanning himself with a pair of tickets.

53 EXT. GALLERIA - CITY - DAY

The Cab pulls up by a blow-up purple octopus, its tentacles wagging in the breeze. As Vernon hops out, he spots Taylor standing nearby, her brown arms folded, smiling.

VERNON

(to the cab driver)
Keep the change.

He hoists his backpack and turns to greet Taylor as she sashays over. The Cab Driver shouts after him -

CAB DRIVER
Hey, it's seven-eighty and this is
only a five.

VERNON
Oh, sure thing...

Vernon fumbles in his tight pocket, but the backpack makes it awkward. Tugging hard, coins clatter into the gutter as he pulls out a billfold, peels off a 10 and hands it over.

VERNON
Keep the change.

Taylor leans in to kiss him on the cheek...

CAB DRIVER
Don't forget your five.

VERNON
I said *keep* the change!

CAB DRIVER
You sure? Thanks a lot, pal...

- and off he roars before Vernon can change his mind. Taylor raises an eyebrow.

TAYLOR
You robbed a bank, huh?
(Vernon shrugs a smile)
So what's up, dirty boy?

VERNON
Ah, shit - I dunno where to start.

TAYLOR
I'll drag it out of you. C'mon,
let's grab a juice - get private.

She leads the way into the shopping mall, Vernon following.

54 INT. GALLERIA - MALL - DAY

Taylor heads towards a fancy-looking cafeteria across the concourse. Vernon looks round the humongous Mall in awe.

TAYLOR
You wanna talk? I understand if you
don't.

VERNON
Sure, but you'll have to keep some
pretty heavy secrets. I understand
if you can't.

TAYLOR
 Whatever. Like, I don't need to
 know where the actual bodies are
 buried or anything.

Taylor docks on a barstool in the cafe, Vernon next to her.

TAYLOR
 So is it like robbery or something?

VERNON
 Murder actually.

Her face crumples like she just stepped in puke.

TAYLOR
 Ooo! Don't you think it'd be better
 to, like, stay and fight it out?

VERNON
 I'm innocent - but the way things
 are stacked, I have to disappear
 awhile.

He feels inside his jacket for the tickets.

VERNON
 Tay, this might seem sudden, but --
 listen up, cos I have to ask you
 something really important...

A Waiter interrupts -

WAITER
 What can I get y'all?

Taylor and Vernon's eyes take a moment to separate.

VERNON
 Tequila. Make that two.

TAYLOR
 Uh-huh - I'll have a *guava licuado*.

VERNON
 Make that two.

Taylor cocks a wary eyebrow.

TAYLOR
 So... what do you want to ask me?

Vernon hesitates - his fingers close around the two tickets --

VERNON
 Listen, I...

The Waiter clears his throat.

WAITER
Will that be all?

TAYLOR
I'm all ears.

Vernon eyes the waiter - nods - then his nerve caves in.

VERNON
Ah, heck, Tay, I'm being real
selfish here -- I didn't even ask
how you're doing...

TAYLOR
You're *killing* me, like, *God*. I'm
just here - did some modelling -
tried out for TV but didn't get
casted yet - just like, *whatever*, you
know? And I'm seeing this doctor...

VERNON
You're sick?

TAYLOR
Dude, do I *look* sick? He's an older
guy, but I'm like *soooo* in love --
he's the reason I'm shopping today,
him and my cousin's new man are
such *panty-pooches*.

VERNON
Hey -- *wow*.

Her voice fades to a distant echo in a tunnel.

TAYLOR
God, I can't believe I just *told*
you that! Anyway he drives a
Corvette, like an original Stingray
whatever, and in November we're
going to Colorado for my birthday -
(suddenly waving)
Hey there's my cousin -- Leona!
Lonni! Over here!

Vernon glances round - sees his mom's friend Leona outside
Victoria's Secret -- and explodes off his stool -

VERNON
Fuck! I have to run.

TAYLOR
What's up?

VERNON
Please please please don't breathe
a words of this to Leona.

TAYLOR
You know *Leona*?

VERNON
Please!

Vernon grabs his backpack --

TAYLOR
Vern!

Vernon glances over his shoulder at Taylor, gazing after him.

TAYLOR
(mouthing)
Be careful, Vern. *Call* me.

Vernon turns and runs as Leona wanders over.

55 INT. GREYHOUND BUS - TRAVELING - DUSK

Vernon stares blankly at his own reflection in the window of the bus, travelling down the highway into the gathering dusk.

56 EXT. HIGHWAY - MEXICAN BORDER - NIGHT

The Greyhound Bus pulls into the Border terminal.

Vernon climbs down from the Bus and joins a straggling line of people heading towards a large sign: *International Bridge - Puente Internacional -- Mexico.*

Up ahead is the border control building - a blast of Arctic light framed in darkness. Vernon pulls on his jacket and slicks back his hair. He strides the last few hundred yards and crosses the bridge where the clean concrete highway ends.

Checkpoint buildings sprawl on the Mexican side, officials in uniform stop cars and search them.

Vernon turns up his jacket collar and tries to lose himself in the flow of people.

57 EXT. MEXICAN CHECKPOINT - NIGHT

Vernon crosses into Mexico with a sigh of relief --

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (O.S.)
Passport please.

He turns to see an IMMIGRATION OFFICER beckoning him over to his glass booth.

VERNON

I'm an *American* -- I just want to
visit your beautiful country and...

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

You have no passport?

VERNON

Well - uh - no...

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

Follow me.

Vernon has no choice but to follow him inside the building.

58 INT. IMMIGRATION BUILDING - NIGHT

There's a TV on the wall, pumping out the usual drivel.
Several travellers sit despondently on a wooden bench
awaiting attention, including Vernon.

A bored GUARD flips to another channel, where crime-scene
tape dances under a threatening sky and body-bags leave
bloody skid-marks on the sidewalk.

LALLY (ON TV)

... the trail of guilt behind last
week's devastating high school
shooting took a sensational twist
today with the flight of the
killer's only known friend...

Vernon's jaw drops as a cute, smiling pre-teen photo of
himself fills the screen, followed by others.

LALLY (ON TV)

To his neighbors, Vernon Gregory
Little seemed like a normal, if
somewhat shy and awkward boy who
wouldn't attract attention walking
any small-town street. But as he
grew older, the cracks began to
show...

Vernon JUMPS as a hand lands on his shoulder.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

Follow me!

The officer ushers Vernon to a desk behind a partition, where
another OFFICER is sitting like he's the president of Mexico.
He's glancing through some documents, with half an eye on the
TV on the wall as Lally now turns to the TV CAMERA --

LALLY (ON TV)
 Vernon Little was described to me
 as something of a loner, a boy with
 few close friends, given more to
 playing on his computer - and
 reading...

The TV camera pans onto the bed, and Lally's hand fishes out
 the *Victoria's Secret* lingerie catalog -

LALLY (ON TV)
 ... but we find no Steinbeck, no
 Hemingway in Vernon Gregory Little's
 private library - in fact his
 literary tastes run only to this -

Lingerie pages from *Victoria's Secret* catalog flap across the
 TV screen. They stop where several are stuck together.

LALLY (ON TV)
 An innocent prop? Or a chilling
 link to the confused sexuality
 behind Tuesday's bloodbath in
 Martirio's bloodbath?

The Immigration Officer looks up at the TV, then at Vernon.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
 You have identification? Driver
 license?

VERNON
 Uh -- not really.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
 You don't enter Mexico without
 identification.

VERNON
 I have to meet my parents, see? They
 came down earlier, but I had to stay
 back and come down later, and now
 they're over there waiting, like
 they're probably worried and all.

While Vernon talks, the TV shows his worried mother. Lally
 sits on the bed beside her, mike in hand, while the
 Immigration Officer nods.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
 Your parents on vacation?

VERNON
 Uh -- yeah, we're going on vacation
 you know.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
 Where?

VERNON

Uh -- Tijuana.

The Officer narrows his eyes at Vernon --

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

This wrong way -- Tijuana is the other side of Mexico.

VERNON

No, well that's right, but they came the other way, see, and I was over here, so I have to go across and meet them, you know?

The Officer sits with his face pointing down, but his eyes pointing up. On TV, Georgette, Leona and Betty are being interviewed by Lally.

GEORGETTE (ON TV)

Oh sure, I definitely saw changes in the boy...

LEONA (ON TV)

One time he had himself a skinhead hair cut and then he let it grow long like a girl...

BETTY (ON TV)

But, wow, he always seemed like such a regular kid, you know?

The Officer's eyes switch from the TV to Vernon.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

You don't enter Mexico today. Tonight you stay in United Estate, tomorrow your parents come for you.

A police car pulls up, blue lights flashing. Vernon's getting desperate.

VERNON

Listen Sir -- Signor -- I really need to cross the border and get some sleep. I'm just a regular American guy -- here, you can check my Walmart loyalty card...

Vernon pulls out his wallet and hands it to the officer, who flicks through it. Meanwhile, on the TV --

LALLY (ON TV)

As Vernon's mother, would it now be fair to number you among the victims of the tragedy?

MOM (ON TV)
Well I guess I am a victim.

The officer pulls out Vernon's remaining \$20 bill.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
This all the money you travel with?

VERNON
Uh - my parents have more.

LALLY (ON TV)
Yet you still maintain Vernon's
innocence - even though he's broken
his bail and absconded?

MOM (ON TV)
Oh yes! For sure!
(turns to TV camera)
Vernie, come on home to your Momma!

The officer folds the \$20 with two fingers and slips it
inside his jacket, then hands back Vernon's wallet.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER
Welcome to Mexico.

59 EXT. MEXICAN HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Bible black, with just the faint hum of crickets chirping.
Then another SOUND: MUSIC, getting louder by the moment.
Suddenly a floating cathedral hoves over the brow in a blaze
of light -- a huge articulated TRUCK. It grows larger and
larger, blasting the night with light.

A silhouette spills into the light -- Vernon, trying to thumb
a lift. The truck looms ever closer, blaring its horn as
Vernon jumps back into the shadows.

The truck swerves across the road and coasts downhill toward
some shambly buildings and a gas station. Vernon tears down
the hill after it...

60 EXT. GAS STATION - MEXICO - NIGHT

Music twangs from a bar next to the gas station. The truck
parks by the bar, and a DRIVER with a bunch of growth on his
face and a hefty moustache climbs down from the cab.

Vernon runs up breathless to see him take off his hat and
slide inside the road house, cool and straight, like he's
wearing guns. A little BOY jumps down from the truck and runs
after him.

Vernon is about to follow when something catches his eye:
four words, painted between the mudflaps: ME VES Y SUFRES.

61 INT. BAR - MEXICO - NIGHT

Vernon enters the bar behind the boy, who heads for a table near a wall-mounted TV. Everybody else checks out Vernon as he moves to the bar. The Bartender - PEDRO - serves the Driver - PELAYO - with a beer.

Vernon pulls a CD from his backpack, points to it -- then to a beer.

VERNON

I no money. No dollars. Only these.

Pedro frowns, looks the CD over, hands it to Pelayo, who nods. Pedro thumps a cold bottle down in front of Vernon.

Pelayo beckons Vernon's backpack. Vernon hauls it onto the bar, and Pelayo and Pedro rummage through the CDs. Their eyes also check out the Nikes on Vernon's feet. When Pelayo orders another beer, Pedro looks at Vernon - does he want one too? Vernon shows the empty insides of his pockets.

Pedro chuckles in Spanish to Pelayo, who agrees, whereupon Pedro points to Vernon's shoes. Vernon glances down - shrugs what the fuck and takes them off.

The beers become tequilas, and Vernon is soon loaded. Others crowd around in a blur of Zapata-style mustaches and howling mouths crammed with gold and tonsils.

Pelayo points to Vernon's trousers.

VERNON

Uh - I don't fucken think so...

Pedro throws a handful of Mexican bills down on the counter, the small crowd laughing and cheering Vernon on as he is fed another tequila. Pelayo starts to unzip Vernon's trousers while Pedro takes off his own --

VERNON

No, please -- NO!

But he's too drunk to put up much resistance. Pelayo skins his trousers from him -- and Pedro puts them on, handing Vernon his own. Vernon relaxes, allowing Pelayo to dress him in Pedro's old trousers.

Now it's the shirt -- but Vernon feels the waves washing over him. He struggles through the door --

-- and throws up in a urinal floating with limes.

62 INT. BAR - MEXICO - DAY

Vernon lies curled up on the floor behind a table. He responds slowly to Pelayo's boy - LUCAS - prodding him.

Vernon looks up to find Pelayo standing above him, offering him another drink - "Bueno!" Vernon knocks it back - a sunbeam bursts into the room, a blinding shaft that frames the crucifix on the wall.

LUCAS
You come with us?

As Pelayo heads for the door, Vernon notices that Pedro the Barman is wearing his shirt - his jeans - his Nikes. Glancing down, Vernon is now wearing a red T-shirt, orange pants dangling loose above sandals with old tires for soles. In his pant pockets: 200 pesos. Pedro gives him a breezy wave.

PEDRO
Bye gringo!

63 INT. PELAYO'S TRUCK - TRAVELING - MEXICO - DAY

Vernon rides up front, Lucas in the middle, Pelayo driving, Mexican MUSIC belting out from the stereo.

Vernon catches Lucas's eye - he bashfully hides his face, sneaking a peek at Vernon, who pretends to stare out at the road ahead -- then suddenly swings round and catches Lucas on the hop. The boy giggles - Vernon pulls a scary face - Pelayo sings along to the "ay ay ay" chorus --

Again Lucas hides his face - again Vernon peers out at the road ahead through a frieze of baby soccer balls and neon Virgin Marys.

When he looks back, his friend Jesus is staring at him.

JESUS
Me ves y sufres.

Vernon looks at him quizzically.

JESUS
See me and suffer.

Vernon turns back to Lucas, who sings along with Pelayo. When he looks back, Jesus is gone.

64 EXT. ROAD ABOVE ACAPULCO - DAY

The truck thunders past a road sign - "ACAPULCO, 3 KM" - and rolls on down towards the distant blue ocean - and the sprawl of hideous hotels fringing the huge bay.

65 EXT. PHONE BOOTH & STREET - ACAPULCO - DAY

While Pelayo and Lucas remain in the parked truck, Vernon huddles inside a booth, impatiently drumming his fingers.

TAYLOR (ON PHONE)
Tayla.

VERNON
Hey - Tay - it's Vern...

TAYLOR (ON PHONE)
Oh my God!

VERNON
You okay?

TAYLOR (ON PHONE)
I'm just like, what the fuck, you know? This damn guy I was dating... I just want to run away, *God*. Anyway, where are you, killer?

VERNON
Acapulco.

TAYLOR
Acapulco??! How d'you get *there*?

VERNON
This guy gave me a ride in his truck - says I can stay at his place a few miles north from here.

TAYLOR (ON PHONE)
But you need cash, right?

VERNON
It'd save my fucken life, Tay.

TAYLOR (ON PHONE)
Okay listen up -- there must be a Western Union agent in town. But today's Sunday - go in around five tomorrow and it'll be there.

The last of Vernon's credits are dripping off the screen.

VERNON
I'll make this up to you, Tay.

TAYLOR (ON PHONE)
And babe?
(a whispered purr)
Take care of.....

Beep. The line goes dead. Vernon kisses the phone.

66 EXT. ROAD & TRACK - MEXICO - DUSK

The truck pulls off the road and heads down a dirt track through a jungle of palm trees, kicking up dust in its wake.

67 EXT. VILLAGE & BEACH - MEXICO - DUSK

The track ends with a collection of wooden shacks held together with Fanta signs, with the ocean beyond. Pelayo pulls up beside a porch of dry palm leaves where two men lie in a hammock, sucking beer. A gaggle of excited kids gather round Pelayo as he piles out. Vernon follows, lifting down Lucas who runs to the arms of his beaming Mama.

Pigs, chickens and grizzly-looking dogs root about - until dispelled by Pelayo, who introduces Vernon to his wife and others, calling up beers from the makeshift bar where a couple of old men sit at a tin table. He opens the beers with his teeth, handing one to Vernon and raising the other.

PELAYO

Bienvenido a tu casa!

Vernon takes a slug, soaking in the life around him.

VERNON

Fucken paradise.

68 EXT. BEACH - MEXICO - NIGHT

A moonlit paradise of a home-coming night, with a swordfish on the fire, kids tumbling, guitar twanging, tequilas flowing. Pelayo says something and they all laugh. One of them - PERO - guesses that Vernon can't understand.

PERO

He says if all gringos were as easy
as you, he move to America.

Vernon downs another tequila.

VERNON

My friend Jesus always told me
things work different in Mexico. He
wanted to bring me down here. Make a
new start, he said. We were gonna be
here in time for my birthday, he was
definite about that. "Destiny works
in strange ways," he told me. "You
and me gotta get out of this shit-
hole before something snaps - let's
end our days in Mexico, smiling."

Pedro quietly and briefly translates, causing a nod and a pause for the moment's feeling to take hold.

VERNON

Only he's dead now, see. I guess he
was what snapped. I loved him, you
know - I really loved him. Hey, I'm
sorry, I'm a little loaded. Fucken
loaded actually.

(MORE)

VERNON (CONT'D)

But do you know what? Tomorrow's my birthday... and Jesus ain't here. Or maybe he *is* here. Maybe this is his spirit I feel, all big, and easy, and free.

Pedro has evidently translated the birthday news, as more tequila is passed around and glasses raised to Vernon -

ALL

Felicitades Gringo!

Getting tearfully emotional, Vernon raises his own glass --

VERNON

To you, Jesus - the best friend I ever had!

(downs his tequila)

I'm just so sorry I couldn't... didn't know how to--

-- and passes out flat on the sand.

69 EXT. HOTEL MEXICANA - ACAPULCO - DAY

Pelayo drops Vernon off outside a Western-style hotel.

70 INT. HOTEL - WESTERN UNION OFFICE - DAY

Now wearing a pony-tail, Vernon looks furtively around as he approaches a Western Union counter.

VERNON

I'm expecting a wire from the USA.

CLARK

Name?

VERNON

I'm not sure who she sent it to.

CLARK

You have the password?

VERNON

Uh - not with me.

CLARK

What's your name?

VERNON

Vernon Gregory Little.

CLARK

(checking monitor)

How much are you expecting?

VERNON

Uh - I'm not too sure.

CLARK

Sorry, nothing here.

The agent looks up -- then his eyes swivel to focus on something over Vernon's shoulder.

VOICE (O.S.)

Freeze, motherfucker!

Someone grabs him around the waist -- Vernon swings round to find Taylor, wearing tank top, white shorts, and a big grin.

VERNON

Shit - what are you doing here?

TAYLOR

How else was I meant to get you the money? You didn't wait for the wire details, like the password, *dummy*.

VERNON

So you just - uh - hopped on a fucken plane, just like that?

TAYLOR

Well I couldn't leave you stranded. Anyway, I'm bummed back home, and this is my vacation money -- I hope you don't mind sharing. Here's 300 - we can work the math out later...

Taylor hands him a wad of 20s.

VERNON

Geez Tay - I dunno what to say.

She takes him by the arm and escorts him to the door, whispering --

TAYLOR

Wait'll you see where we're holed up - that is, if they even *let* you up - ya look like a fucken *beaner*.

VERNON

I found somewhere to stay you won't believe, Tay - on a beach - with a jungle out back.

TAYLOR

With, like, spiders and bugs? *Ew!* Listen up, I already paid for our room -- like, *God*.

71 INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR/BEDROOM - DAY

Taylor leads him by the hand along a plush corridor, unlocks a door and enters a deluxe twin room with views over the bay. Vernon gazes around him while Taylor heads for the mini-bar.

VERNON

I love this damn country, you know?
It ain't even like a country, more
like a state of mind. I could stay
here forever.

TAYLOR

You ain't *quitting*, are ya, killer?

She takes out a couple of tequila miniatures, tosses him one, then curls up on the bed by the window, patting the blankets.

TAYLOR

Come to Tay-Tay, bad boy.

Vernon joins her, a little awkwardly, swigging back his tequila miniature in one go.

Taylor kicks off her sandals, then runs a finger around the lip of her bottle, studying Vernon through vixen eyes.

TAYLOR

Vernon, tell me about all those
things you did...

She cups his face in her hands, then leans forward, kissing him on the mouth while undoing his jeans --

TAYLOR

Violent, nasty boy -- tell me you
thought of me. Tell me you killed
for Tayla.

She squirms out of her shorts, lowers his hand to her panties -

TAYLOR

Mmmm - tell me you loved it! Tell
me it made you hard, hard for me!

She pulls up her top and buries his face between her breasts -

TAYLOR

Tell me, tell me you killed them
for me!

Her knees bend up and she takes him in with one thrust --

TAYLOR

Uhh -- *fuck!* Did you, Vernon, did
you do all that killing for me?

VERNON

Uh - mmm! - sure -- whatever!

TAYLOR

Say it, Vern...

VERNON

I - ungh - mmmm - I did it, Tay --
I killed em all for you!

TAYLOR

Okay, got it!

Taylor tugs free, pulling her panties back up as the door flies open and FOUR MEN burst in. Vernon shields his eyes from the glare of camera lights.

MARSHAL

Vernon Gregory Little?

A US MARSHAL flanked by MEXICAN COPS steps forward with a pair of handcuffs. Behind him, filming it all, is Lally and his camera team.

72 EXT. FLASHGUN MONTAGE - DAY/NIGHT

The FLASH GUNS increase with the rapidity of a firing squad as Vernon is escorted onto a plane -- into a white truck -- into the precinct, press swarming -- mug shots taken -- a crescendo of NOISE and LIGHT: FLASH! FLASH! FLASH! --

-- then a sudden CUT to stillness and silence.

73 INT. VERNON'S CELL - DAY

Vernon sits alone in a white-washed cell, head shaved clean, wearing pale blue prison dress. Presently the door opens and a warden - JONES - pokes his head in.

JONES

People here to see you, Little.

74 INT. PRISON - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Vernon's Mom is weeping on the far side of the grill. The impotent Abdini sits beside her.

VERNON

I'm not going to die, Ma -- I'm innocent!

MOM

(between sobs)

Well -- but you gave that nice girl
Taylor LSD and....

VERNON

She gave those tabs to *me* for
Chrissakes -- begged me to hide
them somewhere safe - I stuffed
them in that ginseng Lally gave me
if you must know....

MOM

... whatever - but what about that
awful catalog, Vern --

VERNON

-- that was *your* catalog, not mine!

MOM

Well I know it was mine -- but what
was it doing under *your* bed?

VERNON

Hell, Ma.... what's that got to do
with *murder*?

Abdini interjects --

ABDINI

Very impotent evidence for the
persecution, Bernom... they try to
convict jury you a psychopat. Now
Bernom, where you go bathroom?

VERNON

What?

ABDINI

You said you take sheet... where
you do it?

VERNON

(flushing)

Please, Mr Abdini... I *dunno*.

ABDINI

No sheet, no hope.

LALLY (O.S.)

Nonsense, Abdini...

Lally moves in, accompanied by a smooth, burly man in a
dapper suit.

LALLY

Hi little big man - how's it going?
(before Vernon can answer)
I'd like you all to meet Mr Brian
Shapiro.

Burly BRIAN steps forward --

BRIAN
Pleasure to meet you, Vernon - Mrs
Little - Mr Abdini.

LALLY
Brian heads the defence dream team
of the south - if anyone can get
you out of here a free man, it's
Brian Shapiro.

BRIAN
We believe you have an excellent
chance, Vernon - the prosecution's
case is flawed from head to toe.

VERNON
But... what about Mr Abdini?

LALLY
With all due respect, Mr Abdini's no
match for the state's star
prosecutor -- they don't call Ray
Cooley the widow-maker for nothing.
And hey, get this - CMN is happy to
take care of all your legal fees...
all you gotta do is sign this.

Lally extracts a contract from his jacket and slips it under
the grill to Vernon.

VERNON
What is it?

LALLY
The rights to your trial. Sign it,
and your memoirs will be top of the
New York Times bestseller list,
even if you lose - so your dear
mother will be well provided for...

Lally gives Mom a reassuring smile.

BRIAN
But we won't lose, believe me - this
case is as important to me as it is
to you -- capital trials are the
cutting edge of our justice system.

Vernon stares at the contract.

VERNON
Mr Abdini?

But Abdini's gone.

LALLY
All pressure will be off your
shoulders.
(MORE)

LALLY (CONT'D)

There will be a buzzer in your, um - security enclosure. A camera will be trained on it all the time, to guard against accidents.

BRIAN

But if at any moment during the proceedings you should feel inclined to change your plea, or to in any way revoke the information given so far...

LALLY

Both the button and the lights it activates are green, thereby avoiding the more stressful implications of the color red...

BRIAN

Also, although we jokingly still call it a buzzer, the sound it makes is more of a chime.

VERNON

Is there a buzzer for being innocent?

75 INT. COURT - MAKE UP ROOM - DAY

A MAKE UP ARTISTE works on Vernon's face, taking great pride in the ashen grey effect. Brian is sitting in the make-up chair next to him, having blush applied to his cheeks. He smiles reassuringly at Vernon -

BRIAN (V.O.)

Members of the jury, you see before you a shy young man, with no previous criminal record, who had the misfortune of being a living victim of the Martirio tragedy...

The Make Up Artiste turns Vernon's head so that he is now looking at a gaunt guy in the make-up chair on the other side -- the State PROSECUTOR, being eyelined and powdered.

PROSECUTOR (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, today we open one of the most cut-and-dried legal cases this state has ever seen. The person who stands before you openly admits attending the scene of the massacre and his perverse sexual leanings link him inextricably to the deceased gunman, Jesus Navarro..

The Prosecutor gives Vernon a thin smile.

76 EXT. KEETERS - WASTELAND - FLASHBACK - DAY

Vernon lies on his back, staring up at a hawk making lazy circles in a clear blue sky.

Jesus lies beside him, idly playing with his ponytail.

JESUS

Remember that philosopher guy Mr Nuckles was telling us about in class last week?

VERNON

The one who sounded like a manual cunt?

JESUS

Immanuel *Kant*... who said that nothing really happens unless you see it happen.

VERNON

All I remember is asking Naylor if he'd ever heard of a manual cunt and he says "I only drive automatics."

Vernon laughs, but Jesus merely stares at him.

VERNON

So what about him?

JESUS

If things don't happen unless you see them happening, do they still happen if you know they're gonna -- but don't tell nobody?

VERNON

(going cross-eyed)

Jeez, what are you talking about?

Jesus looks at him a moment -- then turns away -- then slowly turns back, leans in -- and seems about to kiss him when Vernon pulls back --

VERNON

Wooah -- hey, I ain't no fudge-packer...

Jesus backs off -- then gets to his feet, grabs his bike --

VERNON

Hey Jeez, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that - I mean it's just I'm not into.... Hey Jeez, come back!

-- but Jesus is already riding away toward the road.

77 INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

From the dock, Vernon watches the Prosecutor approaching Dr Goosens in the witness box. His performance seems as much for the benefit of the TV cameras as the jury.

PROSECUTOR

Dr Goosens, in your professional opinion, do these crimes suggest a pattern to you?

GOOSENS

Most certainly. Traits associated with antisocial personality disorder.

PROSECUTOR

Is there a more common term for sufferers of that disorder?

GOOSENS

Antisocial personalities are, well -
- your classic psychopaths.

Vernon lowers his head. In the public gallery, Mom looks shocked, Pam shakes her head, but Betty, Georgette and Leona give knowing nods.

PROSECUTOR

And tell us, doctor, does sexuality play a part in their behavior?

GOOSENS

Psychopaths have a much higher threshold of arousal than you or I - and in the anti-social mind, death and sex are common bed-fellows.

PROSECUTOR

So a sociopath might fixate on a woman and kill her for thrills?

GOOSENS

Yes... or he might kill *for* her.

PROSECUTOR

For her? No further questions.

Vernon tries to catch Taylor's eye, but she evades contact. Brian steps up to the witness box.

BRIAN

Oliver Goosens, how are you today?

GOOSENS

Fine, thank you.

BRIAN
Tell me, doctor, would it be
equally possible for a psychopath
to fixate on a boy?

GOOSENS
Well of course.

Brian nods, then fixes Goosens with a steely eye.

BRIAN
Oliver Goosens, have you ever heard
the name Harlan Perieux?

GOOSENS
Excuse me?

BRIAN
If not, then perhaps you've heard
of an internet site called *Bambi-
Boy Butt Bazaar*?

GOOSENS
(to the Judge)
What is this, your Honor?

BRIAN
A man named Harlan Perieux was
indicted in Oklahoma for procuring
and corrupting underage boys for
that website. Tell us, please --
under oath -- is there something
you know about that?

GOOSENS
I don't have to answer that.

BRIAN
I have exhibits here showing that
you, Oliver Goosens, previously
went by the name of Harlan Perieux,
and I put it to you, doctor, that
five years ago you were indicted
under that name, on four charges
relating to the corruption of boys
for your pornographic website.

A sharp murmur wafts through the court.

GOOSENS
The charges were never proven...

BRIAN
And I further suggest that you own
and operate that site to this day,
under the name *Serenade of Sodom*.
Am I right, Doctor? Yes - or - no?

Somebody stifles a snort of laughter. Goosens' eyes jackrabbit to the Judge, who nods for him to answer.

GOOSENS

No... not entirely -- no.

BRIAN

Is it true that you were treating Jesus Navarro at the time of the Martirio school tragedy?

Vernon looks astonished as Goosens nods. Brian holds up a pair of frilly pink panties.

BRIAN

And that you presented him with these ladies' undergarments - purchased on your credit card?

(Goosens is thrown)

No further questions.

Brian slips Vernon an encouraging smile as he passes him. Vernon looks up -- at the sunbeams invading the court --

KIDS (V.O.)

Bambi boy! Bambi boy!

78 INT. SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

Vernon turns on a pack of kids taunting Jesus.

VERNON

Shut the fuck up, you pack of losers!

A stocky kid - TEDDY LECHUGA - leers at Jesus.

TEDDY

Yo Jaysus, your ass is drippin!

(to the others)

Stand clear of Jaysus's ass -- the fire department lost another four men up there last night.

VERNON

Hey, go suck a fart, Teddy...

TEDDY

Make me, ya beaner-loving fag-hag!

Jaysus give you a little anal action this morning, Vernie?

LORNA

(finally getting joke)

Maybe a whole fire-engine is up there too, tee-hee.

Marion Nuckles arrives in a puff of chalk-dust, all gingery and erectile, and unloads paperwork on his desk.

NUCKLES
Find focus, science lovers. Who remembered to bring a candle for today's experiment?

TEDDY
I think Jesus already used his candle, sir.

Titters from the class.

NUCKLES
Care to elaborate, Teddy?

TEDDY
You mightn't want to touch Jesus's candle, that's all.

NUCKLES
And where do you think it's been, Teddy?

Teddy weighs up his audience's potential.

TEDDY
Up his anus, sir?

The class detonates through its nose. Nuckles shrugs off the remark, turns to Vernon with several small sheets of paper.

NUCKLES
Take these orders down to the lab, Vernon - and see if you can locate a candle.

TEDDY
I guess you don't surf the net much, huh, sir?
(casts a sly eye about)
I guess you ain't seen the boy site starring Jesus Navarro?

Teddy goes to a bank of computer terminals by the window. One by one, he activates the screen-savers: photos of Jesus, naked but for frilly girl's panties.

Jesus stares at Nuckles with a look of utter betrayal as Teddy starts chanting "Jesus Christ Super Ass!". When the others join in, Jesus suddenly abandons his desk with a crash and runs from the room.

NUCKLES
Jesus!!

Nuckles heads after him, leaving the class primed.

79 INT. VERNON'S CELL - NIGHT

Vernon sits on his cot, abstractedly clacking a Newton's metal ball cradle while watching Taylor on TV.

TAYLOR (ON TV)
... but it's not all over for
Vernon Little yet, is it Eulalio?

CON (O.S.)
Give them balls a fuckin break or
I'll come in there and bust yours!

The TV CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal Lally standing beside Taylor with a fake frown of deep concern.

LALLY (ON TV)
That's right, Tay, but I have to
say the evidence looks pretty
stacked against him right now...

TAYLOR (ON TV)
(turns to camera)
But even if the whole world knows
he's guilty, there's still one who
protests Vernon's innocence - and
I'm not talking about his mom.

The TV picture cuts to Silvio Abdini being interviewed -

ABDINI (ON TV)
Police neber look for impoten
eviden collaborating Bernom's
alibi...

REPORTER (ON TV)
And where is this evidence, Mr
Abdini?

ABDINI (ON TV)
Only Bernom know that.

Vernon CLACKS the balls harder. Close by him on a side table is a Valentine card of a gaudy ocean sunset. "For my Bernie".

CON (O.S.)
If you don't quit playing with them
balls, I'll ream your Little white
ass with a fuckin Roto-Rooter!

80 INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

Vernon watches Taylor step up to the witness box, wearing a gray business suit. She tosses back her hair and fixes the prosecutor with a big clean smile.

Vernon gazes at her with a love-lorn look.

PROSECUTOR

Ms Figueroa, please state your age and occupation.

TAYLOR

I just turned 19 and, like, I was a model but now I'm kinda, like, trying out for a career in media.

PROSECUTOR

Ms Figueroa, have you ever been stalked by a stranger, or a casual acquaintance?

TAYLOR

Well, I - uh - I guess kinda. This one guy who, like, turned up out of the blue and started confessing to all these crimes and whatever.

PROSECUTOR

Had you known him previously?

TAYLOR

Uh-huh, kind of, I mean -- I think I saw him outside a party once.

PROSECUTOR

So where did you next see him?

TAYLOR

He was on his way to Mexico. He just came to see me and the next minute he was confessing to all this stuff and whatever.

PROSECUTOR

Do you see that person in this courtroom?

Without looking up, Taylor points to Vernon.

PROSECUTOR

Let the record show the witness has identified the defendant, Vernon Gregory Little. Ms Figueroa, the defendant visited you in Mexico?

TAYLOR

Yeah, like -- yeah.

PROSECUTOR

And what transpired there?

TAYLOR

He tried to, like - make love to me.

PROSECUTOR

Was this when he confessed to the murders?

TAYLOR

Uh-huh.

The Prosecutor has moved to his table and now presses a button on a recorder.

VERNON (ON PLAYBACK)

"I killed em all for you, Tay --
ungh -- I killed em all for you -
ungh -- I killed em all for you!"

PROSECUTOR

No further questions.

As the Prosecutor retires, Brian approaches Taylor.

BRIAN

Ms Figueroa, why exactly did Vernon meet you in Mexico?

TAYLOR

(rolls her eyes)
Well, to have sex I guess, or confess, or whatever.

BRIAN

You paid him to have sex with you?

TAYLOR

No way!

BRIAN

So no money changed hands between you that day?

TAYLOR

No, well - like --

BRIAN

Yes or no answer, please.

TAYLOR

See, but he wanted...

BRIAN

Yes or no?

TAYLOR

Yes.

BRIAN

How much?

TAYLOR
Three hundred dollars.

BRIAN
(cocks an eyebrow)
\$300?! Darned boy must be good.

PROSECUTOR
Objection!

JUDGE
Sustained.

BRIAN
Is it not the case that you used
the cash to entice a confused,
innocent, desperate teenager to a
place where you appeared, out of
the blue, to entrap him?

TAYLOR
Well, like -- no -- I mean...

BRIAN
Taylor Figueroa, please tell this
court the name of the man who took
you to Mexico.

Taylor hesitates a moment.

TAYLOR
Eulalio Ledesma.

BRIAN
No further questions.

81 INT. SCHOOL - HALL - FLASHBACK - DAY

Vernon runs into the hall, pelts through the swing doors --

82 EXT. SCHOOL YARD - FLASHBACK - DAY

-- and out into the school yard, just in time to see Jesus on
his bike, pedalling off down the road.

Vernon tears round to the bike rack, pulls his free --

83 EXT. KEETERS ROAD - FLASHBACK - DAY

-- and heads off in pursuit, pedalling furiously.

84 EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

In a corner of the prison yard a few muscular inmates pump iron while in the background a seriously contested basketball game is under way.

Vernon sits on a bench and watches the men pumping iron, but is soon distracted by a black, grey haired inmate, LASALLE, who speaks to another prisoner in the voice of a Baptist preacher.

LASALLE

Repent. You have sinned.

PRISONER

No. No way. I have sinned, but...

LASALLE

Repent!

PRISONER

..but I won't repent.

LASALLE

Kneel down my son.

PRISONER

No.

LASALLE

Kneel down, I say!

Reluctantly, the prisoner kneels.

PRISONER

There is such a thing as the bliss of evil you know...

LASALLE

Repent, and I shall absolve you of your sins.

The camera whip pans away from the yard.

85 INT. PRISON - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Vernon sits opposite his Mom on the far side of the glass.

MOM

We saw you on TV, but you looked so *impassive*, Vern - not like that sweet crippled boy who was on last week who butchered his parents. He looked so *remorseful* and *cried* all the time... Pam says to put some toothpaste under your eyes, that'll make you cry...

(MORE)

MOM (CONT'D)
 oh, and she also says to ask if
 you're eating good and.... oh
 Vernon - I love you, Vern, you're
 all I got!

Mom pulls out a string of Kleenex from her purse.

86 INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

The Prosecutor steps up to Lally in the witness box.

PROSECUTOR
 Eulalio Ledesma, you've been in a
 unique position to observe the
 defendant, first as a close family
 friend, and later as a concerned
 citizen. If you could characterize
 the defendant in a word, what would
 that word be?

LALLY
 Psychopath.

BRIAN
 Objection!

JUDGE
 Sustained - the jury will ignore
 both question and answer. Counsel
 will remember that a young man
 could well be executed as a result
 of these proceedings.

PROSECUTOR
 Then perhaps you'll tell the court,
 Mr Ledesma -- did the defendant say
 anything to you, privately, about
 the school tragedy?

LALLY
 Not as such... but he talked in his
 sleep some nights -- growled in his
 sleep more like. "Boom!" he would
 say. "Take that -- boom!"

Vernon can endure no more -

VERNON
 That's a fucken lie!

His hand hits the green buzzer, which makes a sound like a
 xylophone. He is blinded by a firestorm of camera flashes.
 Brian's mouth drops open.

VERNON
 Judge?

BRIAN

Shhh!

JUDGE

Go ahead, son. Shall we activate the recant procedure?

VERNON

No sir, it's just that - I thought I'd get a chance to say how things really happened.

BRIAN

Your Honor, the State would hope to preserve the structure of this case, after all the effort that's gone into it.

The judge stares blankly at him.

JUDGE

And I would hope, Counsel, that the State, like this court, would seek to preserve the truth.

He smiles warmly for the camera.

JUDGE

Swear the boy in.

Brian tries to interfere.

BRIAN

Your honor...

JUDGE

Silence.

He nods to Vernon.

JUDGE

Say your piece, Mr Little.

Vernon enters the witness stand, and goes through the routine with the Bible.

VERNON

I never was in trouble. My teacher, Mr Nuckles, he knows it, he knows where I was. The reason I wasn't in class is because he sent me to get a candle for some teeter-totter experiment. If he had talked earlier, none of this suspicion would've happened.

JUDGE

Why has that witness not appeared?

BRIAN
He was judged unfit by his doctors,
your honor.

JUDGE
Well I think we need to hear from
this Mr Nuckles.

87 EXT. KEETERS - WASTELAND - FLASHBACK - DAY

Vernon heads out across the Keeter's wasteland, swerving round scrub bushes and dodging sheets of rusted iron.

He pulls up in a swirl of dust near the old mine entrance, noticing fresh tire tracks in the dirt. The den door is open, lazily swinging to and fro.

Vernon starts back along the track, then wobbles to a halt by the stack of old toilet bowls, clutching his stomach.

Glancing round, Vernon stoops low in among the bushes, pulls down his pants and takes a dump.

Covertly watching him from a distance is Ella.

ELLA
Hey Bernie, how's it goin'?

VERNON
How's it fucken look like?!

88 INT. CORRIDOR COURT - DAY

A wheelchair, accompanied by a nurse and two marshals, is pushed along the corridor. Approaching the door of the court room, we recognise Nuckles.

89 INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

Nuckles is assisted by the marshals to take the witness stand. He is looking pasty white, his hair reduced to clumps, bony and frail.

PROSECUTOR
Marion Nuckles, can you identify
Vernon Gregory Little in this
courtroom?

Nuckles sunken eyes scan the room, stopping at Vernon in his cage. He raises a finger at him.

PROSECUTOR
Let the record show the witness
identified the defendant.
(MORE)

PROSECUTOR (CONT'D)

Mr Nuckles, can you confirm that you were the defendant's teacher between 10 and 11 o'clock on the morning of Tuesday May 20th this year?

Nuckles breaks into a sweat and crumples over the railing of the witness box, sobbing -

NUCKLES

I was there.

PROSECUTOR

Marion Nuckles, can you confirm that at some point during that hour you gave some notes to the defendant, written in your own hand, and sent him with them on an errand outside the classroom?

NUCKLES

(shaking violently)

Yes yes!

PROSECUTOR

And what happened then?

Nuckles starts to dry retch over the railing.

NUCKLES

Scorned the love of Jesus -- erased his perfume from across the land... doused it in the blood of babes!

PROSECUTOR

What exactly did Vernon Little do?

NUCKLES

He had a gun too -- I saw him! I saw those children die!

Both TV audience and jury are open-mouthed. Nuckles breaks into sobs -- as does Vernon's Mom and Pam, gazing down from the gallery. Vernon apathetically shakes his head.

In a SERIES OF SHOTS: Vernon sits dazed, like a zombie - Maps, diagrams, footprints, fibers are presented to the court - Jesus' sports bag is held high, fingerprints projected onto a screen. The voice of the prosecutor wafts by in a surreal distortion.

PROSECUTOR

Can you identify the person you saw around the scene of the crime?

One by one, witnesses point accusingly at Vernon - white, black, Hispanic - fading into a flicker of light.

Finally Brian saunters over to the jury, pulls his sleeve cuffs up a little and leans intimately over the railing. His voice drops.

BRIAN

So how did this happen? Simple. Under the glare of camera lights, a confused and grieving public was offered the chance to be part of the biggest prime-time bandwagon since O.J. Simpson. "Is this the suspect?" they're asked. The face rings a bell. They've certainly seen him somewhere, recently even. Result? Even black witnesses to black murders in black neighborhoods recognize this white school-boy as the suspect.

90 EXT. SCHOOL YARD - FLASHBACK - DAY

Vernon rides along the road and through the back gates. As he hops off, he hears a succession of GUNSHOTS - BAM! BAM! BAM!

He drops to the ground and crawls forward toward the corner of a building. Rounding the corner, he is confronted by the horror of TEN DEAD and DYING CLASSMATES, sprawled across the grass. Jesus has two guns - one is out of ammo - he slings it aside, along with the sports bag, which lands within a few feet of Vernon.

Jesus reloads the other gun and starts firing again -- FOUR more CLASSMATES go down. Vernon crawls forward, fingers inch toward the sports bag, grope inside and find an ammo clip. Now he moves towards the gun just as Teddy comes into view --

JESUS

Hey, Teddy...!

TEDDY swings round -

TEDDY

Hiya fag-hag, how's yer anus.....

-- and Jesus SHOOTS, hurling him backwards.

VERNON

Jesus!

-- Jesus turns to him - Vernon freezes - their EYES meet --

Jesus gazes at Vernon, tears streaming. He shakily points the gun at Vernon, who edges towards him... then Jesus suddenly turns the gun on himself --

VERNON

No!!

-- and FIRES!

Vernon recoils in horror. He drops the ammo -- looks at the gun in his hand -- "VAL" -- his.

Unseen by Vernon, Nuckles crawls from behind the bush and stares at him, hanging limp a few feet away, holding the gun.

The brief, chilling silence is cut by sudden SCREAMS. Vernon hurriedly stuffs the gun in his pocket, turns and bolts from the yard as fast as he can -

91 EXT. KEETERS WASTELAND - FLASHBACK - DAY

-- pedals across the wasteland, flings open the door to the den, throws the gun inside, padlocks the door and rides away.

92 EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

A double fence of razor wire. In the corner of the yard where the prisoners are pumping iron, Vernon lies on one of the benches, face up, his torso naked.

Lasalle the preacher is working on a tattoo across Vernon's chest: ME VES Y SUFRES.

LASALLE

See me and suffer.

VERNON

Why would God let me die if I'm innocent?

Lasalle slips slightly with his needle.

LASALLE

Shut up and don't breathe.

Vernon holds his breath.

LASALLE

Where's this God you talk about?
You think a caring intelligence
would wipe out babies from hunger,
watch decent folk scream and burn
and bleed every second of the day?
That ain't no God. Just fucking
people.

VERNON

I thought you were a preacher?

LASALLE

Sure I am, so listen good. Papa God
grewed us up till we could wear
long pants, then he licensed his
name to dollar bills, left some car-
keys on the table and got the fuck
outta town.

Lasalle puts down the needle and holds up a mirror so Vernon
can see the tattoo across his chest.

VERNON

How can you be a preacher if you
don't believe in God?

LASALLE

It's all in the good book. Genesis
one, twenty-seven: "And God created
man *in his own image and likeness!*"
So get a grip and say a big howdy
to Vernon God Little.

Their eyes meet in the mirror, and sparkle.

LASALLE

You are God, son. You're it.

GUARD (O.S.)

Hey, Lasalle - quit corrupting
minors!

A couple of Guards advance on him, and one leads him off. The
other looks at Vernon, who almost seems to glow.

VERNON

(to himself)

Vernon God Little...

GUARD

Boy, you really bought into his
bullshit.

VERNON

He's a preacher, he should know.

GUARD

Yeah, right - Clarence Lasalle, the
fucking axe-murderer.

93 INT. VERNON'S HOME - KITCHEN

Vernon's Mom is watching a religious broadcast from a TV mega-
church, where an ecstatic crowd listens to a phony preacher.

PREACHER (V.O.)

Sweet name of Jesus! Say amen! Did
I hear anything?
(MORE)

PREACHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Louder, shout it out, I want to
 hear your hearts rejoicing in the
 sweet name of Jesus...!

As the SOUND FADES, the walnut on walnut fridge acquires its
 warm glow, morphing into a halo.

FRIDGE
 Doris, sweet name of Doris, do you
 hear me?

MOM
 Yes, I do.

FRIDGE
 I love you. Doris, I love you. I
 shall never leave you...

94 INT. VERNON'S CELL - PRISON - DAY

Vernon on his bunk, sleeping. Under his closed eyelids his
 eyeballs are moving in dreams.

95 INT. VERNON'S DREAM - DAY

In a flicker, his dream comes alive: a horror vision of his
 mother and her girlfriends. All are eating voraciously from a
 big bucket of Chicken Barn fried wings and legs, and all are
 ultra-obese. Mom offers Vernon a drumstick.

MOM
 Vern, darling - eat. You're still
 growing.

VERNON
 No, please, no. Pretty please no.

PAM
 Needs, boy - human needs.

VERNON
 Why are you always stuffing
 yourselves?

MOM
 (munching)
 I'm not eating, not really.

LEONA
 Doris is into food because it's the
 only thing she can control in her
 life - it won't run from her plate
 or stand up to her.

The women nod in cheerful agreement, waving their fried
 chicken legs and wings in Vernon's direction.

96 INT. VERNON'S CELL - PRISON - DAY

Vernon suddenly awakes in horror and sits bolt upright. Jones the warder is standing in the doorway.

JONES
Hey Vern, you got a visitor.

97 INT. PRISON - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Jones leads Vernon across the visiting area to where his visitor is waiting behind the thick glass window.

It's Ella, her hair grown to her shoulders, beautiful rather than just pretty, wearing a corn blue blouse.

ELLA
Hi Vernon.

VERNON
Hi Ella. Thanks for stopping by.

She smiles shyly at him.

ELLA
Notice anything?

VERNON
Your hair...?

ELLA
My equipment - it finally arrived.

She looks down at the curve of her breasts.

VERNON
You look real nice.

Ella smiles. She glances round, lowering her voice.

ELLA
Mr Abdini's been snoopin about up
at Keeters, lookin for evidence.

VERNON
Looking for... my gun?

Ella shakes her head.

ELLA
Lookin for your shit.

VERNON
What kinda shit?
(off Ella's look)
Oh, you mean like... *shit* shit?

ELLA

I saw you... remember?

Vernon squirms. Ella gives him a wry smile.

VERNON

Well...probably too late now.

ELLA

I love you, Bernie, don't ever forget that.

Vernon stares at her, almost quizzically.

VERNON

I didn't care for kindergarden when I was a kid. I remember one time calling my dad to collect me... but I was real sad when he came cos I'd suddenly grown to love it.

(smiles)

Bye, Ella.

He kisses his fingertips and puts them on the glass - as does she from the other side -- and thus they kiss.

98 EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

A large MEDIA CROWD is gathered outside the court house. At the forefront is Lally and Taylor, speaking to the camera.

TAYLOR

... the jury has heard the case, and now has to reach their verdict.

LALLY

That's right, Tay -- will Vernon Gregory Little be acquitted or found guilty? That's what's on everyone's mind. After the break we have news of the bodies of the two Americans who will be flown home today. Thirty Afghan refugees also died in the blast...

TAYLOR

Stay with us - don't go away -- we'll also have the great story of the duck and the hamster that just won't take a no for an answer!

99 INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

An electric atmosphere pervades the packed courtroom, awaiting the jury's return. Vernon is dreaming.

100 EXT. DEN - DREAM - KEETERS WASTELAND - DAY

Lally has opened the tin door to the den and retrieves a handgun, apparently Vernon's. He is obscenely obese, around four hundred pounds of blubber.

Police zero in on him, weapons drawn. Lally aims at them - guns open up from all sides. As colossal as Lally is, he does not go down but dances some type of medieval Tarantella, as though forced to dance after having been bitten by a spider.

101 INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

Vernon chuckles - then opens his eyes as the Jury file back to their benches.

JUDGE

Has the jury reached a verdict?

FOREMAN

We have sir.

JUDGE

How do you find the defendant,
guilty or not guilty?

The Foreman's eyes twitch.

FOREMAN

Guilty.

Mom lets out a CRY of anguish --

MOM

Nooooooooo!

JUDGE

(banging his gavel)
Silence!

In the brief silence we hear the mounting echo of feet running - doors opening - voices babbling --

-- suddenly Abdini bursts into the witness gallery, followed by a swirl of cameramen.

Abdini has a dirty brown ball of paper in one hand, and a melted candle in the other -

ABDINI

Test prove it! It is Nuckles notes,
the ones to wipe Bernom's ass!

Vernon glances up at Ella in the gallery -

ABDINI
Bernom innocen!!! Test prove this
is Bernom sheeeet! Bernom innocen!

Abdini is dancing up and down. Ella closes her eyes in joy while Mum sobs with relief.

102 EXT. COURT HOUSE STEPS - DAY

A phalanx of flash guns blaze away as Vernon floats through the door of the courthouse to freedom. FLASH! FLASH! FLASH!

Among the crowd and media circus awaiting him is Taylor and Lally, reporting to a CMN camera team.

Vernon looks at her in amazement: from his POV she has become as ultra-obese as Lally.

TAYLOR
Freed at last after six months,
Vernon Gregory Little finally steps
back into the real world. ...

An AIDE next to the camera holds up cue cards from a stack labelled NOT GUILTY. Another stack beside it is labelled GUILTY. Ella stands close by, watching Lally and Taylor reading from the cue exactly as written.

LALLY
That's right, Tay - and his former
Martirio High School teacher Marion
Nuckles is safely behind bars...

TAYLOR
... along with his pervert pal
Doctor Oliver Goosens - what a
pair!

LALLY
(eyeing her boobs)
You can say that again, Tay...

TAYLOR
(befuddled)
... along with his pervert pal
Doctor Oliver Goosens...

LALLY
(rolling eyes)
... so maybe it's time for the
State to take a long hard look into
its soul...

Ella slips in, picks a card from one stack and pops it on top of the other, then slides away. The Aide holds it up to Taylor --

TAYLOR

... now we know that the teenage
pervert Vernon Gregory Little has
been found guilty as charged and
will be transferred to...

(realising the mistake)

What the fuck??!

(to Lally)

Aw shit - like -- are we live??

LALLY

I am - but you're dead, Tay --
you're fired!

Vernon walks up to Abdini, standing near the Eldorado, and
embraces him - FLASH! FLASH! FLASH! -- then his Mom - FLASH!
FLASH! FLASH! FLASH! FLASH!

He waves to Mom's friends in the Eldorado, then turns and
walks away to Pelayo's truck, parked aside from the crowd,
where Pelayo and his kid Lucas are waiting beside it. So is
Ella, with a suitcase by her side and a very sweet smile.

She opens her arms to him and they hug one another, kiss,
then climb inside the truck -- as we do.

103 INT. PELAYO'S TRUCK - DAY

Pelayo hauls into the driving seat, Lucas next to him, Ella,
then Vernon. Ella smiles at someone beyond him. Vernon turns -
- and finds Jesus next to him by the window. They gaze at
each other -- Jesus smiles --

104 EXT. PRISON & ROAD - DUSK

-- the media crowd swirls forward -- Pelayo fires up -- and
the truck lights up like a cathedral as it hits the long high
road for Mexico. We float above them, the glowing truck
receding like a star into the gathering dusk.

* * * * *