# A BEAUTIFUL WASTELAND

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EXT. DRUMHELLER CORRECTIONAL FACILITY - MID DAY A hot sun burns down on the stunted trees bent by wind and drought as a secure doors open. SUPERIMPOSE: Drumheller Correctional Facility. Tall, well-built, late-twenties, PHOENIX CULLEN (NIX), exits flanked by two CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS. Extending a hand, Nix shakes hands with one officer, and is refused by the other who tosses a bag down at Nix feet. Picking up the bad Nix walks down the road.

### EXT. DRUMHELLER OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON

Nix sits in the back of a pick-up flying down Highway 9 through the badlands. Hoodoos rise out of the earth, thick sandstone pillars casting long shadows across the dry earth. On the horizon, glorious green prairie stretches out in stark contrast to the parched earth flanking him.

### EXT. CALGARY DOWNTOWN STREET - EVENING

Bag slung over his shoulder, Nix walks along a quiet sidewalk in a residential area just slightly removed from downtown. Nix stops in front of a small house and makes his way up the front path toward the door. Before Nix can knock, a slender, older man in his sixties, UNCLE RON opens the door.

NIX

Uncle Ron.

UNCLE RON

Come in.

### EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Walking down the outskirts of Saskatoon, Nix holds out his thumb. The first of several cars drive past until a semi-truck finally stops along the side of the road, hazard lights blinking. Nix runs up and hops inside.

# EXT. HIGHWAY 1 - MORNING

Nix sleeps peacefully in the box of an old pick-up, soaking up the sun as the truck drives down the highway. A FAMILY OF NATIVES sit in cab, the WIFE occasionally glancing back.

EXT. HIGHWAY 1 (MEDICINE HAT OUTSKIRTS) - AFTERNOON

On the outskirts of Medicine Hat, Nix walks along the highway. The grass blows in the ditch as he holds a thumb out at a passing car. It drives by without stopping. Heat-waves dance across the asphalt. An older Ford Taurus pulls up ahead of Nix and honks loudly. Relieved, Nix runs over to the car and peers inside the open window: the driver, DAWSON, a slim, ex-hippie looking man in his late-forties nods.

DAWSON

Where you going?

NIX

Brooks.

DAWSON

Then get in.

Nix tosses his backpack in the back and sits in the car. The driver holds out a hand as he pulls back onto the highway.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

Name s Dawson. Like Andre Dawson. You remember him? He used to play for the Expos.

NIX

Bit before my time.

DAWSON

But you remember the Montreal Expos, right?

NIX

Sure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dawson awkwardly steers as he produces a beer from his bag.

DAWSON

Road pop?

Nix looks over at it.

NIX

Jesus Christ.

DAWSON

What s wrong?

NIX

I just did a year in prison because of that shit.

DAWSON

This shit?

NIX

Crashed a car.

DAWSON

Kill anyone?

NTX

Hurt someone.

DAWSON

Bad?

Nix does not answer, but his silence betrays the worst.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

Well, I drink "this shit" because it gives me clarity. Turns this cowards blood into ice water, straightens them lines out on the road for me.

Dawson holds a steady hand up for Nix to see.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

The only time you have to worry about me driving is when I'm sober. From trembling fuck to steely surgeon: it s a beautiful metamorphosis.

Nix does not look convinced.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DAWSON

You want me to drop you off? Nix contemplates this as he looks out the side window: the steaming hot black asphalt passes by outside.

NIX

Nah, man. Just be careful. Dawson smiles and punches the gas.

#### INT. ALL NATIONS HARVEST CHURCH - MORNING

A tall, forty-year old Nigerian man JARI OKEKE, sings hymns from a photocopied program. He stands with the rest of a small congregation of immigrants and refugees. The make-shift church inhabits an old and worn storefront. African drums mingle with an electronic keyboard, as the singing continues. Through the song, Jari stares down at the orange sheet in his hand. Several times, he opens and closes his fingers as they are unable to fully grip the program.

#### INT. ALL NATIONS HARVEST CHURCH - MORNING

The service now finished, the people in the all-immigrant congregation visit with one another. Jari and his youngest child (Nse) mingle with another family. The young pastor (COTTON WILLIAMS) comes around after speaking with several people and ruffles the hair of Nse.

PASTOR WILLIAMS
See you at Sunday school today?
Jari looks down at Nse, who nods
agreeably.

PASTOR WILLIAMS (CONT'D) And where s the oldest?

JARI

... He could not make it.

PASTOR WILLIAMS

Maybe next time then. Cotton Williams then moves on to the next group of people. Jari checks his watch before looking down at Nse.

JARI

(in Hausa)

Go straight home after.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Jari turns and makes his way toward the door, putting a white cowboy hat as he does so. The hat seems a bit odd on his head and out of place as he walks out of the church.

# INT. LAKESIDE PACKING PLANT (LINE) - MORNING

Jari now toils as a line-worker on the floor of the meat packing plant. Working with other Sub-Saharan laborers, they all labour on the assembly line where slabs of meat are cut and de-boned as they pass through the conveyor belt. Covered in blood, Jari takes a moment to again painfully clench and unclench his cutting hand: gripping the knife for so long has taken a daily toll.

## INT. LAKESIDE PACKING PLANT (LUNCH ROOM) - AFTERNOON

Jari sits in the lunch room. The tables there are split by a collection of various nations: Nigeriaese, Ethiopian, Somali, Arab, and others. Signs on the walls are in four different languages. He eats from his tray as the myriad of different dialects flow through the room.

## EXT. HIGHWAY 1 (OUTSIDE OF BROOKS) - AFTERNOON

Nix CULLEN waves at Dawson as he drives off in his Taurus. Enjoying only the sound of the soft breeze, he turns and spots the distant Lakeside meat packing plant. He lifts his nose to the air and catches its familiar scent. Shaking his head and smirking, he peers off at the town of Brooks. TITLE CARD: A Beautiful Wasteland Slinging his backpack onto a his shoulders, he turns and begins walking toward the exit ramp.

## EXT. DOWNTOWN BROOKS (SECOND STREET) - AFTERNOON

Nix walks down second street, the town now in transition. Construction is everywhere, as a new super-market and other stores have gone up all around. A woman in a Hijab drives past him into a parking lot, Middle-Eastern music blaring. Tribal beads hang down from the rear-view mirror. Nix turns and walks past a clothing store with an African sign Kaba Hip Hop Fashion Shop . Peering in the window, he sees that is filled with urban and rapper apparel.

### EXT. OLD NEIGHBORHOOD - AFTERNOON

Nix enters his old neighborhood and walks up to an old house. He approaches the door and knocks, but there is no answer. Looking at the porch, things are unkempt and falling behind.

### INT. CULLEN HOUSEHOLD - MOMENTS LATER

Nix opens the door and walks into the living room, a flood of memories immediately apparent on his face.

He takes off his shoes and looks around the room. Photographs of an eleven- year old Nix and his father adorn one of the tables, their faces filthy after spending the day fishing. Others show a very young women (Marsha) and the same man on a wedding night, the tuxedo and wedding dress from the early-nineties. Coming to the door of his old bedroom, Nix peers inside: other than an old vacuum and a few conveniently stored household items, it has been untouched since his youth.

INT. LAKESIDE PACKING PLANT (LOCKER ROOM) - MORNING

Jari gets cleaned up in the locker room. Behind him, several Muslim workers kneel on mats as they pray.

EXT/INT. LAKESIDE PACKING PLANT (PARKING LOT) - EVENING

Jari Gebresilasie (cowboy hat back on his head) walks with the others toward a small rusted car at the end of the parking lot. Five of them, they all squeeze into the small vehicle, their long legs crammed tight.

INT. LIVING ROOM (GEBRESILASIE HOME) - EVENING

Jari walks into the modest rental house and drops his things on the chair beside him. He spots his oldest and lanky son, Samson, lazily watching television.

JARI

(in Nuer)

What are you doing?

SAMSON

Nothing.

JARI

That is my point. Get up. Samson turns back toward his father, eyes blood-shot.

SAMSON

I cannot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JARI

What do you mean you cannot?

SAMSON

My legs are tired.

JARI

Stand now.

Jari watches as his son sighs before finally obeying. Nse emerges from the bedroom, a concerned look on his face.

JARI (CONT'D)

You will be sixteen next week. It will be time for you to start working after school.

SAMSON

I know.

JARI

What is this smell?

SAMSON

Nothing.

Samson ambles past into his bedroom.

JARI

Samson?

SAMSON

Nothing, father. The door closes behind him. Jari looks over at Nse and smiles slightly, hiding his exasperation of the situation.

JARI

(in Nuer)

Have you eaten? Nse shakes his head.

JARI (CONT'D)

(in Nuer)

Then come.

INT. SAMSON'S ROOM (GEBRESILASIE HOME) - EVENING

Now later in the night, Jari comes into his sons room. Samson plays an old Super Nintendo: a hopelessly outdated sidescroller game on the black-and-white television.

(CONTINUED)

JARI

(in Nuer)

What is happening?

SAMSON

With what?

JARI

(in Nuer)

With you.

Jari sits down on the corner of the bed.

JARI (CONT'D)

(in Nuer)

You remember the camp? Samson says nothing as he continues to play.

JARI (CONT'D)

(in Nuer)

Nse was too young. But you remember, I know you do.

(beat)

I could not have done it without you, none of this. You were responsible then, you looked out for your brother after your mother died. No one asked you to, but you did this anyway. Samson continues playing play the archaic Nintendo game.

JARI (CONT'D)

(in Nuer)

Look around you and do not forget: this wicked world is a prison for the faithful, but a paradise for unbelievers.

Jari stands up.

JARI (CONT'D)

(in Nuer)

I ask that you keep that in your head at all times, that you never fail or lose yourself, son. Samson looks up at his father after his character dies viciously in the game. Jari studies his son, but the disconnect is apparent between the two.

(CONTINUED)

## CONTINUED: (2)

JART

Someday you will teach me that. Samson looks at the controller and then at his fathers worn hands. Jari self-consciously flexes his hand for a moment before turning and leaving the bedroom.

### INT. CULLEN HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Marsha CULLEN (late-thirties, tired and aged but still with hints of being very attractive at one time) comes into the house. Fumbling with the groceries in her hand, she notices that the kitchen light is on. Marsha stops in her tracks as Nix comes from around the corner. The two stare at each other for a long moment before she finally shifts.

MARSHA

Help me with these? He steps forward and takes the grocery bags from his mother.

MARSHA (CONT'D)

Just put them on the floor, I don t like bags on the counter.

NIX

(smiles)

I remember.

Marsha studies her son before finally giving him a hug.

MARSHA

You wouldn t let me come get you.

NIX

It's nine hours each way.

MARSHA

How about you let me decide what I can and can't do for my own son. Nodding, Nix looks down at the floor.

NIX

I guess I wanted to surprise you. I mean you knew I was coming home and all, but I just wanted to walk through the doors like nothing ever happened.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Marsha offers a sad smile and nods. She is about to comfort her son when suddenly a roaring noise can be heard from outside. A pair of headlights bathe the living room, accompanied by heavy country bass beats.

MARSHA

Oh Christ.

They both make their way to the entrance way. Opening the door, reveals three brutish-looking men climbing up the steps dressed in old jeans, sleeveless shirts, and caps: all sport handle-bar moustaches and flattened noses. The oldest, ARCHIE CULLEN (late-forties, rough-looking) barges forward and embraces him.

ARCHTE

You raw-dick motherfucker! The second of the two uncles, FLOYD CULLEN (mid-forties, equally roughlooking, heavier-set) also stumbles in.

FLOYD

Figure the boy must have at least gotten laid by now.

ARCHIE

It he's anything like his father, he s probably laid pipe to half the goddamn town by now. The third brother, SANDY CULLEN (early-forties, slim) budges in-between them.

SANDY

I dunno, heard them Saskatoon prison boys have a way of turning straight guys into strawberries.

NIX

Yeah, yeah. It was minimal security, Uncle Sandy.

ARCHIE

Don t matter. When the bear's hungry, it ll eat.

NTX

You talking from experience? The other two uncles laugh loudly at the sudden reversal. Archie s say nothing for a moment, but his face slowly becomes murderous.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NIX

I was kidding.

ARCHIE

Fuck your goddamn kidding. You always had a fresh mouth on you, even when you was a boy.

MARSHA

Archie.

ARCHIE

You ain t eleven anymore, it s about time now that you backed up that fresh mouth. Floyd holds out a concerned hand.

FLOYD

Fuck it, brother- Marsha steps forward.

MARSHA

You touch my son and you re going back to jail.

Archie glares at her and then back at his frightened nephew. He suddenly begins laughing:

ARCHIE

You stunned fuck, I wasn't being serious!

NIX

It's kind hard of to tell sometimes.

ARCHIE

Tell you what though: around town these days, you gotta watch what you're saying.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

You know what them motherfucking coons do to them cattle at Lakeside? Nix nods, though slightly unsure.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

They cut the viscera out of livestock in three, maybe four seconds flat. And them boys are good at it too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ARCHI

They'll use them same blades anytime you get in a fight with them.

Marsha glances away.

ARCHIE

Just remember to keep your goddamn tongue in check, it ain't like the old days around here anymore.

NIX

Yeah. All right. Archie looks over at Marsha, her arms crossed.

ARCHIE

Ain t seen you since Christ was a cowboy. How you holding up?

MARSHA

(contemptuous)

Doing fine.

ARCHIE

Need help with anything?

MARSHA

Said I m fine.

ARCHIE

That's not what I heard.

MARSHA

Get lost, Archie.

ARCHIE

Mind if we take the boy out and hit the can?

MARSHA

Yeah, Archie. I do. Archie turns and looks at Nix, ignoring his mother.

ARCHIE

How about it, Slim? Nix looks over at the intimidating trio of uncles:

NIX

Spent my last dollar just getting back home-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

FLOYD

It's on us, jackass!

NIX

All right. But I can't drink- The three uncles immediately push their nephew out the door. Marsha watches as they playfully toss him into the backseat of a beige crew-cab. Music blares up again as the truck peels out of the driveway. Finally looking over at the still-ajar front door, Marsha shuts it sheepishly behind them.

INT. OXFORD HOTEL - NIGHT

Archie howls with laughter as he and his brothers are now deep into their cups (though Nix nurses a water for himself.) A small-town STRIPPER dances on the stage in front of them.

ARCHIE

This next toast is to all the virgin women in the world- They all raise their glasses.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Thanks for nothing. Cackling wildly, the brothers down the shots of whiskey.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Floyd signals for the WAITRESS (early-twenties, hard-luck.)

FLOYD

Another round, if you ain t too fucking busy.

WAITRESS

Crown Royal?

FLOYD

You got it.

NIX

(to waitress)

Another water too. Floyd tugs her skirt as she is about to get their orders:

FLOYD

So when are you and me getting married?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The waitress turns and scoffs at this.

FLOYD

Come on! You seen my castle before. You could be my princess, own half of that shit.

WAITRESS

It's a fucking trailer, Floyd.

FLOYD

Trailer with additions.

WAITRESS

Still a trailer. She turns and walks away as the uncles laugh loudly.

SANDY

Two words for you, Floyd: no fucking chance. You look like a goddamn sofa with eyes. The tables laughs loudly at Floyd's expense for a moment. Archie scoots his chair closer to his nephew.

ARCHIE

So what kind of program do those sons-of-bitches got you on?

NIX

Phone parole, every two weeks. Pretty sure they got some other things lined up as well though.

#### ARCHIE

So you end up drinking and getting yourself into an accident. You hurt your buddy, but you don't kill him. Yet the cocksucker judge still decides to motherfuck you. Archie studies Nix and offers a slight and knowing smirk.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Guessing there must of have been a couple priors in there somewhere... Nix glances down at the table, opting not to answer. Archie takes a long drink of his beer before breaking away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ARCHIE

Should tell you about some of the things we've got happening around these parts as of late. I mean Sandy s got his old auto-shop, me and Floyd got the welding. But right now, I'm talking about something different.

NIX

Like what?

ARCHIE

Moonlighting. Snow mobiles, a few stray lawn tractors here and there. Easy meat all around.

SANDY

We re the Vietcong of these fucking prairies, boy: fast hit-and-run action, harmonious shit.

ARCHIE

Only reason we tell you this, is because you just got out of prison. Figure you might-

NIX

Wait a second: are you talking about what I think you are? Nix looks at each of his three drunk uncles for a moment, their dark grins affirming his suspicions.

NIX (CONT'D)

Listen guys, I always knew you were into some raw stuff - but the only reason I came back to Brooks is to earn some money for school and maybe help my mother out some in the meantime.

ARCHIE

Yeah, your mother. He smirks at this and scratches at the table.

ARCHIE (CONT'D) Hates us CULLEN's worse than poison.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ARCHI

The day that woman married our little brother was the same day she started turning her nose up at the rest of us.

Archie looks over at his nephew once more.

ARCHIE

So I'm guessing you don't want to hear more.

NTX

Probably shouldn't. I mean-

#### ARCHTE

Fair enough. Just remember though: you re an ex-convict now, employers are naturally more prejudiced against guys sporting criminal records these days. Especially in this horseshit economy.

(beat)

If you change your mind or ever find yourself in a bind, consider the offer.

NIX

I appreciate that.

SANDY

Your father ever heard us talking to you like we are now, he would have lit us the fuck up.

ARCHIE

We all miss the son-of-a-bitch, Christ fucking knows. But he wasn't one of us in the end.

SANDY

Rest in peace, Hank. CULLEN looks sadly down at the table just as the waitress brings the next round of shots. This time though, the entire group has suddenly grown solemn and quiet.

WAITRESS

What s got you boys down all of a sudden?

FLOYD

(now depressed)
Shut the fuck up, Lisa.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

With indignant shock, she slides their shooter tray onto the table and storms off. Nix sits silently with his uncles as they all collectively brood now, even failing to clap as the next stripper marches onto the stage. EXT. OXFORD - NIGHT

Nix and his uncles walk out of the bar, passing a group of five other men in the parking lot. Drinking from a near-empty beer bottle, a drunken rigger (FRANK) turns and nods at Archie and his brothers.

FRANK

Archie. Boys.

Before Archie can nod back, Frank suddenly notices Nix.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Well, I'll be goddamned. If it ain't the latest in a long line of CULLEN fuck-ups. The drinkers with Frank watch nervously as Archie halts.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Word is little Nixmy here wrote off a brand new Ford Ranger and nearly killed his-

Before Frank can finish, Archie turns and punches him twice in the face, sending him backward onto the asphalt. The two younger brothers glare ominously at the others as Archie kneels down and grabs Frank by the shirt.

#### ARCHIE

You can spout off whatever untoward shit you want about me and my brothers - because in the end it'll probably be true. But if you ever utter another goddamn word about my nephew again, I'll end your life. Archie stands once more and looks at the other men as well:

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

That goes for all of you. The other riggers nod.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

There ain't nobody in this shitty town more honorable than this boy right here. You all be sure to fucking remember that! (MORE)

### ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Archie turns and storms off to the truck, the rest following. It is a tense several seconds as Floyd digs for his keys and begins unlocking the old truck. Sandy finally lets out a snicker, breaking the silence:

#### SANDY

Shit Archie, you two-pieced that son-of-a-bitch. The two brothers laugh as they get in the truck. But Nix does not join in as he instead watches his eldest uncle with a bit more respect and pride than before. But as he does so, he notices Archie glaring at something across the dark street. Nix frowns and turns to see what has caught his uncle's attention: two immigrants stand and drink beside a dilapidated and olive-yellow Mercedes. Grinning and muttering amongst themselves, it is clear they witnessed the fight. Archie locks stares with the more dominant of the two (whom we will later know as Tampa), his mouth folding aggressively. The two lethal men eyeball each other for several more seconds until an oblivious Floyd calls out from the truck:

# FLOYD

Archie, let's go! With reluctance, Archie looks over and notes the license plate of the Mercedes before finally getting into the truck. Watching both his uncle and the two men across the street, Nix climbs into the crew-cab as well.

# INT. CULLEN HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Closing the front door, Nix places his key onto the table. Trying to keep quiet, he ends up bumping loudly into a chair. The hallway light turns on, revealing his mother in her robe.

NIX

Sorry.

MARSHA

You know I m a light-sleeper, would have heard you either way. Nix plops down onto the couch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARSHA

Did your uncles show you a good time tonight?

Nix looks up upon detecting the bitter tone in her voice.

MARSHA (CONT'D)

You were home for maybe three minutes before going out the door again.

NIX

I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. The wall clock ticks in the background as Marsha shifts.

MARSHA

Your father managed to cut himself away from Archie and his brothers. It didn't come easy, but even he eventually came to see just how bad they were for him.

(beat)

I sent you away after he died so that you wouldn't end up like them. Figured if you spent your teen years on my side of the family, you might build a more stable future for yourself.

She stares at her wrists, rubbing them painfully.

MARSHA (CONT'D)

Maybe that was a mistake on my part, I'm don't know anymore. Nix frowns.

NIX

What's wrong?

Marsha stops massaging her lower arms.

MARSHA

Doctor says it's carpal tunnel. It's gotten to the point where I can only work four or five hours a day now. It's impossible to hold onto the trays any longer. Stifling back anger, she continues:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Marsha (CONT'D) And the asshole manager won't let us girls use push-carts either. I've tried looking for other work, but I don't have any useful skills. Not at this age. Nix surveys the coffee table in front of him: for the first time he notices the stacks of bills, receipts, and bank statements that have been laid out and marked in red ink. It is apparent that she is barely hanging on.

NIX

I had no idea it was this bad.

MARSHA

Didn't want to say anything.

NIX

Listen. As soon as I find a job and start making money, we'll figure something out.

MARSHA

It's not your problem.

NIX

How is it not?

MARSHA

Just isn't.

NIX

I have some plans, maybe they might help things here. I was going to talk to you about them earlier. Another semi can be heard passing by on the highway not far. NIX (CONT'D)

I was thinking about maybe going back to school in the fall or next year, getting certified in pipe-fitting and maybe heading north-

MARSHA

Pipe-fitting?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Nix

I've been reading up on some of the course material lately: it might actually be something I could make a career of. I just need to start earning and saving up enough to- But before he can finish, Marsha stands up tiredly.

MARSHA

That's good, Nix. I think it's good that you want to go back to school. Before he can say anything more, she ruffles his hair with worn fingers for a moment: the conversation is over. Marsha tiredly turns and makes her way back into her bedroom. As the door closes softly behind her, Nix sighs and rests his head against the back of the couch: it's been a long day.

EXT. BROOKS COMPOSITE HIGH SCHOOL (ALLEY) - AFTERNOON

Samson Gebresilasie and his friends HADIL and WANI, smoke weed from a pop can. Samson inhales and coughs as Wani giggles.

SAMSON

Cans are the worst.

WANI

Parents found my pipe, what am I supposed to do?

SAMSON

Steal it back.

HADIL

It s Samson s birthday, man. The least you could do is help him celebrate.

Samson looks across the street, where Somali kids glare back.

SAMSON

Fucking Somalians.

HADIL

Fucking Ethiopians, fucking Somalians, fucking Arabs.

SAMSON

Fuck all them bitches, man. His friends nod, scowling and looking hard.

INT. KITCHEN (GEBRESILASIE HOME) - EVENING

Jari and some friends celebrate the birthday of Samson later that night. It is a traditional birthday gathering, as people from the Nigeriaese community drink Karkady and sing. Jari notices Samson (clearly high) snicker with his friends from across the room, but does nothing as he continues his conversation with Pastor Cotton Williams.

INT. SAMSON'S ROOM (GEBRESILASIE HOME) - NIGHT

The party now having ended, Samson sits in his room playing the old Nintendo. Rap filters from his worn stereo, but the music is in mono as one of the speakers no longer works. Jari stops at the doorway and looks in.

JARI

(in Nuer)

I have a gift for you out in the kitchen.

Jumping off the bed and following his father to the table, a smirking Samson waits as his father pulls something from a paper-bag beside him: it is a pair of work gloves.

JARI (CONT'D)

These are good. They will save your hands from being worn down.

SAMSON

From what?

JARI

De-boning meat. At the plant. His face falling, Samson looks up at his father.

JARI (CONT'D)

(in Nuer)

Today is a proud day for you, son. Sixteen years old: on this day you graduate from child to man.

SAMSON

Lakeside?

JARI

You start Monday after school. Jari allows a knowing grin as his son takes a step back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JART

Happy birthday. A deflated Samson turns and walks away into this bedroom, closing the door behind him. The smile leaves the face of Jari as he sits down at the old kitchen table. On the scratched surface are several envelopes: some contain bills and other assorted obligations. But it is one in particular that stands out from the rest. Jari picks up the previouslyopened envelope and pulls out the letter: it is from his landlord. On tacky orange paper, the neatlytyped contents indicate that the rent for his small house will more than double in the next month.

INT/EXT. MANAGEMENT OFFICE - MORNING

Jari walks into the small office of his landlord, holding the orange letter in his hand. A heavy-set, bespectacled man in his late-forties, WALTER KING, is about to go for lunch when he notices Jari come in and take off his cowboy hat.

WALTER

Can I help you?

JARI

I had a question. Jari begins digging in his pocket.

WALTER

Put some wheels on it, brother.

JARI

(not understanding)
It is about the rent.

WALTER

Got the letter, did you? Jari nods, finally pulling it out.

WALTER (CONT'D)

You can read, right?

JARI

Yes.

WALTER

I mean English. You can read-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JARI

I could read the letter.

WALTER

Then what s the question?

JARI

The rent is going up so much, is this legal?

WALTER

Of course it s legal. Thing is, it s out of my hands now - we sold the property to a management company up in Calgary. Walter then points at the letter.

WALTER (CONT'D)

See the letterhead? Call them.

JARI

Call them?

WALTER

They re the new owners, they increased your rent.

JARI

But I cannot pay-

WATITER

Of course not. They ain t aiming to get rich by you actually paying. The decision is already made: they want you to leave so they can tear down the house and throw up some duplexes instead. My best suggestion is that you find somewhere else to live.

JARI

But where?

WALTER

Grab a Bulletin newspaper, how the hell should I know? Jari turns and walks solemnly out of the office.

### INT. MARK'S WORK WEARHOUSE - MORNING

Nix sits on a stool and tries on some work boots. Dozens of open boxes and white packing paper are scattered all around. Archie tosses a display boot toward Nix.

ARCHIE

What about these? The impatient and overworked SALESPERSON turns toward him, but dares not protest.

SALESPERSON

You want me to find your size in those as well?

NIX

Nah, these will do. The salesperson stalks off toward the cash register. As soon as he turns his back, Floyd clumsily slips several packets of shoe laces into his jacket.

ARCHIE

You ask me, you seem a little soft around the edges to be embarking on the glorious life of a roughneck. The grin disappearing, a slightly disappointed Nix looks back down at the work boots.

NIX

At this point, I'll take just about any job that pays decent.

ARCHTE

That's unskilled nigger work, Slim. Hard labour for barely nothing. But Nix ignores him and walks over to pay for the boots, along with a hard hat and pair of overalls also sitting on the counter. As the salesperson is ringing it in, Floyd pockets several cans of polish as well from the rack beside.

EXT. BROOKS - MOMENTS LATER

The four exit the store and wait as Floyd begins unlocking his parked 1992 Dodge crew cab.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FLOYD

So you ain't even found a job yet, why the hell are you spending money on boots and gloves for?

NIX

Want to go out there prepared, in case they decide to hire me on the spot or something.

SANDY

You need a ride out?

NIX

Nah. Rig's just a few minutes outside of town, so mom said I could borrow her- Archie suddenly points across the street.

ARCHIE

Jesus Christ, check out the hole. They all glance up and notice an attractive young woman Emmy HEGEL walking, dressed casually in shorts and a cap

(meant to hide her attractiveness.) ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I'd lay such a punish-fucking on that, she wouldn't be able to-

NIX

(quickly interrupts)

You guys go on without me. The three men watch with surprise as Nix turns and immediately begins jogging down the street. Upon nearing the woman, he slows down until he is only a few feet behind her:

NIX (CONT'D)

Hey, pretty girl. Annoyed, Emmy turns to look back at him. But the irritation on her face turns instead to recognition.

**EMMY** 

Nix!

She hugs him excitedly.

EMMY (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix

Got back from Saskatoon.

**EMMY** 

When?

NIX

Few days ago.

The uncles suddenly drive by, cat-calling the two before blazing off down the street.

**EMMY** 

(slight disdain)

Your uncles are real characters. Nix looks back at Emmy, slightly embarrassed.

NIX

Going to start looking for work here in the morning.

**EMMY** 

That's great!

NTX

How about you?

**EMMY** 

Still on the ranch. Emmy looks at Nix for a moment before shifting.

EMMY (CONT'D)

It's really good to see you.

NIX

Best friends from kindergarten to grade school.

**EMMY** 

Yeah, until you decided to massacre all my Barbies with a vice grip and lighter fluid.

NIX

You're still upset about that?

**EMMY** 

I'm almost over it. Nix awkwardly rubs the heel of his old shoe on the sidewalk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Nix

Maybe we could hang out sometime?

**EMMY** 

I'm still in the phone book.

NIX

Under Roy Hegel, right? Emmy allows
a smile, clearly impressed:

EMMY

Good memory.

Grinning as well, Nix watches as Emmy turns without another word and begins walking away down the street.

EXT. BROOKS (SECOND STREET) - MOMENTS LATER

Nix cuts through a park several blocks away with an extra jump in his step. Just then, an old Buick Regal honks loudly after a large pick- up truck cuts it off.

Curses are shouted from rolled-down windows as two white men get out of the truck and three equally handy-looking black men emerge from the car. Stopping on the sidewalk outside the park, Nix watches as the parties get in each others faces, pointing and shouting. One group screams in English, while the other in Swahili. Shaking his head, Nix looks over at a man also spectating beside him: it is Jari, with the orange letter in hand.

NTX

You believe this shit?

JARI

Unfortunately, I do.

NIX

Thinking maybe we should let this one play itself out.

JARI

Probably a good idea.

NTX

Name s Nix.

Jari looks at his hand for a moment before shaking it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JARI

Jari.

NIX

I'm not even going to try and pronounce that.

JARI

(chuckles)

Don't try.

Just then, an RCMP car pulls up to the melee. Upon seeing the OFFICER get out of the car, the combatants wisely disengage.

NIX

Well, take it easy.

JARI

Likewise.

Jari watches as Nix turns and walks off down the street.

EXT. OIL RIG - MORNING

Nix stands in front of a foreman covered in dirt and grime, dressed in work boots and carrying a lunch bag and gloves. The foreman looks quickly at the resume in his hand.

FOREMAN

Appreciate you coming by so early, but I guess we're chalk-full now for the summer. Nix looks past the foreman and at the roughnecks toiling.

NIX

Nothing at all?

FOREMAN

Afraid not.

The foreman hands back the resume, the white paper is stained by several black thumbprints.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Shit. If you'd come by even a week earlier, we might have still had a spot for you.

NIX

Week earlier...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nix nods with disappointment.

NIX

Right. Thanks anyhow. He turns and walks away, back to an old Chrysler minivan.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - MORNING

Nix walks into a warehouse and hands a resume to one of the managers on the floor. The two can be seen exchanging several words before Nix nods at the man and leaves once more.

### INT. LAKESIDE MEAT PACKING PLANT - AFTERNOON

Jari Gebresilasie works in the de-boning line. Gritting his teeth, he cuts away bones from the grizzled sinew. Beside him, his son also works strenuously as well, the conveyor belt bringing slab after slab of bloody beef to process.

#### INT. LAKESIDE MEAT PACKING PLANT - AFTERNOON

During a moment of down-time, Samson is slightly effected as he watches the cows walk placidly to their death. Blood flows on the floor of the plant as the workers ready their captive bolt pistols before firing them into the heads. Cows drain from hooks, their brain stems left intact to allow the hearts to continue functioning during the bleeding process.

# EXT. LAKESIDE MEAT PACKING PLANT (PARKING LOT) - EVENING

Jari and his reluctant son walk from the plant, toward the rusted car waiting at the end of the lot. Several workers walking in the other direction smirk playfully at the rookie.

#### WORKER

(in Nuer)

Here comes the man! Jari waves them off as they put mock boxing fists up and air-punch at Samson as he passes. The sun setting beside them, Jari proudly pats his glum son on the back.

### INT. EMPTY APARTMENT - EVENING

Later that evening, landlord ALBERT PAULSON (mid-thirties, slender) shows Jari around a decrepid apartment: the carpet, fixtures, and colors are straight from the eighties.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALBERT

And finally, here we have the reading room.

He chuckles at his own joke as he shows the tacky bathroom.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

When you flush the toilet, be sure to hold the lever down until it finishes. Otherwise the tank will run for hours.

Jari nods.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

It s an older building, so you got to be aware of these things. But just think of it in the context of character: the building will be good to you if you re good to her. Old furniture and trash clutter the living room.

JARI

What about all this?

ALBERT

The last asshole living here left it all behind. But don t fret, I ll hire somebody to clean it all out before you move in. Jari nods, a bit skeptical.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

So you want an application?

JARI

Could the price come down just a bit more-

ALBERT

Price remains as advertised.

JARI

But I did also notice that the carpets are burnt-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ALBERT

Listen, you ain t doing business back in Africa where you can keep bartering me down until I m taking a goddamn haircut on the place. In this country, the printed rent is final. Take it or leave it. Jari glares at the landlord.

ALBERT

I m saying this in the nicest way right now: but I guess immigrating here, you people need to put up with some inconveniences- Jari snatches the application from the kitchen counter as Albert looks on surprised.

JARI

(defiant)

This is luxury. He turns and walks out of the decrepid apartment unit, application held firmly in hand.

INT. KITCHEN (CULLEN HOUSEHOLD) - NIGHT

Nix sits in front of the phone, his head resting on his arms as he stares with defeated eyes at it. Several newspapers and resumes are sprawled across the old kitchen table. The front door can be heard opening and closing, his mother walking into the kitchen moments later. Noticing her son sitting at the table, she ruffles his hair.

MARSHA

Still nothing?

NIX

No one's calling me back. I must have handed out thirty resumes already.

Marsha walks over and places her keys on the counter.

MARSHA

You're on parole and you're not an immigrant that'll work for peanuts. The businesses around here-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIX

What the hell does me not being an immigrant have to do with things?

MARSHA

(snaps)

It has to do with a lot! (MORE)

MARSHA (CONT'D)

Marsha stares at her son for a moment, clearly wanting to say more but opting from doing so. With a sigh, she instead begins counting and placing her tip money into a clay jar.

NIX

There's no jobs or anywhere to stay in Saskatoon. I had no choice but to come back here. Marsha stops counting the change and looks over at Nix, slightly hurt by the comment. He turns and looks back at her, a guilty look on his face.

NIX (CONT'D)

I didn't mean-

MARSHA

I know you didn't. Marsha smiles, but it is both tired and jaded, betraying a lifetime of disappointment and harsh letdown. She slowly pushes herself away from the counter and walks out of the room, leaving Nix alone to contemplate things.

INT. BODY SHOP - MORNING

Nix stands in the body shop belonging to his uncle Sandy. In front of them is a purple Chevy with flames on the side.

SANDY

What you see here is an immaculate Chevy, a frame-up straight-authentic restoration. Two-thirty-five in-line six with all original parts, this majestic bitch is an absolute manifestation of beauty. Sandy looks back at Nix, smirking.

SANDY (CONT'D)

Tell me your dick didn t just move a little bit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIX

It moved.

The other uncles laugh as Sandy shuts the hood.

ARCHIE

You ain't been able to find a job, Slim. What's the plan?

NIX

I don't know.

He rubs his foot across the dusty shop floor.

NIX (CONT'D)

Suppose I could try Lakeside.

SANDY

You're white and you speak English, there ain t no jobs for you there. Archie sighs and looks out the window of the shop.

ARCHIE

I guess they told us all the meek would inherit the earth, didn t they? Well, I look around this goddamn town and I see all sorts of imported meek pouring in every day. But they ain t ever going to inherit fuck-all for themselves. Nix peers down at his runners: embarrassingly old and worn.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Don t get confused by the mindset that just because you re good, something good is going to happen to you in return. Because none of that fairy tale bullshit ends up ever being true. Nix leans back against the counter and contemplates it all for a moment. Silence as the prairie winds blow outside, the bits of dust cascading against the shop glass.

NIX

Maybe I could help you guys.

ARCHIE

Help us?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He swallows and looks away.

NIX

Maybe roll with you for a couple of nights or something. Archie turns and begins chuckling at this new development.

NIX (CONT'D)

I mean, all I need is four or five grand going into the winter. Sandy and Floyd look at each other.

NIX (CONT'D)

But if you didn't mean what you said the other night, then I'll leave it alone-

ARCHIE

Fuck that noise, you're our people. Our brothers son.

FLOYD

Hell yeah.

ARCHIE

Me, Sandy, and Floyd have always been there for one another - and Hank too, at least before he went his own way.

Archie picks up a wrench and studies it.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Without that bond, each of us would have died some shitty fucking deaths by now. It s them loner exconvicts, Nixmy: they re the ones by themselves in the dark motel rooms, blowing their brains out with a Bible and a bottle of Jack Daniels in their lap. The eldest uncle places an arm around his nephews shoulder.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

You need some quick cash over the next few months, and as it stands we could use an extra hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Nix

Just a couple runs, right?

ARCHIE

Sure.

Archie steps forward.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Got one in particular that you could help out on. Nix slowly nods, instantly betraying a sense of trepidation over the decision he has just made. Finally, he looks up at his uncles once more:

NIX

When?

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY 2 (OUTSIDE RED DEER) - NIGHT

Nix rides with Archie in an old box-truck later that night. The uncle drinks a mug of coffee, Nix a can of Red Bull. Sandy and Floyd drive in a separate crew-cab behind.

EXT. POLARIS DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

The streets are empty as the trucks pull up to a Polaris dealership. Floyd pulls a set of keys from his pocket and unlocks the padlocked gate in the back.

NIX

I'm not even going to ask how you got those keys.

ARCHIE

It was some raw shit, Nixmy. Floyd begins signaling for them to move the truck forward.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Some real raw shit. Archie roughly jams the truck in gear.

### INT. POLARIS DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

As the uncles enter the back door of the dealership, they begin rummaging around and getting ready to work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Leaving Nix alone and saddled down with a pair of duffle bags, he looks around the darkness until he spots something. Placing the bags onto the floor, Nix walks slowly to one snowmobile in particular and stares sadly at it.

ARCHIE (O.C.)

(solemnly)

Goddamn things are the devil's machines.

Archie walks slowly up and stops beside him.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Don't we both know it. The two stare in grim silence at the snowmobiles.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

But your father ain't here anymore. It's just us now. Archie pats Nix on the back retreating into the store room. Nix absorbs this for a moment before picking up the duffle bags and following his uncle.

### INT. POLARIS DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

Floyd struggles with one of the forklifts in the loading bay. Nix and Sandy also work quickly under Archies direction, rolling crates into the back of the box-truck.

## INT. POLARIS DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

Sandy walks into the owner office and unzips his pants. Clearly relishing the moment, he begins defiantly relieving himself all over the desk and computer.

# EXT. POLARIS DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

Sandy closes and locks the loading bays again. The box-truck turns onto the road and disappears down the dark street.

INT/EXT. EMPTY WAREHOUSE - MORNING

The box-truck now sits in a small and windowless warehouse. Archie beams with joy as they wrap up the score.

ARCHIE

All right boys, we're getting drunk at the Oxford tonight. He then turns toward Nix:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

That means all of us. Sandy and Floyd hoot with excitement as they all pile into the black Chevy and begin backing out of the warehouse.

INT. LIVING ROOM (CULLEN HOUSEHOLD) - MORNING

An exhausted Nix enters the house in the early morning. Taking off his shoes, he walks into the kitchen - but the houses is empty as his mother has gone to work for the day. He walks out onto the back patio and looks out at the grass: the blades are yellow and scorched by the summer sun. Prairie winds blow violently through the yard-

CUT TO:

INT. OXFORD HOTEL - NIGHT

-as Nix stumbles through the bar-room Oxford Hotel, clearly intoxicated. (Note: the prairie wind is consistently heard through the next sequence of otherwise silent scenes.) As he inhabits a drunken and peaceful vacuum, the DANCER on the stage continues her routine in front of him and-

INT. OXFORD HOTEL (DRESSING ROOM) - NIGHT

-laughs beside Floyd. The bar now shut down, the three uncles ply the dancers with alcohol, drugs and money. A plate of cocaine sits beside them, lines being cut by one of the girls with a worn debit card. Nix does not move as the off-duty dancers (now in track pants and t-shirts) party hard from across the room. The dancer turns-

EXT. OXFORD HOTEL (ALLEY) - NIGHT

-and staggers against the brick wall as Nix and Floyd both take a piss in the alleyway. Spraying the wall in front of them, Nix cockily takes straight chugs of alcohol from a bottle of Vanilla Vodka. Sandy burps before stumbling and knocking over a stack of beer cases, the empty bottles shattering on the ground. Nix turns-

EXT. OXFORD HOTEL (PARKING LOT) - NIGHT

-and notices Archie across the alley banging one of the strippers on the hood of his truck, his exposed ass as white as the moon. Floyd runs over and sprays them both with beer from his bottle, causing the STRIPPER to shout with annoyance. Archie cackles loudly. Nix closes his eyes-

INT. OXFORD HOTEL (DRESSING ROOM) - NIGHT

-and is back in the dressing room. The dancers snort more lines from the plate being passed around, their layers of make-up now removed and their faces raw. Archie plunks down into one of the plastic chairs beside a drunken Nix. His gravelly voice cuts through the oppressive silence:

ARCHIE

How you doing?

Nix looks over at Archie but says nothing in his bliss.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

A guy has to get his fuck on sometimes, there can be no denying. But what we re doing here tonight, this ain t no regular thing: blowing dollars like they re fucking pesos on these broken-pussied animals. Every free man should be allowed to break a nut, by hook or crook, once in a while.

(beat)

But when it stops being a special occasion, this kind of reckless display will get a guy put away real quick.

The STRIPPER gestures with a mock-pout for Archie to return.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Tell you something though: I m bored, Slim.

NTX

With tonight?

ARCHIE

With everything. Archie looks down at the bottle of beer in his hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

I've done fucked, drank, snorted, and kicked the shit out of any new experience that ever had the misfortune of wandering into my life.

Archie smirks sadly at this.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Nothing new to be had anymore. Just old memories now. The other two brothers howl and carouse in the background.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Speaking of memories: you remember that time I took you out when you was little? Would have been the spring after your fathers accident. Sandy had that old stalled Ford sitting out there in the stubble that he didn t want anymore.

NIX

Yeah. We shot it up.

ARCHIE

We shot it up real good. Took out the windows, took out the tires, the mirrors. Probably blazed through two boxes of shells on that piece of shit. Once we were done, we threw the bitch into neutral, pushed her into the coolie.

NIX

Truck s probably still down there to this day.

ARCHIE

All rusted up.

It is apparent that the recollection is fresh in Nix s mind.

NTX

I ain t lying when I say it, uncle: I probably had more fun that day than any other. Archie looks sadly up at the strippers before nodding.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ARCHIE

Me too. Archie lifts himself onto his feet with a laborious groan. He begins staggering over to his girl for the night, grabbing her and pulling her into the next room for another session. Nix watches this for a moment before turning and observing one of the other dancers: she vigorously rubs her ruby nose with two fingers, the entire time not daring to look up at anybody else in the room.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. CULLEN HOUSEHOLD (BACK YARD) - AFTERNOON

Nix continues to stare at the grass from the patio, the summer wind continuing to blow across the unkempt backyard. His face betraying deep turmoil and guilt, he does not move.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - AFTERNOON

Nix drives his mothers old minivan down a quiet gravel road. He glances out the window at the beautiful countryside, revelling at the site of the rolling golden prairies.

EXT. RANCH - AFTERNOON

Nix get out, the old engine popping in the summer heat. About to approach the large and affluent house, a man (ROY HEGEL) suddenly emerges from the stables across the well-kept yard.

ROY

Howdy.

Nix salutes back to the man as he approaches.

ROY (CONT'D)

How can I help you?

NIX

Well, I just came- Roy squints.

ROY

Nix CULLEN?

NIX

(reluctant)
That's right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROY

Well, I guess I haven't seen you since you was a youngster. Roy drops some leftover meat into a margarine container sitting on the door step: several cats converge on this.

ROY (CONT'D)

Emmy said you was back in town, that you might be coming by one of these days.

Nix perks up slightly.

ROY (CONT'D)

She's dropping some bails off right now, but should be—Suddenly an ATV pulls into the yard, the young rider standing up on the foot pegs in order to user her knees as a shock—absorbers. Both Nix and Roy watch as the woman shuts off the mud-covered vehicle and hops off. She takes her baseball cap off and stretches before noticing the two standing in the farmyard. Looking down for a moment at her dirty clothes, she finally allows a smile at Nix.

#### INT. IRRIGATION PIPELINE - AFTERNOON

Both Nix and Emmy stroll peacefully together. He looks over at her, slightly bashful.

NIX

Your father looking for any extra help out here?

**EMMY** 

Not really.

She looks guiltily over at a large irrigation pipeline.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Every year, we turn away people looking for work. We live comfortably, but there really isn't any breathing room to hire-

NIX

No problem, I understand. He suddenly looks over at her again, with concern.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIX

That wasn't why I came over. Just in case you were wondering-

**EMMY** 

(smiles)

I know it wasn't. Relieved, he hops onto the pipe as they walk side-by-side.

NIX

I remember playing on this thing when we were kids. Everything seemed a lot bigger back then.

**EMMY** 

Not a whole lot has changed since you were last here.

NIX

That's a good thing.

**EMMY** 

Think so?

NIX

I do.

Emmy continues to stare ahead.

**EMMY** 

How long are you staying in Brooks?

NIX

Don't know yet.

**EMMY** 

You don't know?

NIX

It's kind of up in the air. She nods as they continue to walk. After a moment, she looks with genuinely caring eyes toward Nix:

**EMMY** 

Did you end up doing anything in Saskatoon after you graduated? Nix shakes his head and looks evasively away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix

Not much.

**EMMY** 

You must have something. I mean did you work, travel, go to college, anything at all? Unable to make eye contact with Emmy, Nix continues to evasively stare down at the pipe.

NIX

I didn't really get around to doing a whole lot after school. The two continue to walk along the large irrigation line. Grasshoppers and other insects can be heard loudly buzzing about the tall and wild grass all around.

**EMMY** 

You going to rodeo dance next week?

NIX

Rodeo dance?

 $\mathsf{EMMY}$ 

The Patricia Rodeo Dance. You remember?

Nix thinks for a moment before finally nodding.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Well, you should come.

NIX

I would, except for one problem.

**EMMY** 

What's that?

NIX

It's a rodeo dance. There's bound to be lots of two-stepping there.

**EMMY** 

(grins)

Pretty much.

NIX

I don't know how. The two reach a large irrigation canal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

**Emmy** 

Come here then. I'll show you. Nix playfully offers a pained look.

**EMMY** 

Come on!

He walks reluctantly over to her, placing his hand into hers.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Hold me like this. Emmy moves his one hand onto her hip and starts leading.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Now. Slow, slow, quick, quick. She repeats the phrase several times as the pace increases.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Slow, slow, quick, quick. You're doing it sort of right. Emmy smiles at him.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Slow, slow, quick, quick. There. Now twirl!

He does a commendable job of spinning her, even though their limbs get twisted around a bit. She verbally continues to guide him through the repetitive steps several more times, until finally they both stop.

EMMY (CONT'D)

See? Wasn't so hard. But Nix is no longer listening, instead he stares deeply into her large brown eyes. Emmy notices this and stops, her face quickly becoming serious as well - it is clear that she shares an intense attraction with him as well. Nix begins bringing himself in, his face moving closer. Emmy suddenly pushes him into the irrigation canal behind. He splashes loudly into the water, shouting with surprise as he surfaces a second later.

EMMY (CONT'D)

That's for the Barbies.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Nix looks up at her, a grin forming on his face as he nods.

NIX

I probably deserved that. Emmy moves toward the canal, playfully offering a hand out in order to help Nix from the canal. He accepts and is about to begin climbing out - when suddenly he pulls her into the water as well. Screaming with surprise, Emmy begins hurling handfuls of water at Nix. They splash each other amongst the cattails and tall grass lining the banks.

INT. LIVING ROOM (GEBRESILASIE HOME) - NIGHT

Jari packs a box with items, the majority of his bedroom now in either boxes or plastic garbage bags.

As he finishes packing the last box, he stops what he is doing and stares down at a framed picture in his hand: a modestly attractive Nigeriaese women is in the photo, standing next to him. His wife. A candid Polaroid from an unknown refugee processing station, it is housed in a cheap frame. With emotion, he studies it a few moments longer before placing it also into the box.

EXT. BROOKS STREET - NIGHT

Samson and his friends walk down the empty residential streets, peering inside parked vehicles. His friends Hadil and Wani attempt to keep up with his frantic pace.

WANI

What are we doing, man?

SAMSON

Having some fun. Samson moves with purpose toward a car that is unlocked. He opens the door and looks inside: spotting some change, Samson quickly snatches the money and closes the car door once more. The three next approach a run-down house, the lights on.

Samson stops and stares enviously at an immaculate black short- box Chevy sitting in the drive-way. Samson creeps over to the truck, careful to make sure he is out of sight-line from the living room window. A country song blares from inside the house, the bass thunder rumbling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Samson looks into the truck and sees that it is also unlocked. His eyes brighten even more: the keys are in the ignition.

SAMSON

We re going for a ride.

HADTT

I don t think this is smart.

SAMSON

Then go back home with the women and children, Hadil.

(MORE)

SAMSON (CONT'D)

Hadil glares at them both before finally walking around and quietly getting into the passenger side of the truck. Samson and Wani open the drivers door and also cram inside.

WANI

Do you even know how to drive? Samson offers an unsure smirk before awkwardly pushing the gas and roughly backing the vehicle out of the driveway.

INT. TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Samson turns off the main road and begins driving through a less-affluent part of Brooks.

SAMSON

There.

HADIL

There what?

SAMSON

That s the dump we're moving into. The three look disparaging at the dive, Samson nodding grimly.

SAMSON (CONT'D)

Fucking hate this town. Hadil looks on nervously as Samson punches the gas once more.

EXT. ARCHIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Archie walks out of the run-down house. Beer in hand, he hums happily while digging for his keys. Upon producing them from his pocket, he looks up and notices that the driveway is empty. After taking an extra moment to absorb this unexpected stimuli, he quickly shakes his head:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

Fuck me.

Archie drops his beer onto the driveway and runs back inside.

### INT. ARCHIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Grabbing his phone, he quickly dials a number. It rings before someone answers through loud music on the other end.

ARCHIE

Some motherfucker stole my truck! The surprised voice on the other end protests.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I don t give a shit who s coming on stage next, you two need to get your asses here right now! He is about to hang up, before reconsidering:

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Grab Nixmy on your way. Archie slams the old phone back onto its flimsy wall mount.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY 1 - NIGHT

Samson and friends howl as the truck barrels down the highway.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. ARCHIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Archie waits on the driveway, pacing back and forth. He turns as the large crew-cab screeches to a halt in front of his house, bumping up onto the curb. Running over to the truck, Archie opens the front door.

FLOYD

I'm pissed out of my fucking gourd, Archie! If they pull me over again, they ll damn sure throw my ass in the cooler.

Sandy is delegated to the backseat with an annoyed Nix.

NIX

Why don t you just call the RCMP?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

Got a flap of coke under the seat, I ain t calling no cop.

NIX

Look, I m thinking it s better if I just get out and walk back-

ARCHIE

It s all hands on fucking deck! Now let's go, goddamn it! Nix quickly raises his hands in order to reassure his uncle.

EXT. BROOKS EXIT - NIGHT

As they drive, Archie looks over at Floyd.

ARCHIE

Motherfuckers ain t still in town, I ll guarantee that much. Which means they went either north or south down highway one.

FLOYD

So which way you want to go? The eldest brother closes his eyes. Meditative.

ARCHIE

Fuck it. Let s head north.

FLOYD

Calgary?

ARCHIE

If they're heading straight to Calgary, we ain t got a hope in hell of finding them. But if they re dumb enough to detour into Bassano or Strathmore first, then we might still have half-a-chance. Floyd quickly nods and proceeds to turn onto the north exit.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT (ARCHIE'S TRUCK)

Samson and his friends cackle loudly as they barrel down the darkened highway. On one occasion, they ride up alongside the edge of the ditch, spraying up a trail of dirt behind them.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT (FLOYD'S TRUCK)

The four men sit ominously silently in the large pick-up. Nix glances at the rear view mirror, where the headlights of an oncoming vehicle brightens the murderous face of Archie.

EXT. STRATHMORE - NIGHT

Entering Strathmore, they turn onto the main street to continue their search. Up ahead, Sandy spots several TEENAGERS walking along the sidewalk. They pull up behind and bathe them with the headlights: adorned in matching Strathmore Storm hockey coats, they look back at the truck while attempting to hide bootlegged beer.

ARCHIE

Pull up beside. As the they approach, Archie opens the door.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Any of you boys seen a nineteen-andeight-three Chevy black short-box driving through town tonight? The kids are silent for a moment before one finally stirs:

TEENAGER

Them black kids yelling shit at us, they were in a Chevy.

ARCHIE

You sure about that?

TEENAGER

Definitely, man. It was an older Chevy for sure.

ARCHIE

Which way-

Just then a black 1983 Chevy short-box roars across the street several blocks in front of them all. They watch incredulously as it streaks past on the way to some unknown destination, knocking over a garbage can on their way. Loud hollers and laughter can be heard from inside.

ARCHIE (CONT'D) Well, fuck me running.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The teenagers watch as he hops back into the crew-cab: it tears loudly off after the truck as soon as he is inside. It only takes seconds until large truck pulls up beside. Sandy shines a hunting light into the cab: Samson and his three surprised friends look back with wide-eyes. Archie offers an ominous and dire nod at Samson. Floyd floors the gas, cutting in front of the small pick-up. The young occupants break and barely avoid hitting the crew- cab in front of them. They immediately abandon the still- rolling truck and begin running. Nix opens his door and angrily dashes out after them, as Archie runs over to the rolling Chevy to halt it. Nix locks onto Samson and sprints hard in pursuit. His two horrifically out-of-shape uncles quickly lose steam after only several seconds. Nix bounds after Samson down a dark residential street, but the separation between the two also widens - Samson is simply too fast for him. After pursuing for another block, he loses steam and kicks at the asphalt.

EXT. STRATHMORE STREET - NIGHT

The three uncles watch as Nix ambles back toward them.

SANDY

It can no longer be denied: black people are faster than whites. Nix looks angrily up at the three men.

NIX

Why didn t you guys just drive after them or something? Archie glares at Floyd and Sandy: it is a good question.

ARCHIE

Because we re rolling with some fucking retards here, that s why. Couple of Mountain Dew drinking, cross-eyed, whore-fucking troglodytes.

FLOYD

No reason to talk like that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SANDY

(equally hurt)

Yeah, at least we got your wheels back, Archie.

Archie turns and makes his way back to the Chevy.

SANDY (CONT'D)

So what do you want to do now?

ARCHIE

Nothing.

SANDY

You re not even going to look for them sons of bitches? We might catch them hitchhiking or-

ARCHIE

I m heading home: gonna plug in some porn, rub one out, and get some sleep.

FLOYD

(confused)

How s that?

ARCHIE

I ll catch them boys eventually, Floyd. Don t you worry about a goddamn thing.

SANDY

Since you mentioned it, you still got my Anal Dykes DVD?

ARCHIE

Using it tonight.

SANDY

Well, can I get the fucking thing back one of these days? But Archie does not respond. They all watch as he instead starts his recovered truck up and peels off down the street. EXT. HIGHWAY 1 (OUTSIDE OF STRATHMORE) - LATER IN THE NIGHT

Samson and his two nervous friends attempt to hitchhike on the highway outside Strathmore, but no car stops at this hour.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. PRINCESS PARK (GEBRESILASIE HOME) - MORNING

Jari sits at the kitchen table, his face betraying deep concern. In front of him is a Lakeside shift schedule: both he and his son s names are circled in red ink. Just then, the front door can be heard opening. Jari immediately bolts up and makes his way into the living room. An exhausted Samson looks up at him as he takes off his sneakers and kicks them aside.

JARI

(in Nuer)

Where were you? Samson is barely cognizant for lack of sleep. He dismisses his father with the tired wave of a hand.

JARI (CONT'D)

You leave for school Friday and come home this morning. You expect me not to worry?

SAMSON

All you ever do is worry, father. It makes me crazy.

JARI

Do you think I do it for nothing? In your naive experience, do you really believe this world is kind to those who do not worry?

SAMSON

I think that I really do not care.

JARI

You have a shift in three hours at the plant.

SAMSON

I will call in sick.

JART

There is no calling in sick there. If you do, they will hire another to take your place on the line.

SAMSON

Then I ll find another job.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JART

Do you think so?

SAMSON

Man, the days of slavery are over-Jari slaps his son across the face. Samson turns shocked toward his father. The two stare at each other for a long moment before Samson slowly raises his fists.

JARI

(in Nuer)

Do you really want this? Samson angrily swings and clips his father in the mouth. Jari reels back into the wall as Samson is about to lunge. Just then, a crying Nse runs in between them. Jari and Samson stop fighting and look down at him. After a moment of absorbing the situation, Jari reaches out for Samson.

JARI (CONT'D)

...Son.

But Samson quickly grabs his sneakers from the floor and flees out the door. Nse watches as his disappointed father slumps back against the wall, his lip bloody.

INT. LAKESIDE MEAT PACKING PLANT - AFTERNOON

Jari works on the assembly line, his lip swollen and red from the punch. His son is not beside him.

#### EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - EVENING

After work, Jari walks down the long gravel road back toward Brooks on his own. He watches his friends wave as they drive past in the crowded old commuter car. But Jari looks sadly out into the barren fields beyond, his white cowboy hat held steady through the wind by two firm fingers.

### EXT. RANCH PASTURES - AFTERNOON

Nix and Emmy ride ATVs through the pasture, corralling several loose cattle back toward their land. The ATV that Emmy is riding suddenly stops, an unknown mechanical problems obviously manifesting itself. Noticing this, Nix turns his four-wheeler back and stops beside her as she climbs off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

**EMMY** 

Damn it!

NIX

What's happened?

**EMMY** 

It just died.

Nix turns off his bike as well and begins digging around the toolkit strapped onto the back.

EMMY (CONT'D)

We're going to have to fix the fence first and then take yours back-

But she stops and watches incredulously as Nix walks over with his wrench. As he begins inspecting the still-hot and crackling engine, Nix notices this and smirks.

NIX

(mock voice)

Don't worry - I know a thing or two about a thing or two.

**EMMY** 

Oh, do you?

Careful not to burn himself, he pokes around with his wrench.

NIX

You shouldn't doubt me.

**EMMY** 

I would never.

Emmy continues to watch him before turning and looking out at the vast expanse of pasture. A slight breeze blows through her hair in an otherwise calm summer day.

EMMY (CONT'D)

I wish you could work out here. Nix stops and looks up at her, his face also again serious.

NIX

Me too.

The two stare at each other for a moment, before Emmy finally looks away. Nix focuses on the engine once more: after a few adjustments with his wrench, he nods.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix (CONT'D)

Try it now. Emmy walks over and turns the key: the ATV starts effortlessly.

**EMMY** 

Mildly impressed.

NIX

Just mildly?

**EMMY** 

Possibly a bit more. They both climb back onto their bikes and begin riding off after the remaining maverick cattle, the afternoon sun hanging peacefully in an otherwise blue sky.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Nix awakens to the sound of the alarm clock going off on the bed table beside him. Turning it off, he sits up on the edge of his bed and looks down at the floor. Glowing still from the day before (and perhaps a bit sun burnt as well), Nix rubs the sleep from his eyes and grabs the pair of overalls from the chair next to him. He begins getting dressed.

EXT. BROOKS (SECOND STREET) - MORNING

Nix walks down a sidewalk the next morning, work gloves tucked under his arms. Just then he hears a honking noise: he turns and spots his mother pulling up in the mini-van.

MARSHA

Where you off to?

NIX

Found a job in the paper last night.

He stops.

NIX (CONT'D)

Clearing furniture from an apartment. Isn't much, but it should help.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARSHA

You need a ride?

NIX

It's just a couple more blocks.

MARSHA

Well if you lift anything heavy, be sure to use your knees and-

NIX

(smiles)

It's good, mom. Marsha squints at her son through the bright sunlight. Understanding that she is perhaps being too motherly, she smirks and puts the old van into drive.

MARSHA

Yeah, yeah. All right. She pats him on the shoulder before slowly rolling away.

EXT. OLD APARTMENTS - MORNING

Nix works hard at the old apartment building, hauling a smashed entertainment unit down the flight of stairs.

### EXT. OLD APARTMENTS - MORNING

Dismantling an old dresser, Nix pulls out the drawers and tossing them roughly onto the floor.

### EXT. OLD APARTMENTS - AFTERNOON

Nix tosses an a couple wooden chairs into the junk truck. Sweating beneath the sun, he takes off his cap and looks up with exhausted relief at the afternoon sun. Albert comes out of the building and waddles over to him and hands out several twenties.

ALBERT

That should do it. Taking the money, Nix tips his cap at Albert.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Just in time, too. Albert points behind as a pick-up truck overloaded with furniture pulls up to the building.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nix makes his way over to the front step and sits down, rubbing his sore muscles. He cracks open a can of warm soda from his crumpled lunch bag and takes several gulps. Nix then notices a second vehicle rolling past: a familiar olive-colored Mercedes, African music audible from inside. The rough-looking driver can be recognized from earlier. One hand on the wheel and one arm over the seat next to him, he stares coolly ahead as he drives past. He frowns at this, but devotes no more thought to it. Instead, Nix looks once more at the pick-up. He frowns with recognition as the lone Nigeriaese man attempts with effort to yank a bed from the spot is has been wedged it into. Shaking his head, Nix tiredly contemplates his options as the Nigeriaese man continues to struggle mightily with the couch. He rubs his aching muscles as he looks over.

NIX

(whispers)

...Shit.

Finally standing, Nix begins making his way to the truck.

NIX (CONT'D)

Hey.

JARI

What?

NIX

I think we met before. Jari stops and looks back, frustration on his face - but this is replaced by recognition instead.

JARI

Yes.

NIX

Can t remember your name though.

JARI

Jari.

NIX

Behe-

Unable to pronounce it, Nix instead points to the truck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix (CONT'D)

Got anybody to help you with this?

JARI

Not today.

Nix studies Jari and then the truck before nodding.

NIX

Let me give you a hand then.

JARI

I cannot pay-

Hopping up into the back of the truck, Nix grabs the other end of the bed and begins pushing it. Jari watches perplexed for a moment, before finally grabbing his own end.

INT. BUILDING STAIRWELL - AFTERNOON

Jari and Nix work hard moving the furniture up the cramped stairs of the old building.

INT. APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

An exhausted Jari hands Nix a large glass.

JARI

It is all I have. Nix takes the water and begins greedily gulping it back.

JARI (CONT'D)

I did not say it earlier, but thank you for your help. Nodding, Nix finishes the water.

JARI (CONT'D)

My youngest son is home from school soon, and will be hungry for supper. Will you join us? As Jari begins unpacking pots and pans from the boxes, Nix looks around the apartment before nodding appreciatively.

NTX

I could eat.

# INT. APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Nix eats with Jari and Nse around an old kitchen table, dipping their flat bread (Khubz) into four bowls of sauces.

NIX

I'm still trying to picture where exactly Nigeria is.

JARI

It is below Egypt and west of Ethiopia.

Nix listens while trying to copy Jari's eating technique.

JARI (CONT'D)

There was civil war in my country for a very long time, it forced many people to leave. We spent six months in a refugee camp before coming here.

NIX

And you re working at the packing plant now?

Nodding, Jari holds his gnarled hands up for Nix to see.

JARI

From ripping away meat and bone. There was a time when I used to mend both.

NIX

How s that?

JARI

In my country I was a doctor. Jari sadly dips his bread in the sauce.

JARI (CONT'D)

This is something I would not have imagined while in medical school. Nix looks at Nse and then once more at Jari.

NTX

You don t have many friends here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JARI

Some at the church, but I usually avoid most people from my country. When they get together, it is always to talk about the Arabs, tribal identity, grievances. Nothing about being better Canadians.

Jari shakes his head.

JARI (CONT'D)

But it does not matter. I have my two sons to think about: this is the most important thing.

NIX

Two?

Jari only smiles sadly at this.

JARI

I am not sure where my oldest one is today.

Nse looks up and says something to his father in Nuer. Jari answers him back, allowing the young boy to excuse himself from the table.

JARI (CONT'D)

It is very hard sometimes without their mother.

Nix looks back at Jari.

JARI (CONT'D)

She passed away in the refugee camps from a respiratory infection. Though I was a doctor, there was nothing I could do to help her, there were no tools to work with.

NIX

I'm sorry to hear that. They watch Nse as he opens up boxes in the living room.

NIX (CONT'D)

I lost my father when I was eleven in a snowmobile accident. Jari turns back at Nix.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix (CONT'D)

He'd had a few beers before. I guess he'd been cruising ditches outside of town when he hit some dislodged barbed wire from a fence. Nix looks down at his plate.

NIX

They said he didn't feel a thing. But I know he must have, while bleeding out in that snow. He lets out a sad laugh and shakes his head.

NIX (CONT'D)

Drinking beer, getting into snowmobile accidents: you must think we're all a bunch of reckless shitheads over here.

JART

I do not.

The two sit at the table, both men having experienced losses.

INT. CULLEN HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Nix enters the kitchen later in the evening. His mother is up still, doing dishes in the old sink.

MARSHA

How did the job go? He answers by placing the cash from earlier on the counter.

NIX

For groceries: I know it s not much, but I m hoping it helps.

MARSHA

It does.

She pushes a twenty back his way, which Nix tries to reject.

MARSHA (CONT'D)

Put some of it towards your school savings.

Nix concedes, grabbing the bill and sitting down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARSHA

You hungry?

NIX

Nah, had supper tonight already. Marsha begins washing the dishes again.

NIX (CONT'D)

Guy from Nigeria. Lives at the apartments where I was working.

MARSHA

How did you meet him?

NIX

Helped him move in.

MARSHA

I thought the job was to clear out furniture.

NIX

Helped him after.

MARSHA

Did he pay you?

NIX

Couldn t afford it.

MARSHA

So he tricked you into helping him?

NIX

I offered.

MARSHA

These people won t do you any favors, Nix.

NIX

Cooked me supper, didn t he? Marsha continues scrubbing.

NIX (CONT'D)

He was a doctor back in his homeland.

She puts down a plate and wordlessly grabs another.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix (CONT'D)

You don t like the immigrants around here, do you?

MARSHA

Guess I m just a bit jaded, Nix. I hear about the crime, I see how they treat their women like cattle-

NIX

Seen some of our own good old boys around here acting the same way. Marsha reflects on this for a moment: it is obvious she can relate to this statement. She continues silently doing the dishes in the sink. Nix looks down at the kitchen table with slight regret over his statement. The school program sits open before him as he stares at the pages.

### INT. PATRICIA RODEO DANCE - NIGHT

Nix walks with Emmy onto the dance floor, past other dancing couples young and old. Emmy looks absolutely stunning in her cowboy hat and jeans.

**EMMY** 

You remember what to do?

NTX

Think so.

Assuming the lead, he awkwardly takes her one hand and places the other on her hip. She smiles while placing her hand on his shoulder and begins. At first it goes well - near the fourth beat however, he almost trips over the pause. The next few beats are pitiful as well, as he struggles to keep his feet moving.

**EMMY** 

Maybe this isn't the right-

NIX

Wait.

Nix nervously glances back at her for the first few seconds. But this is suddenly replaced with a sudden mischievous and coy look instead as the song ends. As the next one begins, he grabs her hands and begins leading her across the floor. Stunned at this, Emmy matches his sudden speed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The two begin almost flawlessly dancing through the people, like they have been doing it for years. He spins her around, back and forth through the duration of the song. As it ends, a slightly exhausted Emmy looks at Nix with both surprise and shock - he matches this with a cocky grin, his rarely-seen confidence returning during this moment.

**EMMY** 

(breathless)

So.

She looks up at him.

EMMY (CONT'D)

You know how to two-step.

NIX

T do.

**EMMY** 

And you've done it before.

NIX

I have.

**EMMY** 

Lots.

NIX

Up in Saskatoon.

**EMMY** 

Then you tricked me.

NIX

I think of it as more me wanting to surprise you tonight. Emmy shakes her head, now also grinning.

**EMMY** 

Any more surprises, Nix CULLEN?

NIX

Maybe.

Nix reaches for her hand again, about to take her for another spin before suddenly breaking off. He spots an agitated Archie stalking through the crowd toward the two of them. Seeing that Nix has finally noticed him, his uncle begins gesturing impatiently for him to come over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix (CONT'D)

I should go see what he wants. She stands in the middle of the floor as Nix begins making his way to his uncle, dodging incoming dancers as he does so. As people glide past Emmy, she watches as Nix speaks with an animated Archie. The conversation quickly concluded, Nix returns.

NIX

I have to go.

**EMMY** 

(frowns)

Why?

NIX

He told me that we need to-

**EMMY** 

"Told you?"

Still unable to look up, he rubs at the floor with his foot.

NIX

I'll be back.

Emmy watches as he turns and begins walking quickly back toward the impatient Archie, the two making their way out of the crowded dance hall.

EXT. CHEVY TRUCK - NIGHT

Archie and Nix drive down Brooks main street until they reach an avenue overlooking a grocery store. He turns off the truck and puts it into park. They sit in silence for a moment before Nix turns.

NIX

So what's this all about? Archie gestures at the grocery parking lot four blocks away: approximately twenty teenagers loiter and hang around outside, all immigrants of some form or another.

ARCHIE

That s my boy, right there.

NIX

You mean-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

The one that stole my wheels, that s right.

Archie spits his gum out the window.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Been there for hours.

NIX

Which one is he?

ARCHIE

Sitting beside the other nappy in the Senators jersey.

NTX

How can you tell?

ARCHIE

They may all look alike to you, but I can spot the difference. Archie cracks a beer.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Let me tell you something: those people in front of us are an affront to every goddamn sensibility I got left.

(beat)

When we was your age, this old prairie town had a population of four thousand folks. People used to wear their Lakeside jackets with pride, because a guy could make thirteen-dollars an hour just starting out. But now twenty-five years later, Lakeside pays three-dollars less for the same goddamn position. All because they scrapped the unions and started trolling overseas for cheap labor instead. Archie glares at the crowd.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

You got fifty fucking languages being spoken on these streets now: Arabic, Ethiopian, Nigeriaese, Somali. Begs the question, how much more of this shit can a guy take?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

The limp-wrist, liberal bug-chasers claim we re a community in bloom, but I say we re turning into fucking Mogadishu. He looks over.

ARCHIE

Let me qualify that by saying Somalia would be a hell of a fine place if it weren't inhabited by blacks.

The teenagers clearly pass around smuggled booze.

# ARCHIE (CONT'D)

You watch them degenerate shitheads in front of us for a second and then tell me something: would they be as accommodating to us if the tides were turned and we were the ones streaming into their towns—Suddenly the old crew cab pulls in behind. Both Floyd and Sandy climb out and make their way over.

SANDY

You going to tell us now what the fuck's going on?

ARCHIE

Got one of my thieves over there in the parking lot. Wearing the Senators jersey.

SANDY

How do you-

ARCHIE

I fucking know.

SANDY

Ain t even going to argue then. What s the plan?

ARCHIE

Got some Noriega-style psyops shit in mind for these motherfuckers. Archie taps his stereo system and points toward the dashboard of his truck: there a bullhorn sits wired to his stereo.

### (CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ARCHIE (CONT'D) Four white guys ain t going to be able to blaze into a parking lot full of drunken savages, nab one of them, and escape again without first getting swarmed. So we need to use our smarts on this one, distract them a little.

NIX

They're just a bunch of teenagers-

ARCHIE

Shut up, Slim.

Archie then turns to his two brothers.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Me and Nix will take point and roll in first, whip up the hornets nest. While they're busy scattering, you ll cruise in behind and make the grab.

SANDY

(incredulously)

...Shit, it's a plan I guess. Archie proceeds to tap the CD case against the side of his head (like an M16 magazine) before plugging it into the stereo. As the music starts to roll, Ride of the Valkyries swells loudly through the interior truck speakers.

ARCHIE

These fuckers got an instinctual fear for the Germanic shit. You ever seen Apocalypse Now?

NIX

Think so, a long time ago-

ARCHIE

Good enough.

Archie starts the truck and hands Nix the bullhorn.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Hang that bitch out the window. Hold the button down and make sure its pointing in their direction.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Nix complies, extending the bullhorn through the open window. Archie nods at this before flipping a switch: the song begins blaring through the bullhorn. The strings echo loudly through the feedback as Archie tears out of the parking lot.

(MORE)

CONTINUED: (4) (CONT'D) With the song now in full blaze, both trucks roar down the street toward the parking lot. Three blocks.

Nix looks over at Archie, who grins wildly as he drives. Looking back at the crew cab behind them, he notices Floyd leaning out the window while chugging a beer. The wind blows through his ragged hair. Two blocks. The first of several onlookers stop what they are doing and look down the street, some of the paranoid ones dispersing. Archie bites his lip in anticipation. One block. The truck barrels into the parking lot from over top the sidewalk and several planters, nearly hitting a number of the fleeing teenagers as they bounce into the parking lot.

ARCHIE

(screaming)

Run Charlie!

As soon as Samson recognizes the black Chevy pick-up truck, he predictably begins dashing away with the rest. But Sandy jumps out of the second truck and tackles him to the ground. He picks the teenager up and jams him into the backseat of the crew cab. The few remaining teenagers watch as the two trucks peel out of the parking lot and drive off.

# EXT. DARK CLEARING - NIGHT

Samson is tossed onto the ground before Sandy and Floyd. They all turn and watch as Archie grabs an old wood-chopping stump from the back of the truck and tosses it also into the dirt.

#### ARCHIE

Go ahead and hold his hand down while I grab the tools. Samson attempts to scramble away, but Sandy catches him and pulls him back over to where Floyd is preparing the stump. Archie opens the large toolbox in the back of the crew-cab and begins digging inside, producing a small chainsaw.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

I guess your kind is always getting waterboarded by our Yankee neighbors down south, ain t you?

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

You ask me though, that s some pussy-shit compared with what us natives have in store for you here. Floyd watches with wide-eyes as he holds Samson s shaking arm.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

What s the name, character?

SAMSON

...Samson.

ARCHIE

And how long you been in our country?

SAMSON

Since I was seven.

ARCHIE

Well boy, why don t you tell us what they do to thieving cocksuckers over there in your Muslim shithole?

SAMSON

I m not Muslim.

ARCHIE

You ain t?

SAMSON

Christian.

ARCHIE

Well, guess it don't matter what religion you are. In places like the one you're from, I ll tell you what they do: they cut the hands off of said thieving cock-suckers so they can t steal no more.

SAMSON

(terrified)

No, they don t!

ARCHIE

Fuck yeah, they do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Samson

No! They just put them in jail!

ARCHIE

(genuinely surprised)

...No shit?

Samson nods emphatically. Archie contemplates this new development before finally shaking his head and starting up the chainsaw:

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Well, guess we ll start ourselves a little Brooks tradition then. Samson begins screaming and attempting to wiggle free as the two brothers hold him down. Tears flowing down his face, Samson closes his eyes tightly as Archie brings the chainsaw within an inch of his wrist. Nix steps forward and is about to stop him when suddenly a shout emanates from behind:

SANDY (O.C.)

Archie!

Archie pauses and looks up at his brother.

SANDY (CONT'D)

We were only supposed to scare him! Floyd looks up with wide-eyes at his older brother as well. Holding the saw for a moment, Archie revs it several times before pulling it away.

ARCHIE

Looks plenty scared to me. Archie shuts off the saw. As the motor dies down, Samson opens his eyes and first stares with shock at this still-intact hand and then once more at Archie looming over him.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Consider this your fucking probation, Q-tip. Archie picks him up and punches him in the stomach, causing Samson to gasp loudly. Another punch is delivered to his face, followed by several savage kicks after he falls down.

CONTINUED: (3)

ARCHIE (CONT'D) You ever come near my truck again or tell the RCMP what happened here, I ll fucking cut you apart. Farmers will be finding pieces of you all over the countryside, you read me?

Samson manages a weak nod in between wet coughs.

ARCHIE

Toss him the back of the truck. We ll at least be civilized enough to give him a ride back to the highway.

Sandy and Floyd hoist Samson up off the ground and roll him over the edge of the box, into the crew-cab: he lands inside with a heavy thud. Out of earshot from the other two uncles, Nix quickly approaches Archie and stops him.

NIX

If this had been some kid from Strathmore or Brooks, would you have messed him up so badly?

ARCHIE

What did you say?

NIX

You heard me.

Frowning in disbelief, Archie turns toward his nephew.

ARCHIE

You've got some fucking nerve. Nix glances nervously away.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Them crippling liberal flaws inside you are sapping whatever ounce of common sense you got left. He takes an ominous step closer.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Black or white, it doesn t matter. I reserve the right to fuck up any son-of-a-bitch that tries snatching my wheels.

CONTINUED: (4)

Archie finally bumps past his cowed nephew.

ARCHIE

Meet you boys back at the Oxford. Drinks are on me! The other two uncles watch as Archie gets in his pick-up truck and tears out of the clearing. Nix does not move or react as Samson groans from the back of the crew-cab. He then looks back at the wood stump still sitting in the clearing.

FLOYD

Hey Slim.

A still-shocked Nix turns to face his uncle Floyd.

FLOYD (CONT'D)

Been thinking: you ought to cut them sleeves off your shirt. Nix glances incredulously down at his shirt and then back at the genuinely helpful Floyd. Sandy loudly honks the horn, breaking up the strange exchange.

### EXT. PATRICIA RODEO DANCE - NIGHT

Nix walks across the gravel parking lot toward the near-empty dance hall. Many of the cars and trucks have now left, as it is now well past midnight. Spotting Emmy sitting alone on the step, he curses to himself before making his way over and stopping before her.

NIX

Tonight was probably a deal-killer, wasn't it?

EMMY

I'm still here. He sits guiltily down beside.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Any more surprises, Nix CULLEN? Nix stares out into the parking lot, the sounds of an infinite number of crickets chirping in the distance.

CONTINUED:

NTX

You asked me what I did in Saskatoon after graduating. I spent a year in prison. She looks over at him.

NIX (CONT'D)

They were punishing me for drunk driving. Because I ended up hurting someone bad in an accident. Rolled my truck on some empty grid road in the middle of nowhere.

(beat)

Was so out of it that night, I still don't know why we were driving out there in the first place. Certainly don't remember where we came from before that. He closes his eyes, fighting back emotion.

NIX (CONT'D)

He was a friend. Emmy studies him for a moment before finally nodding.

**EMMY** 

I knew that already. He looks over at her with surprise.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Word spreads quickly in Brooks.

NIX

...Right.

Nix grimly looks out into the parking lot.

NIX (CONT'D)

Well I made my bed that night, now I got to sleep in it.

**EMMY** 

What does that even mean?

NIX

It means I got ideas about school, about being the first CULLEN to actually do something with himself.

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix(CONT'D)

But the more I think about it, the more I realize maybe it's all a bunch of bullshit-

**EMMY** 

Why is that bullshit?

NIX

I can't get into school without earning some money-

**EMMY** 

Then get a student loan.

NIX

With a criminal record?

**EMMY** 

I guarantee the government has programs to help rehabilitated-

NIX

They don't even have jobs for rehabilitated guys. I have yet to find even one goddamn-

**EMMY** 

Shut up, Nix.

NIX

What?

**EMMY** 

I said shut up! You said you have a plan for yourself, but all I hear coming out of your mouth right now are a bunch of excuses! Emmy shakes her head.

EMMY (CONT'D)

I mean I wouldn't have waited here if I didn't think there was maybe something between us - but if you expect me to follow you down your uncle's, or even your mom's path, then count me out. Stunned, Nix shakes his head and looks away.

EMMY (CONT'D)

There are options out there for you, Nix.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Emmy(CONT'D) Just give yourself a chance and stop beating yourself up about that damned night! If you have plans in your head, then do something about them and forget about the past!

NIX

Even if those plans take me far away from here? Emmy leans forward, her face imploring.

**EMMY** 

Especially if they do. She then closes her eyes sadly. Though her feelings for Nix clearly rage beneath the surface, she does not act on them. Instead, she merely places her small hand inside his.

EMMY (CONT'D)

You deserve something better. Without another word, the two sit silently on the old wooden steps, the sound of insects and distant party people filling the otherwise peaceful night sky.

INT. BEDROOM (GEBRESILASIE HOME) - NIGHT

Jari wakes up from his sleep to the front door opening. Shuffling sounds and loud banging noise can be heard, as though something from outside has fallen onto the floor. Jari gets up out of bed, angrily putting on a shirt. He opens the door to the bedroom and makes his way into the living room where he sees Samson on the floor.

JART

Samson? Are you drunk? Jari then turns on the light and his eyes widen in shock: his son s clothes are bloody and torn.

(MORE)

JARI (CONT'D)

Immediately sliding down beside Samson, he carefully turns him over to see that his face is swollen and his nose is bleeding.

JARI (CONT'D)

What happened?

But Samson only shakes his head as Jari s doctor instincts begin taking over: he probes for any broken ribs or wounds.

SAMSON

(in Nuer)

...I m sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JARI

Sorry for what? Samson says nothing more, as his father scans his limbs next.

JARI (CONT'D)

Who did this to you? But Samson only shakes his head. Without saying another word, concerned father and bloody son continue to grip each other tightly on the floor of the living room.

FADE TO BLACK.

### INT. TOWN HALL MEETING - EVENING

Archie barks from the audience at a speechless civic representative during a town-hall session. The town hall is a quonset-like building, with old banners and a hundred years of rich history hanging from the walls: framing the image of a once-homogenous (and perhaps somewhat boring) society, white council members and dignitaries, rodeos, oil rigs, farm tractors in the background. In contrast to the diverse crowd that now inhabit the hall.

ARCHIE

-These immigrants that Lakeside are bringing in: they don t pay taxes their first three years, they don t produce any-

Another equally-rough man, RUSS GRIMM, stands up.

RUSS

Come on, that s crap Archie. These people grumble about the deductions coming off their cheques the same way the rest of us do.

ARCHIE

Ain t what I heard!

RUSS

Well you heard wrong. Everybody pays the same taxes in this country, doesn t matter where they re from-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

Tell you what else I ve been hearing: them boys at the plant have been busy recruiting people from any overseas prisons they can-

RUSS

Also bullshit.

Finally fed up, Archie turns and faces his nemesis.

ARCHIE

Then tell me something smart guy: who the hell was it that stole the nineteen-and-eighty-three black Chevrolet off of my driveway last week?

RUSS

How the hell should I know? Did you even bother filing a police report?

ARCHIE

It s a trick question, Copernicus: I know exactly who the fuck it was! The two brothers look nervously over at Archie.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I found my goddamn truck and brought it back!

RUSS

Listen, Archie. All I hear around town these last two weeks is how suddenly you won't shut up about the immigrant situation-

ARCHIE

Call it a goddamned enlightenment, Russ.

Archie turns and points up at the town council:

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Because these assholes here are actually proposing to build a mosque next to the old rodeo grounds now! Twenty years ago, this wouldn't even be a conversation!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

How much more of our heritage are we going to surrender to these foreign-born fucks before- A petite WOMAN in a headscarf stands up from the audience.

WOMAN

Sir, you need to calm down-

ARCHIE

I don t ever remember talking to you, jerk-off!

This causes the entire town-hall to erupt into chaos.

RUSS

I ll bring the RCMP in here if you don t leave!

ARCHIE

We re fucking done here anyhow! You shit-heads can stay behind and keep planning on how to make our goddamn town more of a fucking sewer than it already is! Meantime, me and my brothers will be taking the streets, making a difference!

RUSS

Don t do anything stupid, Archie! Paper and bottles of water are tossed in every direction as the brothers fight their way past several belligerent folk.

INT. CHEVY - MORNING

The next morning, Archie drives by himself down a lone road. Barely cracking the horizon, the sun shines a pale blue over the sky as he begins slowing his truck. Looking out his sidewindow, he studies a run-down trailer. Parked in front of it is a familiar olive-yellow Mercedes. Archie looks ominously down at a piece of paper in his hand: a licence plate number is scrawled out. Nodding darkly, he punches the gas and drives off down the gravel road.

EXT. PARK - MORNING

Nix walks briskly through the park with a bit of urgency. But he suddenly slows upon noticing a familiar figure sitting alone on one of the benches, white cowboy hat in his hands.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIX

Jari?

Jarred from his thoughts, he looks up and manages a smile.

JARI

You finally got the name. Nix frowns with genuine surprise.

NIX

Yeah. Guess I did. He squints through the sunlight.

NIX (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

JARI

An hour before my shift, just came here for some air. Though clearly in a hurry, Nix decides to sit down for a moment on the bench across from Jari.

NIX

You get things squared away in your new place yet?

JARI

Everything is still in boxes. It's been a very hard move, my friend.

NIX

Sorry to hear that. A multitude of thoughts run through Nix s head before he finally looks back at Jari.

NIX (CONT'D)

So why did you come to Brooks anyhow?

JARI

This is a good question. Jari contemplates this.

## (CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Jari (CONT'D) Many people from my country immigrated here before I did, and then they were paid good money to refer others. That is how I first came to know about this place and eventually arrive here.

NIX

Referred anyone yet?

JARI

...No.

Nix looks at the sidewalk, where several ants scurry about.

NIX

How many years did you go to medical school for?

JARI

Many years.

NIX

Where at?

JARI

Khartoum, the capital.

NIX

Have you ever thought of becoming a doctor again in Canada?

JARI

I could not now.

NIX

Why?

JARI

They have made it very hard for a doctor from Nigeria to become one in Canada.

NIX

But there are ways that you could eventually become one again though, right?

JARI

Perhaps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Nix

You should do it then. The Nigeriaese meat packer stares off into the trees.

JARI

I no longer have the skill. He holds up his gnarled hands:

JARI (CONT'D)

It is likely I would probably do more harm than good now. Jari looks at his young friend, his wary eyes betraying years of letdown and wear — but he says nothing for a moment as a cloud begins to block out the sun. Finally, he stirs:

JARI (CONT'D)

My two sons could have grown up in Nigeria, been conscripted into either of the two armies. If they hadn't starved or been killed before, they would have spent their lives living hardened lives, in barracks. Jari shakes his head.

JARI (CONT'D)

There was no future for either of them in our country. So in the end, my coming here was a good thing. He looks over at his friend.

JARI (CONT'D)

I have no regrets. Nix studies his resigned friend for a moment, before genuinely nodding. The two sit in silence once more, before Nix finally points at the white cowboy hat sitting on the knee of Jari:

NIX

Where did you get the hat? Jari looks down at the hat, picking it up off his knee.

JARI

Back home, I sometimes saw cowboys in books and on the television.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Jari(CONT'D) I bought this at the airport the moment we arrived.

NIX

And is that why you wear it, to fit in around Brooks? Jari frowns slightly at the question.

JARI

Is that why I wear this?

NIX

Yeah.

Jari shakes his head before proudly putting it on, tipping it forward a bit as he does so.

JARI

I wear this because it looks good. Nix digests these words for a moment before allowing a smirk. Jari glances back at him, finally offering a goofy and wide smile as well.

NTX

Damn, Jari. When you re right, you re right.

The two finally manage a long laugh over this, one shared between growing friends. Nix is about to say something more, when suddenly he notices a black Chevy pulling roughly into a parking lot down the street. Nix grabs his jacket and stands.

NIX (CONT'D)

It was good seeing you. Surprised, Jari looks up at him with a smile.

JART

You as well.

Nix studies his Nigeriaese friend one last time before regretfully turning and jogging away.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - MORNING

Nix rides with Archie down a narrow gravel road. Slowing, they turn down a pathway and approach an ill-maintained trailer at the end of the lot. Several additions jut out from different parts of it, forming odd rooms and hallways.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIX

After all these years, Floyd still lives in that piece of shit?

ARCHIE

Floyd s got a real easy disposition about him, he don t need much in the way of creature comforts. Archie parks and shuts off the truck.

NIX

Listen, I need to talk to you about something before-

ARCHIE

Not now, Slim. Got a surprise for you inside.

NIX

A surprise-

ARCHIE

Real nifty. You'll see. As the two get out of the truck, a large rooster suddenly charges up to Nix, its wings fiercely outstretched as it approaches. Immediately Nix jumps onto the side of the truck as the rooster attacks his feet.

NIX

Holy shit!

FLOYD

(off camera)

Ah, don t mind the old watch dog! He keeps the place safe when I ain't here.

Nix looks over and sees Floyd descending the wooden steps. Archie walks around the truck and begins petting the rooster.

ARCHIE

Good dog!

The bird watches Nix as it snuggles up to the leg of Archie.

FLOYD

Trained him all its life. Nix nods nervously as he follows his uncles into the trailer.

INT. RUN-DOWN TRAILER (FLOYD) - MOMENTS LATER

They all enter the trailer and sit at the table, where a slightly fatigued Sandy is waiting as well. Archie steps over and places a triumphant arm around Nix.

ARCHIE

Sandy met with our contact last night: his guys moved the skidoos without a hitch. Floyd and Sandy worked the splits accordingly. Sandy pulls out envelopes and hands them to each of them. They all watch as Nix opens his up and brings out a small stack of cash from the envelope: all twenty dollar bills.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Six thousand in there.

NTX

... Holy shit.

Sandy and Floyd exchange glances.

SANDY

So, you going to tell him about our thing tomorrow night?

ARCHIE

Yeah. Been thinking a lot lately about my truck being stolen by those immigrants. Archie stands and looks solemnly out the window.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I've known about one in particular for a real long time now. Lives just outside of Brooks, in a trailer like this one. Calls himself Tampa or some such shit. Word is he s been cooking up some nasty bathtub crank and using some of his buddies in town to run it for him. I reckon it's all that cheap shit that provides them savages with the crazy-courage needed to thieve and steal. The brothers do not notice as Nix looks nervously away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

Three of us here have made the decision: we re going to pay this Tampa a visit and persuade him to relocate his business. That ll be the first step in taking our hometown back from these fuckers.

NIX

(frowns)

Take the town back-

ARCHIE

I'm tired of watching it devolve into a goddamn sewer, Slim.

NIX

So let me get this straight: you guys are drug-using criminals, but you re thinking of becoming vigilantes instead by kicking out drug-dealing immigrants-

ARCHIE

Fuckin' A!

NIX

Even though you're sitting here moments after splitting money from a robbery-

ARCHIE

Listen! We ain t never stole nothing from the town of Brooks itself. That's something you need to make good and sure to remember.

FLOYD

Except for the local Pro Shop: we broke into that one night.

ARCHIE

Ted Florentine is a fucking prick! And besides that, the goddamn guy came up from Taber.

NIX

Look guys, maybe you should do this one without me-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SANDY

So now that you got paid, you're starting to get selective on us?

NIX

No, I just-

ARCHIE

Bottom line is that regardless of whatever misgivings you might have, you need to make sure you re available tomorrow night. Archie looks out the window.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

And I ain't asking. Nix looks nervously around at his uncles, barely able to hide his discomfort at the situation. Archie suddenly shifts gears, his face once more adorned by a smirk.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Meantime though, we're going to celebrate our haul here by getting ourselves hooched up. As the uncles hoot and holler, Nix looks down at the stuffed envelope in his hand. A gamut of emotions run through his head as he stares at the folds of cash jutting out from it.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Nix and Archie sit on the hood of the Chevy, each drinking from their own six-pack. Floyd and Sandy can be seen commiserating by themselves off in the distance. Staring grimly at the gravel road, Nix finally shakes his head.

NIX

There's something I need to talk to you about.

He brushes several rocks away with his runner.

NIX (CONT'D)

I don't think I can do this anymore.

ARCHIE

Do what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NTX

Roll with you guys. Archie looks over at his nephew for the first time.

NIX (CONT'D)

I just can't get it out of my mind, how badly you messed up that kid-

ARCHTE

And a lot of people in the world won t get supper tonight either. So what, life s fucking tough. Archie cracks a smirk at this, but Nix does not reciprocate.

NIX

Just feels like I ve been taking nothing but the low road ever since coming back here.

ARCHIE

High road s a dead end.

NIX

But at least a guy can still look himself in the mirror.

ARCHIE

You think you can look yourself in the mirror while making minimal wage and barely scraping by?

NTX

Listen, I got a taste of what kind of shit-jobs there are in the world, and the prospects don t exactly excite me much-

ARCHIE

Then keep earning. With us. Nix says nothing.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

All right, I understand I've been on a bit of a crusade as of late. But you got paid today, pocketed yourself some good money.

NIX

No argument there-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ARCHIE

Then fucking speak on it. Nix looks down at the gravel and kicks away several pebbles.

NIX

It's just, when I came to you guys, I was desperate-

ARCHIE

And now you ain't?

NIX

I'm starting to understand there's other options out there. Archie chuckles under his breath.

NIX (CONT'D)

I got myself some plans, had them for a while now. I just didn't want to tell you, because I figured-

ARCHIE

What kind of plans?

NIX

Going back to school.

ARCHIE

Back to school?

NIX

That's right.

ARCHIE

Even with all your mother's problems?

NIX

I'm guessing she'd agree with my decision.

Nix looks over at his uncle.

NIX (CONT'D)

Been looking at a course. Pipe fitting, it might be something worth-

ARCHIE

Pipe fitting?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Nix

That's right.

ARCHTE

Listen Slim. You don't go to some fancy school to learn a fucking trade, you get it by working out in the goddamn world-

NIX

Knew you wouldn't approve.

ARCHIE

How the fuck can I? You got yourself a good gig right here, with us!

NIX

It's already decided. I'm doing it.

ARCHIE

And the cash earned from our score made all this possible.

NIX

Tt. did.

Archie snorts, causing Nix to immediately frown:

NIX (CONT'D)

Listen, I took the same risk that night as the rest of you! I'm not going to feel guilty about taking the cash and-

ARCHIE

Fucking off?

Nix does not answer, continuing to glare at his grim uncle. Archie looks down at his hand and studies the back for a second, each of his strong fingers flexing in the moonlight.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Let's table this discussion until tomorrow night. Nix looks over at him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ARCHIE (CONT'D) We going to need all the muscle we can muster, in case this Tampa character decides he wants to get militant on our asses.

NTX

This isn't a good idea-

ARCHIE

Goddamn it, Slim, we came through when you needed us! Now I need you to do the same for me. Archie leans forward.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Once we've finished up with that, you and I will sit down nice, have ourselves a family discourse on how best to part ways. Nix does not respond.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I promise.

The young nephew continues to study him for a long moment before finally nodding with reluctance.

NIX

Tomorrow night then. Archie nods.

Contemplating this for a moment, Nix looks over at his uncle and silently raises his beer: almost in a gentleman s pledge. Archie peers at the offering and reluctantly returns the gesture, darkly touching his can against Nix s. The two sit in silence for a moment before Nix finally pushes himself up off the truck and begins walking away to relieve himself in the nearby ditch.

ARCHIE

Hey Slim.

Nix stops and looks back.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Where you going to be when the war finally starts?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Nix

...What war?

ARCHIE

With them reds in China. Nix watches Archie with growing apprehension.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Them nuke birds are going to come flying across our borders eventually, you can depend on that. Archie studies his can of beer.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

And when them bombs finally do start dropping, our little world here is going to be changed forever.

Archies squints sadly.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

You'll wish you was still with us. Nix stares at his increasingly erratic and glum uncle for a moment with a frown, unsure of how to respond. Finally he turns once more and continues walking off into the ditch without a response.

EXT. RANCH PORCH - NIGHT

Nix knocks on the door and waits, swaying a bit on his feet. Emmy finally opens the front and screen door.

**EMMY** 

Nix?

Though Nix smiles, Emmy can tell through his behavior that he is deeply affected by something.

EMMY (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

NIX

I'm going to do it. He takes her hand and sits with her on the porch bench.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIX

I just told my uncle that after tomorrow night I don't want anything more to do with him.

**EMMY** 

What?

NIX

Not him, not Sandy, not Floyd. Emmy wraps her slender arms around him as his eyes begin welling up with tears.

**EMMY** 

I know it must hurt-

NIX

No. It feels good. Nix turns and looks at her.

NIX (CONT'D)

It feels really good. He swallows.

NIX (CONT'D)

I'm going to do it, I'm going back to school to take that course. And when I graduate and get a decent job, I can start sending some money back to my mom and helping her through her thing.

**EMMY** 

That's so great, Nix! But Nix suddenly glances away, his face portending a small sense of sadness.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Isn't it?

NTX

I don't know.

He looks back at her with conflicted emotions. Emmy suddenly pulls him closer and begins kissing softly around his mouth as it trembles slightly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Unable to finish, Nix closes his eyes and begins reciprocating, expunging the final vestiges of fear as he does so. The two continue to kiss each other on the darkened porch, the insects sounding off in the distance.

#### EXT. ARCHIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Archie comes barreling around the corner in his truck, music blaring. He drives up on his lawn and turns sharply onto the drive-way. But he pushes the brakes a bit too late as the truck slides loudly against the front of the garage. Archie shuts off the vehicle and spills out, alone and even more drunk than before. He plops down and rests defeated back against the bumper. Taking several gulps from his bottle of Vodka, he begins to laugh bitterly.

#### ARCHIE

You motherfucker. Slumping his head back against his beloved Chevy, the laughter suddenly turns into tears.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

...You goddamn motherfucker. The moon shines down upon Archie as he sobs to himself.

FADE TO BLACK.

### INT. LAKESIDE MEAT PACKING PLANT - EVENING

Jari works side-by-side with his son on the de-boning line. His face still swollen and one eye red still, Samson does an admirable job of cutting away the meat.

INT. LAKESIDE MEAT PACKING PLANT (LOCKER ROOM) - EVENING

Jari and Samson change into their civilian clothes. The rest of the room is empty, save for the two.

#### SAMSON

I cannot stand the blood. It reminds me of home.

#### JARI

It reminds me of the same thing. But we must put all that out of mind and continue working here. There is little choice in this. After putting on his shirt, Jari sits down onto the bench and looks over at his sons bruised body.

(CONTINUED)

JARI

(in Nuer)

You will never tell me who did this, will you? Samson finishing buttoning up his own shirt, but says nothing.

JARI (CONT'D)

(in Nuer)

We could tell the RCMP about what happened, file a report. Here the police are different.

SAMSON

That would be the worst thing we could do.

Samson sits down beside his father.

SAMSON (CONT'D)

What happened that night, I want to leave behind forever.

JARI

I do not understand.

SAMSON

In Nigeria, I remember the violence. But I didn t realize that it could exist here too - until that night. I know about the school fights and small things, but I did not understand that people here are as insane as the ones back home. Samson finally looks up at his father, tears welling.

SAMSON (CONT'D)

They are just as insane. Jari places a hand on the shoulder of his son.

SAMSON (CONT'D)

I was so scared. Father pulls his son close.

SAMSON (CONT'D)

I never want to feel that again.

JARI

Then you will not.

CONTINUED: (2)

The two sit in the locker room, fathers arm around his son. Their work clothes sit beside them, covered in blood.

#### INT. CULLEN HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Nix sits in the living room, the envelope of cash held firmly in his hands. A mixture of both anticipation and guilt mar his face as he studies the money intently, the bills poking out from the top of the envelope. He then looks over at the open school program, the student loan guidelines circled and marked up, his mind racing with thoughts and emotion. A pair of headlights suddenly shine through the window curtains, followed by a horn sounding off. With growing angst, Nix carefully places the envelope beneath the couch. Once it is safely stashed away, he grabs his jacket and slowly makes his way to the front door.

#### INT. ARCHIES TRUCK - NIGHT

Nix sits in the back-seat with Sandy, staring grimly out the window into the passing night. A severely hung over Archie suffers in the front seat as Floyd drives in silence. The truck pulls off the gravel grid and onto a smaller dirt road leading to a parked trailer. Cutting the engine, they lets the truck roll the last hundred meters into the yard where an even worst-kept trailer than Floyd s sits. The four men get out and creep past an old, olive-colored Mercedes and up to the dimly-lit habitat. Nix looks at the car with recognition, but thinks nothing more of it. As they crouch down beside the parked car, the sound of African rap can be heard from inside trailer.

ARCHIE

All right, I'm going to kick the door in and-

FLOYD

Let me kick the bitch in.

ARCHIE

(shakes his head) Nah, I better have a go.

FLOYD

Come on big brother, I ain t never knocked down a door before!

CONTINUED:

NIX

(sarcastic)

You want to flip a coin? Archie glances back at Nix and then once more at Floyd, a sudden selfless look appearing on his face.

ARCHIE

Nah, fuck it. Go ahead then.

FLOYD

Thank you. Means a lot. Floyd comes up to and assesses the door with a wide smile. After taking several seconds to line it up with his foot, he proceeds to bash it open. They all storm loudly into the trailer, waking the hazy black man in his early-thirties, TAMPA, from whatever sleep- deprived slumber he was in. First in, Floyd picks him up by his hair and tosses him into the side of the cupboard.

ARCHIE

You're going out of business as of right now.

TAMPA

(heavy accent)

What are you talking about, business is great!

ARCHIE

Not anymore it ain t. Archie begins looking around the apartment, picking up pans and various mineral spirits.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

You re going to buy yourself a bus ticket someplace far away from here, preferably out-of-province. Floyd holds a gas can and lighter in his hand.

FLOYD

This trailer is a fire hazard.

CONTINUED: (2)

ARCHIE

If it went up one day, them fire fighters would know right away it was because of all them goddamn Coleman cans and bags of fertilizer you got laying around.

SANDY

And it will fucking blaze up if you stay here.

ТАМРА

You would not-

Archie stomps down on his fingers, causing Tampa to scream.

TAMPA (CONT'D)

All right! I will leave!

ARCHIE

That s all we re asking here, boy: take your crank to some other town and peddle it there. The drug dealer quickly begins nodding in pain.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

When?

TAMPA

Tomorrow?

ARCHIE

How about tonight. Clean your black ass up and catch the first Greyhound out of here.

TAMPA

Tonight.

ARCHIE

That's right. We'll be coming back to make sure you've vacated. Archie turns and signals for them to all depart the trailer, as a sobbing Tampa begins crawling back to his sitting area. As they are leaving, Floyd suddenly looks with surprise as Tampa produces a small pistol from the chair cushions (with his intact hand) and quickly fires it.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Stumbling backwards, Archie slips and falls onto the floor as the other three panicked men scamper out of the trailer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Floyd picks himself off the ground and begins running back toward the truck with the others.

SANDY

I think Archie s been hit! Nix crouches down beside the truck and watches as Floyd opens the door and reaches beneath the seat.

NTX

What are you doing? But Floyd says nothing as he pulls out his own .22 pistol and begins loading it with trembling hands. Several times, he drops the clip onto the floor of the truck before finally managing to slide it into the pistol chassis.

NIX (CONT'D)

Don t do it.

Floyd pushes back toward the trailer fifteen yards away. Through the window, Tampa can be seen standing motionless and in a dumbfounded daze as he stares down at Archie. Gritting his teeth, Floyd raises the pistol and opens fire with three shots: the window shatters and Tampa can be seen quickly clutching his neck before falling from view. Sandy and Nix watch as Floyd runs back to the trailer. Peering inside, he sees both Archie and Tampa sprawled out.

FLOYD

Archie!

Archie mumbles something as he clutches his side, a small pool gathering beneath him. With furious anger on his face, Floyd steps over his brother and storms over toward Tampa. Sandy and Nix also come into the trailer, in time to see Floyd raise the pistol and points it at the gurgling Somali.

ARCHIE

Don t-

Floyd ignores this, firing two more kill-shots into Tampa. Nix turns away in shock. The trailer remains deathly silent until Archie finally shifts wetly on the floor. Sandy makes his way over to his brother, nearly slipping on the blood that has accumulated on the cheap plastic tile. Through grit teeth, Archie glares angrily over at Floyd.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ARCHIE (CONT'D) You executed him, motherfucker! I can t go to no hospital now without all of us being arrested! Trembling, Floyd does not turn to face his brother.

ARCHIE

We re all fucked now! It won t take the goddamn RCMP long to figure out what the hell happened here! With tears in his eyes, Floyd guiltily shakes his head.

FLOYD

I m sorry.

Grimacing in pain, Archie glares at his sorrowful brother for a moment before then looking away and nodding.

ARCHIE

I know you meant well by it, Floyd. His face softening a bit, Archie looks down at the ground.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

I know that.

SANDY

We're taking you to a doctor.

ARCHIE

No, here s the deal: you going to bring me home so I can cauterize this bitch shut and get some rest. If I wake up in the morning, we can figure something out-

SANDY

You ain t going to wake up at all if we do that.

ARCHIE

Then fuck it, I guess I'll roll the dice and see what's on the other-

NIX

Wait. I know somebody.

SANDY

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Nix

He used to be a doctor. The three brothers look back over at  ${\tt Nix.}$ 

NIX

He owes me a favor.

FLOYD

Then get his ass over here.

NIX

I don t know his phone number, we have to go over to his place. They all look at each other, before Sandy finally nods:

SANDY

All right, let s do it. Archie shouts in pain as he is picked up off the floor.

INT. CREW-CAB TRUCK - NIGHT

Nix sits in the back-seat with Archie as they speed down the gravel road back into town. Blanketed with a jacket and trembling violently, Archie glances over at his young nephew.

ARCHIE

Hell of a fucking thing. Nix tucks the jacket tighter around his uncle.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Always wondered what it felt like getting shot.

NIX

How does it feel?

ARCHTE

Other than the pain, not too bad. Chuckling grimly, Archie then coughs and rests his head back.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Truth be known, I was born about two hundred years too late. Never had the sensibility for these last few centuries.

Grimacing as they hit several bumps, Archie shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARCHIE

Fucking law, jurisprudence, political correctness - spend what we owe, kiss before we fuck. In the end it s all horseshit. Archie closes his eyes.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)

Civilization s a cunt. Nix does not move, though there are tears in his eyes. Through the windshield ahead, the first lights from Brooks can be seen coming closer.

EXT. OLD APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Nix buzzes the apartment number belonging to Jari.

JARI

(answering groggily)

Hello?

NIX

It s me, it s Nix.

JARI

What are you doing? It s so late.

NIX

My uncle has been shot and we can t take him to the hospital! I got nowhere else to go. Silence for a moment. NIX (CONT'D)

I need your help, Jari. Several more seconds pass before the door buzzes open. Nix motions frantically as the uncles begin unloading Archie.

INT. OLD APARTMENTS - NIGHT

The two uncles follow Nix as they haul a moaning Archie into the apartment. Jari closes the door behind as the brothers quickly lay Archie down on the yellow plastic tile.

JARI

What happened here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FLOYD

He took a fucking bullet, that s what happened.

JARI

Then you must take him to the hospital immediately!

NTX

He s in trouble with the law.

JART

He is a criminal?

SANDY

That's right.

NIX

You re a doctor though. It's in your oath to help my uncle out. There s no way the police will hold that against you. Jari looks over at Sandy and then back at Nix, his face housing both fear and confusion. But despite this, he allows a quick nod and kneels down beside Archie on the floor.

JARI

Have his hands or feet moved?

FLOYD

Thought I saw his hands. Jari begins checking for breathing and circulation.

SANDY

Can we give him some water or something?

JARI

Cannot give him water right now. Let me work.

Gently probing the body with his gnarled and damaged hands, Jari closes his eyes in concentration. Archie moans several times as Jari expertly locates the wound through the soaked layers of blood and clothing. He next lifts him and probes his back: there is no exit-wound.

JARI (CONT'D)

In that box, there are some towels. Please bring them all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nix nods and makes his way over to the packing box, but suddenly he notices Samson standing fearfully in the doorway. His young brother Nse is also beside him. Gathering up every ounce of courage, Samson makes his way over to his father and puts a trembling hand on his shoulder. Jari looks back at his frightened son and frowns.

JARI

Samson.

SAMSON

(in Nuer)

These men beat me. Jari stops what he is doing, removing his hands from.

JARI

What?

SAMSON

(in Nuer)

These are the men that beat me.

JART

Which ones did this? Floyd and Sandy look over at each other, as they too recognize the trembling Samson.

SAMSON

These three.

Jari stands up and faces both Sandy and Floyd.

JARI

You beat my son?

SANDY

Don t know what you re talking-

JARI

For three days, my son was bound to his bed because of what you did.

FLOYD

He stole our brothers truck-

JARI

He is a child!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SANDY

And that s our brother on the floor there, who will die if you don t keep working on him!

JARI

I do not care anymore about your brother!

Lunging at Sandy, Jari attempts to grab his shirt - but Floyd tosses him roughly back into the counter.

NIX

Stop this!

But everyone ignores him as Samson feebly attacks Floyd, who in turn punches him in the face. The teenager drops to the floor, the one hit in the sweet-spot enough to stun him.

SANDY

You motherfucker, you need to help our brother right now!

JARI

I will not!

As Jari and the two brothers struggle, Nix kneels down beside his uncle and waves a hand in front of his eyes. There is no movement. He sits motionless for a moment before slumping back.

NIX

...He s gone.

FLOYD

What did you say?

NIX

He s dead.

Sandy takes a sluggish step back away from Jari as Floyd combats a flood of his own emotions.

SANDY

(fighting back tears)

... Archie?

Sandy kneels and begins gently shaking his brother, but there is no response as Archie stares into the beyond.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

FLOYD

You piece of shit. Jari looks first to Samson who sits dazed on the floor, and then speechless over at the body of Archie.

FLOYD

You let our brother die. Sandy also stands up as Floyd begins digging for the pistol in the back of his pants - but Nix suddenly dashes forward, pulling out before the his uncle can. Both Sandy and Floyd turn toward Nix, who now points the gun directly at them.

NTX

I seen you motherfuckers hurt too many people. But you're not going to hurt this one.

FLOYD

That s my goddamn gun.

NIX

I don't give a shit.

FLOYD

So what the fuck are you going to do now?

NIX

Shoot you. If you don t leave this apartment right now, that s exactly what I m going to do.

FLOYD

We ain t leaving our brother here.

NIX

Take him with.

FLOYD

You re really going to turn your back on blood?

NIX

If this is blood, then I don t want anything more to do with it. After some contemplation, the brothers hoist Archie up. A string of coagulating blood also lifts up behind his torso.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

SANDY

We re all going to prison because of this. And believe you me, you re coming with.

NIX

(defiant)

Been there before, I can handle it again.

The uncles glare at Nix one last time before turning and carrying their expired brother out the door. Standing motionless, Nix lowers the gun back down to his side. Jari quickly makes his way over to Nse and Samson, clutching them both before looking back toward Nix.

JARI

I did not know this about you. Ashamed, Nix lowers his head slightly.

NIX

I m sorry.

Jari says nothing.

NIX (CONT'D)

For your son.

Nix walks over to the kitchen window and watches as the crewcab races off down the street. He then faces Jari and his family once more, who silently stare back.

NIX (CONT'D)

For all this.

Shaking his head instead with both remorse and shock, Nix turns and also makes his leave of the apartment. He carefully shuts the door behind him as he does so. Jari and his sons stand motionless on the bloody floor: the old and outdated yellow tiles, tacky beneath the expanding crimson pool. Jari, the Nigeriaese doctor, gently breaks away from his children and takes a long moment to study his rough hands. They are indeed gnarled - but perhaps still able.

EXT. OLD APARTMENTS - EARLY MORNING

Nix emerges from the old apartments and begins walking down the alley behind.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The rising sun can now be seen slightly, bathing the streets in an blue morning glow. He reaches and drops the pistol into a garbage can as he continues walking.

INT. CULLEN HOUSEHOLD - MORNING

Nix enters the house, closing the door with an unsteady hand. From the kitchen, his mother can be heard frying some eggs.

MARSHA (O.C.)

(from the kitchen)

Is that you, Nix? Nix answers, his voice cracking.

NIX

Yeah.

MARSHA (O.C.)

You just get in?

NIX

Yeah.

Nix stares sadly at the worn carpet before him. Sounds of cupboards closing and pans clattering continue to permeate from the kitchen.

MARSHA (O.C.)

You want anything to eat? Nix walks over and pulls the envelope from beneath the couch.

NIX

Going out again for a walk.

MARSHA (O.C.)

You sure? I can cook you up an egg or something.

NTX

No, thanks.

More clattering from inside the kitchen as he carefully places the cash-filled envelope down on the table, on top of the stacks of bills, coupons and receipts. Nix then glances around the living room: so many memories in this small home.

MARSHA (O.C.)

See you in a bit then?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Picking up the old cell phone from the table beside him, Nix nods emptily back toward the doorway of the kitchen where his unseen mother continues to cook.

NIX

... See you, mom. He then makes his way to the front door and with shame leaves the old CULLEN house once more.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Nix walks down the street near the Brooks outskirts, hands in his pockets. Additional sirens can be heard in the distance.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - MORNING

Nix continues down a gravel road. The morning sun hangs higher in the sky now, an indication that he has been walking for upwards of an hour now.

EXT. RANCH - MORNING

Nix makes his way up the long half-mile driveway up to the Hegel house. Emmy can be seen up early and feeding several excited dogs in the yard. Upon noticing Nix approaching, she turns and smiles with surprise.

**EMMY** 

Nix?

He stops in front of her, sweating under the sun.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Where did you park?

NTX

Didn't drive.

**EMMY** 

Then how-

NIX

I walked.

**EMMY** 

What? How many hours did that take? You should have called, I would have picked-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NIX

There's something I need to tell you.

He looks up at her, eyes imploring.

NIX (CONT'D)

It couldn't wait.

**EMMY** 

...All right.

Nix gently takes her hands in his.

NIX

I just needed to say thank you. For everything.

**EMMY** 

I don't understand.

NIX

Something's come up. I'm going to be going away for a while, I don't know for how long. Nix looks down at the gravel at his feet.

NIX (CONT'D)

I'll get through it though, don't want you to worry.

**EMMY** 

What are you-

Her face suddenly sinks with realization.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Your uncles.

Nix looks quickly away, confirming her suspicions.

EMMY (CONT'D)

Oh no-

NTX

I meant it when I said I'm not a part of them anymore. So whatever you hear these next few days, just absolutely know I was being straight with you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She slowly nods.

**EMMY** 

I believe you.

Over his shoulder, she suddenly notices for the first time and RCMP cruiser coming cautiously down the long driveway. Nix looks back and sees them approaching as well.

NIX

I let them know I'd be here. Though her love for him has clearly not diminished in the slightest, Emmy's eyes tremble with deep sadness. She looks away after a long moment.

**EMMY** 

Any more surprises, Nix CULLEN? Offering a demure smile, Nix shakes his head. He studies her a final time.

NIX

No.

Crestfallen, he glances once more at the cruiser where the two MOUNTIES have gotten out. Emmy and Nix say nothing more. Their fingers loosen their grip with one another, until finally falling apart. The two continue to stare each other, hands by their sides for what seems like an eternity. Nix slowly turns and begins making his way back down the long driveway toward the waiting officers. Emmy does not move. As he continues down the driveway, Nix takes a moment to look into the blue sky where the sun is hidden by a single cloud. The warm, fractured rays shine gently down and caress his

exhausted face.

Nix closes his eyes.