

BRINGING HIM BACK

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL STADIUM - OMAHA - NIGHT (2010)

Stadium lights radiate through a chilly fog as a Friday night tradition plays out. A raucous blue collar home crowd cheers as their football team drives the ball.

SUPER: "Six years ago."

A scoreboard shows "21-17" with the Visitor ahead and "18 seconds" left in the fourth quarter.

A nervous visitor HEAD COACH and visitor DEFENSIVE COACH pace the sideline.

HEAD COACH  
Damn it, Bob! They're running  
right through us.

DEFENSIVE COACH  
Give me Jaeger back.

HEAD COACH  
Hell no!

ON THE FIELD

another play by the home team brings the ball within four yards of the end zone. The head coach relents.

HEAD COACH  
Jaeger! Get up here!

An imposing athletic figure, ALEX JAEGER, rises from the bench. Alex, a teen about himself and clueless of the past.

His jersey shows 'forty-eight". He saunters to the sideline.

ALEX  
Yea.

HEAD COACH  
Get your butt out there.

ALEX  
You're the one took me out.

HEAD COACH  
Yea, three-quarter game suspension.  
Now go, go!

ON THE HOME TEAM SIDELINE

the HOME TEAM COACH sees Alex return.

HOME TEAM COACH  
Son-of-a-! Time-out ref, time-out!

He brings his quarterback to the sideline.

HOME TEAM COACH (CONT'D)  
Listen, if forty eight lines up  
left, you call Twenty-eight Sweep  
Right. If he lines up right, you  
call Twenty-nine Sweep Left. Keep  
it away from forty-eight!

Quarterback nods affirmative, runs back to the huddle.

AT THE VISITOR TEAM HUDDLE - SAME

ALEX  
Watch the outside!

DEFENSIVE CAPITAN  
I'm captain here, Jaeger!

ALEX  
Whatever.

SMALL DEFENSIVE PLAYER  
You'd be captain if you weren't  
such a dick.

ALEX  
Shut up, Kowalski!

Alex thumps him, sending him on his butt.

DEFENSIVE CAPTAIN  
You shut up, Jaeger! Just make the  
play and we get the hell out of  
this 'hood. Four-three Monster,  
now break!

On a quick count, the home team quarterback pitches to a  
running back. The sweep goes opposite Alex's linebacker  
position. Alex runs down and tackles the back at the line of  
scrimmage.

Alex shakes a finger in his face.

ALEX  
No, no, not going anywhere Jamal!

The offended running back doesn't retaliate. Teams huddle.

AT THE VISITOR TEAM HUDDLE

DEFENSIVE CAPTAIN

We got this! Hold 'em one more time.  
Six-five Goal Line, now break!

AT THE LINE OF SCRIMMAGE

Alex spies a gap and readies himself. At HIKE, he crushes a lineman and devours the frightened quarterback. The ball shoots loose. Alex's team recovers.

Alex stands menacingly over his victim.

HOME TEAM PLAYER

Helmet to helmet! Call it ref!

ALEX

Clean hit, clean hit!

A REFEREE shakes his head negative and his WHISTLE blows.

The visitor team swarms Alex with congratulations. Unaffected, Alex jogs past coaches coming out to shake hands.

DEFENSIVE COACH

Wish we had him another year.

HEAD COACH

Couldn't stand him if we did.

FROM THE STANDS

a chorus of BOOS radiate down upon Alex.

ALEX

(to crowd)

Yea, that's right, I did that!

A lone exception holds a swaddled baby at the tunnel entrance. MELISSA is an attractive girl about Alex's age.

MELISSA

Good job, Alex!

Alex acknowledges Melissa with a reluctant wave.

AT THE LOCKER ROOM DOOR

a FAT SECURITY COP steps in front of Alex and pokes Alex's chest.

FAT SECURITY COP  
They should have kept you out!

Alex flips him off and continues toward the locker room.

FAT SECURITY COP (CONT'D)  
Whoa, big boy! That will cost ya.

The Fat Security Cop grabs Alex. Alex's face maddens. He swings around and punches him.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

An elder JUDGE at the bench of an uncrowded courtroom. Alex, his forgiving mother LISA JAEGER (50's), Alex's ATTORNEY as well as an opposing attorney and Fat Security Cop present.

JUDGE  
Mr. Jaeger, see this is the second time your face has graced a court. Congratulations on that. Now, while security may have been out of line,...

Black and blue peek out beyond bandages over the Fat Security Cop's nose.

JUDGE (CONT'D)  
... I will not let your actions go unpunished. I'm ordering that you be confined to your home for a period of 30 days. Allowances being made for necessary medical appointments and alternative school. You'll also attend counseling. Case dismissed.

SLAM of a gavel. Alex and his attorney ready to leave.

ALEX  
(to Attorney)  
That's bullshit.

ATTORNEY  
Shh! Be glad you got off easy.

ALEX  
No!

JUDGE  
Is there a problem?

ATTORNEY  
No, no Your Honor. I'm very sorry.

The attorney ushers Alex away. Alex turns back.

ALEX  
I said, this is bull --

A voice trumpets from the back.

JACK (O.S.)  
-- Alexander!

Everyone turns. At the back, an elder man in a wheelchair and an elder black man.

The wheelchair carries Alex's grandfather, JACK JAEGER. Jack (87) is frail, but his dignity transcends his condition.

LISA  
Dad?

ALEX  
Grandpa?

JUDGE  
Well I'll be. Hello, Jack.

Jack wheels himself to the front.

JACK  
Your Honor. I hate to press, but may I speak?

JUDGE  
Oh now Jack, don't be so formal.

JACK  
Okay, Sam. First, I apologize for my grandson's behavior. He has much to learn. Second, it might seem trivial, but I ask that Alex be allowed a visit to my home. I believe it will do the boy some good.

JUDGE  
(chuckling)  
So Alex, this is your grandpa?

ALEX  
Yea, uh, yea sir.

JUDGE

Well, you are a lucky man. I should give you another month for that outburst.

(considers)

Arrange a visit with the officer. And son, if there's anyone you would do well to listen to, it would be your grandfather.

EXT. ALEX'S HOME - DAY

A newer, well-equipped pickup pulls into a driveway of an upper middle class home. Alex exits the driver's side, Lisa exits the passenger's.

INT. ALEX'S HOME - DAY

Alex launches up steps.

LISA

Alex, we still need to talk.

Nothing.

LISA (CONT'D)

Alex!

He pauses his climb.

ALEX

What!

Lisa crumbles, Alex grumbles. She follows him up.

IN ALEX'S BEDROOM

Alex begins a video game in a room littered with sports memorabilia, trophies, and ribbons. Lisa enters.

LISA

Do you realize the effort grandpa made to be there?

ALEX

Yea.

LISA

Do you appreciate it?

ALEX  
Appreciate you taking this crap off.

Alex lifts his leg to reveal a police ankle bracelet.

LISA  
Alex! I'm serious.

ALEX  
Yea, whatever, I appreciate you, I appreciate grandpa. Now go away before you chase me away too.

Lisa stomps in frustration.

LISA  
Ugh! Do you understand all you have? Do you appreciate anything? I'm the one who stayed, Alex! I'm the one that works all day, comes home and makes you dinner, does your laundry. I'm the one who took you to all the practices, tournaments, games. I've got major bleacher butt because of you!

No visible reaction.

ALEX  
All because you don't have a life of your own.

Lisa sulks away.

LISA  
(sadly)  
Maybe so.

EXT. JACK'S STREET/HOME - DAY

An older van drives down a street lined with 1950s era tract homes. A faded "LOUIS AND THE JAZZARIFICS" graphic lines the van's side.

The street ends in a circle. In contrast to the tract homes, a much larger, elegant home stands on a large lot at the terminus of that circle. The van pulls into the driveway of the large home.

The elder black man exits and readies Jack's wheelchair as Jack exits.

JACK  
Thank you for taking me.



The black man holds out his hand.

BLACK MAN  
(sternly)  
Where's my tip?

JACK  
Find something better to do than  
cart an old fart around all day.

The man breaks into a warm smile. This is LOUIS, a gentleman brimming of decency and kindness.

LOUIS  
Now, now, Jack, you only got a few  
years on me. Just glad you're  
outta that damn hospital.

Jack taps his heart.

JACK  
Not much they can do, Louis. At my  
age, if it bursts, it bursts.

Louis wheels Jack towards the front door.

LOUIS  
You know, Jack, you could move out  
of this big old house and into that  
Elm Creek Village. It's nice, right  
next to the hospital.

Jack gazes upon his home.

JACK  
I know, Louis, I know. But this,  
this is where my memories live.

LOUIS  
Always been about memories my  
friend, you always have.

INT. JACK'S HOME - DAY

Jack wheels himself through the doorway. A dated decor, but warm and well done. Abundant photos and other mementos suggest a full life.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

an array of family photos adorn a table. Jack picks up a framed photo of a toddling "ALEX AND JACK FISHING". He runs his finger across the photo and closes his eyes.

JACK

Dear Lord, I fear for Alex. So much has been taken from him, yet so much more has been given. Thank you for allowing me to show him this.

Jack gazes upward.

JACK (CONT'D)

Thank you for granting me this one last wish.

EXT. JACK'S HOME - NIGHT

Drizzle, on that fine line between rain and ice. Alex jumps from his truck and jogs to the curb where an older muscle car waits, engine running and blaring heavy metal.

In the driver seat, TATTOO GIRL. Naughty, not nice.

ALEX

See where it is now?

TATTOO GIRL

Yea. So what's the plan?

ALEX

Soon as I can get outta here I'll call and you pick me up. If anyone checks, they see my truck and think I'm still here.

TATTOO GIRL

And your grandpa?

Alex looks back to the house.

ALEX

He won't know, he's old.

TATTOO GIRL

Make it quick. Remember, my roommate's gone.

ALEX

Two more months and I'm the roommate.

TATOO GIRL  
Can't wait.

Tattoo Girl licks her lips, shakes her boobs and speeds away.

ALEX  
Damn!

INT. JACK'S HOME - ENTRY - NIGHT

Right at the front door, Alex kicks off his big shoes.

ALEX  
Grandpa!

IN THE LIVING ROOM

two comfortable chairs, with a table between, frame a glowing fireplace. Jack's unoccupied wheelchair sits adjacent to the chairs. A hospital bed to the side.

Alex sees Jack's lower body lying on the floor behind the chair.

ALEX  
Grandpa!

As he rounds the chair, Jack stares upward.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
What ya doing down there?

JACK  
Missed the damn chair.  
(pause)  
You know, as a boy, I'd lay on the  
ground and stare at the sky for hours.  
Give's ya time to sort things out.

ALEX  
Sounds gay.

Jack grumbles. Alex helps Jack into a chair framing the fireplace and takes the other.

Two men, generations and worlds of experience apart, stare awkwardly.

JACK  
Your mom?

ALEX  
Good.

JACK  
School?

ALEX  
Okay.

JACK  
Doing well?

ALEX  
Passing, mostly.

Jack shifts in his chair. He tries another tactic.

JACK  
Your uncle says Division One schools  
are looking at you, despite things.

ALEX  
Despite things?

JACK  
You, son, are talent surpassed only  
by attitude.

ALEX  
Can't help if I'm better than others.

Jack glares at Alex.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Come on! Seriously think they'd  
won Class A without me? And now,  
everyone expects so much of me.  
It's not that easy.

Jack glances out at Alex's nice truck. Not easy?

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Just..., why am I here?

JACK  
I worry about you.

ALEX  
I'm fine.

Jack leans forward and stares directly at his grandson.

JACK

No, no you're not, son. I see it,  
I see the anger, I see the hurt --

ALEX

-- Don't want to talk about that!

JACK

What happened to him, happened. It  
wasn't your doing, Alex. You have...

Bursting through the door come a string of family members.  
A pile-up as they trip over Alex's big shoes. Among them,  
Jack's children JOHN (50's), MICHAEL (50's), Lisa, and step-  
daughter CARLA (60's). Other family includes grandchildren,  
and great-grandchildren.

The family members have an air of affluence, are cheerful and  
close. They gather around their patriarch.

CARLA

Happy birthday, dad!

MICHAEL

Dad! Happy birthday.

JACK

What the dickens going on?

MICHAEL

Figured since Alex was here just  
tonight we'd surprise ya. It is  
your birthday tomorrow.

Michael hands over a bottle of Scotch and places a shot glass  
on the table.

JACK

Hey, I don't need presents.

Jack focuses on the bottle.

JACK (CONT'D)

Oh, eighteen years old. Maybe we  
can make one exception.

Laughter as Jack tucks it away in his chair.

MONTAGE - THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

-- Jack blows out candles. Alex sulks in the background.

-- Dinner around a large table. Stories as they feast.

-- Gift opening.

-- Alex sits by himself, ear-buds in and focused on his cell.

BACK TO SCENE

Michael looks to Alex.

MICHAEL

(to John)

I see Grandpa's last and favorite  
is sitting another one out.

The family gathers around Jack near the fireplace as they talk and laugh.

GREAT GRANDCHILD

Did lots of things in your life,  
great grandpa. What's the best  
thing?

Jack spreads his arms to an adoring audience.

JACK

This.

Plenty of hugs for Jack.

LATER

Lively conversation continues when Michael notices Jack's eyes have closed.

MICHAEL

Alright folks, grab the coats.  
Grandpa needs some rest.

Lisa places a caring hand on her father and kisses his forehead.

LISA

I'll come by tomorrow morning.  
Love you.

As no one looks, Jack catches Alex's eye.

JACK

Sit.

ALEX

Grandpa, are you faking --

JACK

-- Shh!

The family members exit. Only Jack and Alex remain. They sit in the chairs framing the fireplace. Jack opens one eye.

JACK (CONT'D)

They gone?

ALEX

Can't believe you did that.

JACK

Love 'em, but we got business.

ALEX

Business?

Jack opens the Scotch and fills the shot glass.

JACK

Know what I heard the other day?  
Heard there's over seven billion  
people walking this old earth.  
Ain't that something?

ALEX

Yea, whatever.

JACK

And of all those people, you and I  
are better off than most all of 'em.  
Think about it. God placed me in the  
most wonderful country at its most  
powerful time. I was given the  
opportunity to become wealthy and  
traveled the world. And for so much  
of my life, I've been surrounded by  
blessed family and friends. Was even  
lucky enough to spend forty years  
with your grandma Mary, a woman I'm  
just sure was an angel.

Jack takes a sip. An awkward silence.

ALEX

Okay, but you worked your butt off,  
and it's not like you ever did  
anything wrong.

JACK

Oh, Alex, know this, we all have  
chapters of our lives we hush.

ALEX

Even you?

JACK

Even me.

(pause)

Know something else I've learned?  
Learned it doesn't matter the  
generation you're born into, we all  
have the same desires, fears, and  
needs as we go through those same  
stages of life.

ALEX

Yea, well, there's a butt-load of  
years between us.

JACK

Oh, yes, more than most any grandpa  
and grandson.

ALEX

It's different now. There's nothing  
you can tell me.

A knowing smile.

JACK

Well then, why don't I show you.

Jack points to the fireplace mantle.

JACK (CONT'D)

Grab that little chest over there.

Alex brings over an old, weather-beaten chest. Anticipation  
as he peeks inside, disappointment at the contents.

ALEX

It's crap.

JACK

Crap?

Alex pulls the contents from the chest as he speaks.

ALEX

A jar of dirt, a coin, and a nasty  
old napkin. Sorry, but it's crap.

JACK

Treasures aren't all diamonds and gold.



ALEX  
So what about all these things, the  
key to the city, the awards?

JACK  
Mhh.

Alex holds up the napkin.

ALEX  
But if someone took this?

JACK  
It would break my heart.

ALEX  
Don't get it.

JACK  
I know. So, even though I've been  
given so much, I did ask that He  
grant me one more wish, a wish to  
help you.

Awkwardness again, Alex gets up.

ALEX  
Got any chips?

JACK  
Sit down, boy! Take the jar.

Alex sits back down.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Open it.

Alex opens the jar and tilts it so that soil falls from jar  
to hand. Entranced, Alex takes a deep breath and closes his  
eyes. A cloud of dust billows.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. - SOUTHWEST KANSAS - DAY (1936)

A cloud of dust billows behind bare, running feet.

ALEX (O.S)  
Grandpa! What's happening?  
(pause)  
I'm with you.

(pause)  
You're a boy.

The feet belong to Jack Jaeger (11), as he runs along a desolate country road. Sweat pours down his anxious, dusty face. An older rifle strung across his back. Windblown soil blankets the parched landscape and piles into drifts.

JACK  
Let's go, Joe!

JOE(7), Jack's sickly brother, runs well behind.

JOE  
Jack, help!

Jack turns back. He freezes. For there, just a couple of miles away, towering across the expansive prairie horizon, a dark, roiling beast devours all in its path - a duster. It races towards them.

Adrenaline unglues Jack. He dashes back to Joe.

JOE (CONT'D)  
(coughing)  
Can't run no more.

JACK  
Gotta get inside, it's a bad one!

JOE  
(breathing heavily)  
Hurts.

JACK  
It ain't far!

Jack throws Joe's arm over his shoulder. They race home.

Still distant from their tumbledown shack, Jack yells to his mother, RUTH (30's), a portrait of dimming hope. Ruth holds the youngest child, NELLIE (6).

Jack points behind him.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Momma!

Ruth eyes the beast.

RUTH  
Good god. Fritz!

Ruth and Nellie run inside. Their father FRITZ, works on their dilapidated Model T they nicknamed Hoover.

Fritz, angry at the world and anyone, spies the duster.

FRITZ

Damn!

Before the brothers reach the shack, day turns to night. The force of wind and debris shoves them to the ground. Grit pelts, a tremendous roar.

INSIDE THE SHACK

The sky turns black. Ruth and Nellie watch as sparks, caused by static electricity, arch across the family's windmill. Within a second, wind and debris slam the house.

OUTSIDE

Jack and Joe claw at the ground.

JOE

It hurts!

JACK

Hold on!

Joe gasps for air. Jack covers Joe's mouth with a handkerchief. Jack looks around, disoriented.

From out of the blinding dust, a hand, Fritz's hand. The boys take it. They struggle back to the shack using a rope Fritz tied to the porch.

INT. JAEGER SHACK - DAY

Jack, Joe, and Fritz come through the door. They gasp and cough. Fritz slaps Jack across the face.

FRITZ

Trying to kill your brother?

RUTH

Fritz, Stop! They're safe now, that's what's --

FRITZ

-- You stupid or something?

JACK  
Sorry. Shooting rabbit for dinner  
and...

Fritz cocks his hand. Jack cowers, Ruth ushers Jack away.

RUTH  
Help me now, children.

In the dim lantern light, the family stuffs bits of paper  
where dust billows through numerous cracks.

LATER

The beast continues to pound. The air inside heavy and hot.  
Joe giggles and coughs as he hides under a table. A dampened  
cloth covers mouth and nose.

JACK  
Hey Nell, you seen Joe?

NELLIE  
Joe blowed away.

JACK  
Probably in Arkansas by now.

Joe jumps out.

JOE  
I'm right here!

JACK  
Look momma, Joe's so ornery the  
wind blowed him back.

Laughter from all but Fritz.

FRITZ  
Can't stand this no more!

Fritz angrily shoves at the door. Drifted dust opposes his  
effort. He slides his thin frame through.

OUTSIDE

the family joins Fritz. A surreal landscape.

Hell blown to the surface. Scattered wood sticks up among  
drifts, remnants of the barn. Hoover barely visible, buried  
in a drift. Drifts gather along a fence-line.

Fritz spits.

FRITZ  
Let's get to work.

EXT. JAEGER SHACK - DAY

Fritz pieces remnants of the barn back together using old nails. Ruth approaches, Fritz ignores.

RUTH  
Gave it another year.

Continued ignore.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
Fritz! Talk to me.

FRITZ  
Still my land.

RUTH  
I don't care about that. It's  
killing our Joe!

FRITZ  
Joe's strong.

Fritz continues to nail. Ruth comes around and grabs the hammer away.

RUTH  
You don't see the people dying around  
us? How the hell can you be so ready  
to risk all our lives just to prove  
you're not a quitter?

Ruth summons her courage.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
If you won't leave, then I'm  
leaving with those kids.

Fritz grabs the hammer back.

FRITZ  
Don't you dare.

RUTH  
Please Fritz, please. Wrote my  
sister. She wasn't real happy but  
said we can stay a while.

FRITZ  
Not leaving, now go!

Dejected, Ruth runs back into the shack.

EXT. JAEGER SHACK - DAY

Jack grabs Hoover's crank-start while a greasy Fritz watches. Fritz's pocket holds a flask.

FRITZ  
Damn it, boy! Do it with your  
left, your left arm. And don't put  
your hand around it.

Jack thinks on which hand to use.

FRITZ (CONT'D)  
Forget it, move!

JACK  
No, let me start Hoover.

Fritz shoves Jack out of the way. He turns the crank and the engine comes to life.

Ruth bursts from the home carrying Joe. Joe struggles to breath, his body in full sweat.

RUTH  
Gotta get Joe to Liberal. Now!

Ruth jumps into the driver's seat.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
We're losing him!

Fritz pushes Ruth aside. Jack and Nellie jump into the back.

FRITZ  
I drive.

Fritz puts Hoover into gear. With a lurch, they're off.

INT/EXT. HOOVER ON THE ROAD - DAY

Hoover closes on Liberal, Kansas. Ruth comforts Joe as he battles to breath. In the back, Nellie stares intently at a rusted-through hole in Hoover's floor.

Fritz's driving becomes erratic. Hoover plows into a dust drift and stops cold. The Jaegers are thrown about.

RUTH  
 Oh my god! Jack, Nell, you okay?  
 Joe! Joe baby!

Joe doesn't respond. Fritz, drunk and wounded, sits useless.  
 Blood from a wound on Ruth's head. She grabs Jack.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
 Take Joe. Run as fast as you can.

JACK  
 Yes, momma!

Jack picks up Joe and takes off towards Liberal.

JACK (CONT'D)  
 Let's go, Joe.

ON THE DUSTY ROAD

Jack struggles in the heat as he carries his brother.

AT THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN

CITIZENS gawk at the tired, sweaty Jack and Joe.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A sparsely-equipped facility. Jack bursts through the doors.

JACK  
 My brother!

A NURSE springs into action. She grabs Joe and heads into  
 the nearest room.

NURSE  
 Doctor!

A DOCTOR and gathered NURSES attempt to revive Joe, they give  
 him oxygen. A nurse takes Joe's pulse. She shakes her head  
 negative. They soon give up. A nurse hugs Jack.

NURSE (CONT'D)  
 I'm sorry.

The Doctor places his hand on Jack's shoulder. Jack walks  
 over to his brother. He strokes Joe's hair.

JACK  
 Don't go, Joe.

Jack sobs. A breathless Ruth and Nellie rush through the door. Jack runs to his mother.

JACK (CONT'D)  
I couldn't run fast enough. I  
couldn't do it, Momma. I'm sorry.

RUTH  
No!

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

A desolate, windswept place. Dust whips among the downtrodden community gathered to pay respects. A pastor reads the grave-side service.

A tall young man in the crowd, head bowed, looks up. It's Alex, in period garb. A sad, lost look on his face.

The Jaegers lumber from the grave, tearful. Nellie looks back to where Jack speaks before Joe's coffin.

INT/EXT. HOOVER - DAY

Jack joins the waiting family.

NELLIE  
Say goodbye to Joe?

JACK  
Yea, and made a promise.

AT THE GRAVE

A shovel handed to Alex. With reluctance, he scoops soil into the grave.

EXT. JAEGER SHACK - DAY

Jack and Nellie sleep. A hand covers their mouths, Ruth's hand. Nellie brushes it away.

NELLIE  
What's wrong, momma?

Ruth motions to keep quiet. She looks back to assure Fritz still sleeps. An empty liquor bottle beside Fritz.



RUTH  
 (softly)  
 Taking a ride, honey. Get your  
 doll and blanket.

NELLIE  
 But it's night time.

RUTH  
 No arguments. Your things are in  
 Hoover.

EXT. JAEGER SHACK - NIGHT

The confused children come out upon a moon-lit night.

RUTH  
 Help me push Hoover out a ways.

JACK  
 What's going on?

RUTH  
 Do as your told.

They push Hoover away. Ruth comes to the front to start  
 Hoover. Jack intercedes.

JACK  
 Momma, let me.

Jack jerks the crank and Hoover rumbles to life. They're  
 off.

INT/EXT. HOOVER - NIGHT

The family bumps along in the moonlit night.

JACK  
 Leaving for good, aren't we?

RUTH  
 He'd see us all die in this god-  
 forsaken land before he'd go.

NELLIE  
 Where we going?

RUTH  
 Omaha, where your aunt lives.

NELLIE

Where's Omeeha?

RUTH

It's Omaha, and it's north, Nell.  
Ain't nothing left for us here, not  
a god-damn thing!

NELLIE

Momma, you cussed!

RUTH

Hush Nell. Momma knows best.

JACK

How we getting there?

Ruth pats Hoover's dash.

RUTH

Hoover's gonna take us.

Jack looks around at the battered Hoover. A fender falls off. Jack shakes his head.

JACK

Hoover ain't gonna make it.

RUTH

Don't you worry, momma will find a  
way.

An idea comes to Jack.

JACK

Stop a second.

RUTH

Now why --

JACK

-- Do it momma!

Ruth stops Hoover along the dusty road. Jack reaches into the back and produces an empty mason jar. The same jar Alex opens decades later. He fills it with the windblown soil.

NELLIE

What ya doing?

JACK

Taking a memory.

As Jack hops in, Ruth jams Hoover back into gear.

INT/EXT. HOOVER - DAY

A graveled road speeds by through a rusted hole. Nellie stares through it as she hugs a worn doll. Jack sits in front, mouth a-gap, eyes closing, closing, THUMP! Jack bolts awake. Hoover sputters and dies.

The three pile from Hoover and open the hood. Sprayed oil blankets the engine compartment.

NELLIE

What we gonna do, mamma?

Ruth plops on the running boards. She frets, cries, coughs. Jack and Nellie hug her.

LATER

The bedraggled family waits.

Over a hill, a new vehicle approaches. An AFFLUENT FAMILY rides, top down. The Jaegers anticipate the car stopping.

Except for a young girl who stares at them, they fail to acknowledge the stranded family. The mother turns her daughter's eyes from the Jaegers.

Jack looks himself up and down, and then at his family.

JACK

When I get rich, ain't nobody ever  
gonna look at me like that again.

A truck approaches, so dilapidated it makes Hoover look showroom new.

As the truck closes Ruth sees it holds three rough-looking characters, an OLDER MAN and TWO GROWN SONS. They stop.

As the three lumber from the truck, they stare menacingly at the Jaegers. Ruth shields the children behind her, anticipating the worst. Instead, the Older Man saunters up to Hoover. He grunts as he assesses the engine.

OLDER MAN

Cecil, get the tools.

As Cecil goes for the tools, the Older Man takes his hat off and smiles a neighborly smile.

OLDER MAN (CONT'D)

We'll get ya going, ma'am.

INT/EXT. OMAHA STREET - DAY

A repaired Hoover travels down a corridor represented by several ethnicities. One and two story Italian bakeries, German sausage shops, and fresh food markets line the bustling street. Streetcars compete for the road.

CONTINUOUS

The Jaegers enter downtown. Biggest buildings they have ever seen. Smiles fade at the site of unemployed in a breadline.

INT/EXT. OMAHA - KATHERINE/JAEGER HOME - DAY

The Jaegers are brought back to a detached garage off a bungalow. KATHERINE, Ruth's sister, is refrigerator-shaped and cold as one too. She leads the way.

RUTH

Sorry for all this.

KATHERINE

Don't have room in the house so you'll have to stay in here. Now I still expect some rent.

A door to a cramped, dilapidated space opens.

RUTH

Oh..., my.

Jack and Nellie equally unenthusiastic.

KATHERINE

Have the first month?

RUTH

Not just yet, but --

Katherine turns away.

KATHERINE

-- Figures.

RUTH

Well, kids, we're home.

INT/EXT. KATHERINE/JAEGER HOME - DAY

Jack hops off his rickety bike and bounds through the door.

JACK  
 Mom! Got a paper route, starts  
 tomor...

Jack stops cold. Fritz stands menacingly near the doorway.

JACK (CONT'D)  
 (to Ruth)  
 What's he doing here?

Ruth says nothing, a scared look on her face. Nellie cowers under her mother's arm.

Fritz backs Jack out the door.

FRITZ  
 Damn kids getting jobs! What did  
 you do?

JACK  
 What ya mean?

FRITZ  
 Showing me up, boy? Think you're  
 the man of the house?

JACK  
 No dad, I --

FRITZ  
 -- Not man enough to get your  
 brother to the hospital, were ya?

JACK  
 Don't say that!

FRITZ  
 Get out! Get out!

Jack looks back inside at Ruth. She looks away. Confused and scared, Jack runs away.

NELLIE  
 No Jack, don't go!

EXT. OMAHA RAIL YARDS - NIGHT

Jack sneaks among railroad cars. Two railroad bulls walk the yard. They look in, under, and everywhere for hobos. One carries a bat. This is ROT MOUTH, rotten teeth, rotten mind.

They spy Jack.

ROT MOUTH  
Hey kid! Stop!

Jack spots a train leaving and runs for it. The bulls chase.

Rot Mouth catches Jack and grabs his shoulder. Jack swings around and smacks Rot Mouth in the face.

Jack makes a desperate jump for a boxcar. He misses, falling hard. He gets back up and runs. Rot Mouth almost catches him again. Jack makes it into a boxcar. Rot Mouth gives up.

ROT MOUTH (CONT'D)  
I'll get you boy! I know your face.

INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

Jack gathers himself. In the dim light, he makes out the dark form of a HOBO against the side of the car. He hunkers timidly at the opposite end.

HOBO  
Be careful yourself, boy. That  
there bull is Rot Mouth. He gets  
half a chance, he'll kill ya.

EXT. WYOMING - TRAIN - DAY (1938)

Slow progress up a grade. Jack and BOYS ride in a gondola rail car. Two RAILROAD BULLS appear on the car ahead.

GRIZZLED BULL  
Hey boys! Get over here!

JACK  
(to other boys)  
Go! I'll stall 'em.

The other boys pull further back while Jack walks sheepishly to the bulls. Close up, Jack recognizes one bull as Rot Mouth. Rot mouth smiles his rotten smile.

ROT MOUTH  
I know you.

Without warning, Rot Mouth swings his bat, catching Jack in the ribs. Jack tumbles to the rail bed below.

GRIZZLED BULL  
Jesus Christ, don't have to do  
that! Just a damn kid!

ROT MOUTH  
It's what we're paid to do.

Rot mouth continues on. The Grizzled Bull crosses himself.

GRIZZLED BULL  
God help ya, kid.

EXT. ALONG RAILROAD TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Jack's flailing body comes to a stop. Bloodied, intense pain as he breaths. He becomes unconscious.

EXT. ALONG RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

A group of four black hobos walk. The group includes EARL, a sizable man with a heart to match, and Earl's son, Louis (7).

EARL  
Hey, what's that up there?

The group runs up, Louis in the lead.

LOUIS  
It's a boy!

They find Jack semi-conscious.

EARL  
Give him room now, give him room.  
You okay, boy?

Jack offers an incoherent moan.

EXT. WYOMING - HOBO CAMP - NIGHT

The hobos share stories before a fire. Jack becomes aware of his surroundings. He stares intently at his saviours. Earl notices Jack.

EARL  
Well looky here, coming around now.

Earl hands Jack water. He guzzles.

Jack looks around. Deer in the headlights face.

EARL (CONT'D)  
Look like a scared jackrabbit, boy.

JACK  
You're, you're all... coloreds.

A hearty laugh from the hobos.

BLACK HOBO  
(pointing to his hand)  
Hey, lookee here, someone done  
colored all over me!

OLDER BLACK HOBO  
Damn, me too!

As the laughter dies.

EARL  
Now boy, ever consider maybe you the  
one that's colored?

Jack smiles.

JACK  
Guess I never thought of that.

More laughter from the group.

EARL  
What's your name, boy?

JACK  
Jack Jaeger.

EARL  
Jack, you'd a died we not got to ya.

JACK  
Knocked off by a bull. Some bull  
called Rot Mouth.

The hobos look to each other, recognition of the name.

EARL  
Been riding long?

JACK  
Most of a year. Picking for a  
while in California.

EARL  
Well, I'm Earl, this here's my boy  
Louis.

JACK AND LOUIS  
Hey.



EARL  
Got a home?

Jack thinks on what to say.

JACK  
No.

EARL  
Well, okay. Get yourself some sleep  
now. See what tomorrow brings.

The group beds down for the night.

EXT. FARM HOME - DAY

A "STICK CAT" and an "X WITHIN A CIRCLE" carved into a fence.  
The hobos huddle, talking MOS.

JACK  
What they doing?

LOUIS  
Them marks mean an old lady live here.  
Might give us a meal. But, that don't  
mean she will for us.

Hats in hand, the group continues towards the front porch and  
stop well before the porch.

EARL  
Jack, go ring the bell.

JACK  
Why me?

EARL  
Just do it.

Jack walks hesitantly and rings the bell. An ELDERLY WOMAN  
answers. She looks down at Jack.

ELDERLY WOMAN  
Hello, son.

EARL (O.S.)  
Hello, ma'am.

The elderly woman sees the group and almost shuts the door.  
She considers a moment and keeps it open.

ELDERLY WOMAN

I'll make something for you. Welcome to eat here on the porch.

EARL

Well thank you, ma'am. But me and the boys, well, we're not used to just taken a meal without work.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(smiles)

Got something for you to do out by the barn. I'll meet you there.

EARL

Thank you, ma'am, thank you.

The hobos walk towards the barn.

JACK

Why not just eat and go?

EARL

Well little Jack, learned long ago, if you do the right thing it don't matter your station in life, you'll always keep respect for yourself.

Jack stops to consider.

EXT. NORTH PLATTE, NEBRASKA - RAIL YARD - NIGHT

The hobos encamp with several others in a hobo jungle. Several campfires burn, stew boils, a harmonica plays, and lively stories unfold.

Earl notices Jack lost in thought.

EARL

Thinking about home, aren't ya?

JACK

I guess.

LOUIS

What about schooling?

JACK

Got through fifth grade. It's enough.

Jack gets a far away look. Out of nowhere.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Dad say's it my fault my brother  
died.

EARL  
Now why's that?

JACK  
Down in Kansas. Joe got dust in  
his lungs. Was supposed to get him  
to the hospital but I didn't run  
fast enough.

Earl thinks on this.

EARL  
Don't know all about it, but I can  
tell you when a man can't do for his  
family, well, it can make him all  
sorts of crazy. But I can also tell  
you that a man right in his head would  
never, ever put that on his son.

JACK  
(forlorn)  
I miss my momma. I want to go home.

Earl's group look to each other. There's agreement.

EARL  
Well then, that's what we're gonna do.

Jack hugs the hobos. Loud voices O.S.

LOUIS  
What's going on?

Other hobos confront five bulls, one of them Rot Mouth, that  
walk their jungle. Rot Mouth spies Jack.

ROT MOUTH  
Well I'll be damned. See ya made  
it out alive, boy.

Evil laugh from the bulls.

EARL  
What you want, Rot Mouth?

HAGGARD HOBO  
You don't belong here!

Loud agreement from the whole camp.

ROT MOUTH

We go wherever we want. And, if I don't want you on my train, you don't get on.

Rot Mouth points his bat at the circle of hobos.

ROT MOUTH (CONT'D)

I own you all.

EARL

Don't want no trouble, just want to get this boy home.

ROT MOUTH

Now see, that's the problem. To get that boy home, your gonna take my train, and you ain't taking my train. Hand him over, I'll see he gets home.

Earl shields Jack.

EARL

No way.

The hobos tighten the circle and ready makeshift weapons, prepared to defend their own.

ROT MOUTH

We're going, we're going.

Rot Mouth turns away, but just as suddenly, turns and swings his bat. Earl goes down.

Pandemonium. Weapons swing, yelling, dust, screams of pain. Jack and Louis watch in horror.

Earl shakes off the hit. He grabs Rot Mouth's bat just as he lifts it to smack a downed hobo. The downed hobo is a frightened Alex.

An astonished Rot Mouth turns to see Earl back on his feet. Rot Mouth pulls a handgun from his waist but Alex grabs it away. Earl swings the bat, Rot Mouth goes out cold.

The hobo numbers overwhelm. A last bull knocked out.

Earl falls to his knees. Jack and Louis run to him.

LOUIS

Dad!

EARL  
 Sorry you had to see that. Had to  
 be done, just had to be done.

Alex jumps to his feet.

ALEX  
 (to self)  
 Had to be, Earl. Had to be.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

Jack and the Hobos yell encouragement from a moving rail car  
 as Earl chugs along trying to catch the ride.

He huffs and puffs, his big frame gains enough speed to catch  
 the outstretched hands. They help him into the car.

EARL  
 Still got it! I still got it!

EXT. KATHERINE/JAEGER HOME - DAY

Jack and Hobos amble down the sidewalk. Jack sprints ahead.

JACK  
 This is it.

Jack opens the door to the detached garage.

JACK (CONT'D)  
 Momma!  
 (bewildered)  
 Our stuff's gone.

Nellie bursts through the door of Katherine's home. She  
 walks deliberately to Jack. She stops and glares at her  
 brother as she trembles. Sadness and anger fill her face.

JACK (CONT'D)  
 Nellie?

She slaps a stunned Jack.

NELLIE  
 Where were you?

JACK  
 Huh? Nellie, where's momma?

NELLIE  
 Momma's gone, Jack. Daddy left.

JACK  
What? Where'd she go?

NELLIE  
No, Jack, momma died. Where were  
you? You should have been here!

Nellie pounds on Jack. Jack falls back.

NELLIE (CONT'D)  
Momma cried every night. I was scared!

JACK  
No, No, Nell! Can't be.

NELLIE  
Her lungs, it killed her. Where  
were you?

JACK  
Nell, I'm sorry. I didn't know.  
I'm sorry.

Nellie continues to glare at him. She turns away.

NELLIE  
I hate you.

Nellie runs inside. Jack looks to Earl and the other hobos.  
Sad faces all around.

LATER

Louis and a forlorn Jack sit at the side of the detached  
garage. Louis has his arm around his friend.

Earl stands with Katherine on the lawn.

KATHERINE  
(pissy)  
She's already trouble. Suppose  
they're both my responsibility now.

EARL  
Pardon ma'am, but seems after all  
them children have been through,  
you'd have heart enough to care.

An incredulous look on Katherine's face.

KATHERINE

I am not having someone of your kind telling me what to do! You go on now. All of you, go!

Earl scowls. Earl joins Jack and Louis.

JACK

Going with you.

EARL

Can't, gotta take care you're sister now. Road's no place for a little girl.

The tears stream down Jack's face, he trembles.

JACK

All family does is hurt.

A tear comes to Earl. He takes Jack into his arms.

EARL

My prayer is you find out otherwise.

As the hobos continue down the sidewalk, Earl turns back.

EARL (CONT'D)

Jack! Keep respect for yourself now.

EXT. DOWNTOWN OMAHA - DAY (1941)

A cold winter day. Gritty patches of snow. Jack, worn coat and hat, pedals his rickety bike furiously as he weaves in and out of traffic and people. A package sits in a basket.

He looks down at an old watch as it flops on his wrist.

JACK

Got two minutes, gonna make it.

A WORKING MAN steps out in front of Jack. He skids his bike in another direction, spraying the man with gravel.

WORKING MAN

Hey, kid!

JACK

Sorry!

CONTINUOUS

Jack screeches to a halt in front of a barbershop. He leaps from his bicycle, package in hand.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

A group of men gather around a radio. They listen intently.

JACK  
Hi Mr. Nicotero. Got a package --

GROUP OF MEN  
-- Shhh!

ON THE RADIO

an announcement blares about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

"...I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, nineteen forty one, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese empire."

Jack's face registers disbelief.

EXT. OMAHA - VACANT LOT - DAY (1942)

Jack rides his bike, searching. Among scattered debris he spots Nellie and RUFFIANS huddled around a car, smoking.

JACK  
Nellie, get over here!

Nellie throws down her cigarette and comes to Jack.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Why you ditching school?

NELLIE  
Why aren't you in school?

JACK  
I work so you can go to school.

NELLIE  
So tell that bitch Katherine. I don't care.

JACK  
Girls, don't talk like that!



NELLIE

When you gonna learn, Jack? Nobody  
cares about us, nobody.

The Ruffians approach, curious. A LARGE RUFFIAN, with cigar,  
gets in Jack's face. He pushes Jack to the ground.

LARGE RUFFIAN

Who's this?

NELLIE

Just a nobody.

The Large Ruffian puts his arm around Nellie.

LARGE RUFFIAN

Don't worry, we'll take care of her.

The Ruffians laugh. Nellie glares at Jack, no support here.

An enraged Jack rushes the Large Ruffian. He smacks him  
square in the mouth and sends him flat onto his back. A  
crazed Jack pounces and repeatedly strikes his face.

A collective look of amazement. The other Ruffians pull Jack  
off. Jack throws his bike at them.

RUFFIAN

You're crazy!

Jack steps towards them, the Ruffians back away. They  
hurriedly drag the Large Ruffian away.

Nellie glares at Jack.

NELLIE

I still hate you.

She turns away.

JACK

Go ahead Nellie, get yourself  
knocked up. I won't be here!

Nellie turns back. A confused, hurt look. She rejoins the  
Ruffians.

Tears stream as Jack collects his bike.

INT. ARMY INDUCTION CENTER - DAY (1943)

A large, stark room of controlled chaos. Lines of uneasy recruits, newly stripped of their dignity, stand butt-cheek to butt-cheek in underwear. Scattered desks manned by surly army personnel bark orders.

An assembly line physical, teeth hurriedly inspected. Recruits cower and run between stations.

Seventeen year-old Jack, papers in hand, stands next in line to a desk where a GRUFF SERGEANT sits.

GRUFF SERGEANT

Next!

Jack nervously hands him his papers.

GRUFF SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Any skills?

JACK

Well, I'm fast. I'm a good shot.

The Sergeant's eyes don't leave the papers.

GRUFF SERGEANT

What did you do back home?

JACK

Lots. Delivered messages for a radio station, a --

The Sergeant slams a stamp to Jack's papers.

GRUFF SERGEANT

-- Signal Corps. Next!

JACK

But sir, they said I could pick what I want. I don't even know what the Signal Corps is.

The Gruff Sergeant glares back, sizing Jack up.

GRUFF SERGEANT

How old are you anyway?

Jack snaps to attention. He attempts a man-voice.

JACK

Nineteen, sir!

The Sergeant scoffs.

GRUFF SERGEANT  
Stupid kid. Next!

Jack sulks away.

JACK  
What's Signal Corps?

EXT. BOOT CAMP FIRING RANGE - DAY

Enlistees await instruction. A group of CITY BOYS crowd CHUCK KOPECKIE (18). Kopeckie, an easy-going mouth a minute, argues face to face with a COCKY CITY BOY. Jack observes the argument.

COCKY CITY BOY  
Ever seen a building higher than a barn, country boy?

KOPECKIE  
Eat shit!

COCKY CITY BOY  
You boys know a lot about shit.

City boys laugh it up. An INSTRUCTOR comes over.

INSTRUCTOR  
You two! Get over here.

The Instructor shoves a gun in Kopeckie and Cocky City Boy's hands. He stares down range.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)  
Target at fifty yards.

Neither know what to do. Kopeckie looks around, nervous. He grabs his hand.

KOPECKIE  
Oh, uh, forgot sir, jammed my trigger finger on the obstacle course.

INSTRUCTOR  
God damn it, son. You telling me --

JACK  
-- Sir, consider myself a country boy.

The instructor considers.

INSTRUCTOR  
Fire away soldier.

Cocky City boy holds the gun awkwardly and fires a round.  
The kick shoves the stock into his face, sending him reeling.

Jack takes careful aim and fires off four rounds quickly.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)  
How'd we do?

A CO-INSTRUCTOR, binoculars in hand, points to Jack.

CO-INSTRUCTOR  
This man, two in the black.

The CO-INSTRUCTOR points to Cocky City Boy.

CO-INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)  
This man, hit a donkey in the ass a  
mile down the road.

Laughter from the gathered enlistees.

INSTRUCTOR  
Always, always pick a country boy  
to fight with.

The men get the message.

LATER

Enlistees leave the range. Kopeckie pulls up next to Jack.

KOPECKIE  
Hey, thanks for that. Was raised in  
the country but mama didn't like guns  
much on account of daddy.

JACK  
Why's that?

KOPECKIE  
Actually, was her that clipped him  
pretty good. Never knew the man but  
heard he's got a hell of a limp. Yea,  
can say I spent time in Tupelo, Fargo,  
Key Largo. See, all end in "O".

JACK  
Caught that.

KOPECKIE

She used to tell me we were lucky 'cause we got to see the whole country our way. Not sure about that. So, what's your name? Where did ya learn to shoot like that?

JACK

Jack Jaeger, hunting.

KOPECKIE

Oh, name's Chuck Kopeckie. Folks just call me Kopeckie. Never did hold a gun before.

JACK

Wouldn't a guessed.

KOPECKIE

Really? Oh hell, you're just kidding. Wish I could --

JACK

-- Do you ever shut up?

Kopeckie stops while Jack walks on.

KOPECKIE

Oh yea, yep, I can do that. Good to know ya.

INT. TROOP SHIP - SLEEPING QUARTERS - DAY

Troops see their quarters. Cramped. Rows upon row of cots hang five deep, floor to ceiling. Soldiers rush for the best spots.

JACK

Holy crapbuckets.

Jack picks a cot. The occupied cot above hangs down giving Jack just a few inches of free space. A face looks over.

KOPECKIE

See as my ass is gonna be in your face the next month or so, suppose I outta tell ya I love beans!

JACK

Oh God.

KOPECKIE

Damn! Sardines would feel cramped in here, huh Jackie? Hey, ain't that something, you and me going to China together? Boy, I never thought I'd see India, China. Hell, might even see Japan once we wipe their ass. Heard them Chinese are all small fellas. Must be why they can fill up on rice and stuff. Hey, did...

Jack covers his ears.

EXT. CALCUTTA, INDIA - STREET - DAY

Hotter than snot. The Bengal Famine in full display while Jack's squad, consisting of Jack, Kopeckie, translators, and grunts, ambles among the otherworldly setting. The starving masses, stench, and filth awe the Americans.

A funeral pyre consists of wood, a layer of bodies, wood, bodies, repeating. A torch lights the pyre. The Americans gag. They cover their mouths and noses.

An EMACIATED INDIAN BOY approaches Jack. They lock eyes. Jack instinctively reaches in his pack for food. A BRITISH OFFICER intervenes.

BRITISH OFFICER

Hey Yank! Don't be feeding him.  
You're just prolonging his misery.  
Go on now!

JACK

But --

BRITISH OFFICER

-- Go!

Two British soldiers step between Jack and the boy.

The boy continues to hold out his hands. Jack, torn but obedient, moves along.

EXT. STREET IN CALCUTTA, INDIA - DAY

The squad gathers gear into jeeps. Jack notices the Emaciated Indian Boy dead on the street. He stares woefully as he squats before him.

Behind Jack, a relief truck pulls up, brimming with foodstuff. A starving mass quickly surrounds. British soldiers struggle to control the masses.

Jack looks back at the truck.

JACK  
Woulda been enough.

Jack bows his head.

AT THE TRUCK

one of the British soldiers holding back the starving looks back upon Jack as he kneels before the dead Indian boy - it's Alex. He pleads with the starving.

ALEX  
Stop, please stop! I'm sorry! Stop!

ON THE SIDEWALK

Kopeckie's hand touches Jack's shoulder.

KOPECKIE  
Got a plane to catch, Jackie.

Reluctantly, Jack joins Kopeckie in a jeep.

KOPECKIE (CONT'D)  
This whole damn country stinks.  
Hope China's better.

Jack stares blankly ahead as the jeep speeds away.

INT. MILITARY CARGO PLANE - NIGHT

The squad sits on rickety benches amid cargo.

JACK  
This is gonna take us over the  
Himalayas?

The PILOT comes back.

PILOT  
Lost our door on the last trip. Bundle  
up good boys, it's gonna get damn cold  
over the Hump! Next stop, Kunming!

LATER - NIGHT

The plane flies over the Himalayas - the Hump. The squad shivers against the cold.

KOPECKIE

Sweating our butts off this morning,  
freezing our nuts off tonight. Don't  
get better than this, huh Jackie?

EXT. CHINESE VILLAGE - DAY

Jack and Kopeckie enter a decrepid building. Colonel BOOMER, (50's), a blaring nut-job, sits in an ornate, ancient chair with mouth open. A CHINESE DENTIST stands over him. The dentist holds a drill powered by a bicycle his WIFE peddles.

JACK

Colonel Boomer?

COLONEL BOOMER

(to Chinese dentist)

Oww! Damn it man! Don't ya got  
anything for me?

CHINESE DENTIST

(in Mandarin)

Sit still!

COLONEL BOOMER

Who the hell are you two?

JACK

(saluting)

I'm Staff Sargent Jaeger. This is  
Corporal Kopeckie. Squad's outside,  
sir. Told to report to you.

COLONEL BOOMER

Well, lucky you. Welcome to the  
backwoods shit-hole of the war.  
Know why they sent me here?

A crazy glare as he awaits a response.

JACK

Uh, no sir.

COLONEL BOOMER

Drilled my boys too close to the  
lines. Japs came over and strafed  
us. God, what a mess.



Jack and Kopeckie exchange a worried glance.

JACK

Here's our orders sir.

COLONEL BOOMER

We keep the Japs occupied so they stay off our boys elsewhere. Hell, I was born to fight. Don't do enough fighting. Why the hell you here?

KOPECKIE

Uh, the orders, sir.

Colonel Boomer reads the orders.

COLONEL BOOMER

Oh, the radio boys. Understand you'll be receiving eyes alone messages?

JACK

That would be us, sir.

Colonel Boomer takes a shot of whiskey, lost in thought.

COLONEL BOOMER

Don't get yourselves captured or they'll torture your ass for sure.

JACK AND KOPECKIE

(simultaneous)

Yes sir!

Colonel Boomer sits back down.

COLONEL BOOMER

(To dentist)

Do your worst, Lee.

The dentist's wife starts the peddles. Jack and Kopeckie head to the door.

KOPECKIE

Tortured! That don't sound good. Didn't say anything about that back at Crowder. So is he saying we can run if --

JACK

-- Shut up, Kopeckie.

EXT. ROAD IN CHINA - DAY

A narrow course bisecting fields of rice where peasants toil. Jack's squad and Chinese soldiers move forward, Americans in jeeps, Chinese walk.

Colonel Boomer stands silently, heroically, in the jeep he shares with Jack and Kopeckie. A peasant woman approaches the jeep, bucket in hand. She babbles and gestures.

JACK  
(to interpreter)  
What's she want?

CHINESE INTERPRETER  
She want you to shit in pot.  
American shit good for fields.

Kopeckie thinks, grabs bucket, paper and jumps from the jeep.

COLONEL BOOMER  
Three sheets, Kopeckie! Three  
sheets minimum or your thumb will  
go through!

As Jack and Colonel Boomer watch, Chinese officers and their men grab peasants from a field and hurry them to the column. They're in the army now.

A peasant protests. Chinese soldiers quickly surround and beat him.

COLONEL BOOMER (CONT'D)  
Jap's kill 'em just for practice  
and their own warlords don't treat  
'em any better. Figure if they  
kill one ya still a million to take  
their place.

Colonel Boomer turns to Jack, wild eyes.

COLONEL BOOMER (CONT'D)  
Crazy world ain't it?

Chinese point excitedly. Smoke rises in the distance.

COLONEL BOOMER (CONT'D)  
Trouble has found us, boys!

EXT. CHINESE VILLAGE

Not sure what to expect, the Squad and Chinese soldiers spread out cautiously as they close upon the smoking village's outskirts, stepwise, moving forward.

Oblivious to any danger, Colonel Boomer charges ahead of the others, firing wildly.

COLONEL BOOMER

Ahhhhh!

Colonel Boomer stops abruptly, astonished.

Chinese peasants stream to the soldiers, wailing, frantic.

On a main road, dead Chinese peasants, from young to old, women and men, litter the street. Women cry and hide their faces in shame as their hovels burn.

Among the soldiers, a mind-numb Alex. A PEASANT MAN ignores the pain of a severed hand. He pleads with Alex in Manchurian. The peasant points to his dead WIFE a few yards away.

ALEX

I'm sorry, I can't help you! I  
can't help her!

Alex grabs his head and falls to the ground. He looks to Jack as Jack bends over and heaves.

LATER

Jack, Kopeckie, and Colonel Boomer walk the main street. Soldiers attend to victims.

COLONEL BOOMER

After a good fight, Japs give their boys twenty four hours to do anything they want. Kill, rape, don't matter. After that, they snap to. But this, this just don't make sense. They had no fight here.

JACK

If Japs don't kill 'em their own people will anyway.

Kopeckie puzzles this. Jack notices.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Just, don't know what to think  
anymore.

INT. CHINESE VILLAGE - SHACK - DAY (1945)

A makeshift radio room. So quiet, so still. A scruffy Jack sits sprawled in a chair, motionless, eyes closed, radio headphones on.

The squawk of morris code startles Jack awake. He listens intently while his pencil writes furiously. Wide eyes.

Colonel Boomer Blasts through the door.

COLONEL BOOMER  
Where the hell's Kopeckie? I told  
that dumbass to get back before --

JACK  
-- Hot damn! It's over! It's  
over!

Jack bear-hugs the Colonel.

COLONEL BOOMER  
What the hell's gotten into you?

JACK  
Colonel, the war's over. The  
superbombs did it. The bastards  
gave up!

COLONEL BOOMER  
Well good God and shit my drawers!

The men whoop it up and go out to tell others.

LATER

A festive mood as the squad celebrates with locals.

A shot rings out, hitting a squad member. Immediately, rounds strike everywhere. Villagers and soldiers go down. They scatter and hide.

Jack and Colonel Boomer take cover between shacks.

JACK  
Son of a bitch!

They peek around the corner. Japanese soldiers walk confidently, deliberately towards them.

COLONEL BOOMER  
Jaeger! Get the hell outta here!

JACK  
Don't matter what I know, the war's over!

COLONEL BOOMER  
Well apparently, dumb-ass, they didn't get the word! Go for the jeep, soldier!

Heightened sounds as Japanese come even closer.

JACK  
I can't leave my --

Colonel Boomer points his sidearm at Jack.

COLONEL BOOMER  
-- That's an order, Sergeant!

Jack hesitates, then takes off for the jeep. He zig-zags, head down. Bullets ricochet about him. He disappears over a levy and gets in a jeep. He hesitates.

JACK  
Damn it!

Jack grabs a rifle from the jeep and heads back. He crests the levy. The Japanese have overtaken the village. A Japanese officer aims his gun to Colonel Boomer's head.

JACK (CONT'D)  
No!

Japanese soldiers look up. Jack fires, hitting two quickly. They fire back at the exposed American. A bullet grazes his helmet, the force knocking him back over the levy into a ditch.

Jack throws his helmet off and grabs his head. Blood comes from the wound. He stumbles and loses consciousness.

LATER

The Japanese soldiers come upon Jack and drag his unconscious body from the ditch. Two soldiers hold Jack in a kneeling position to an officer. The officer unsheathes his sword.

A SENIOR OFFICER comes over the levy. He yells to the soldiers around Jack.

SENIOR OFFICER  
(In Japanese)  
Stop!

Soldiers snap to attention. The Senior Officer trudges to them, head down, ashamed.

SENIOR OFFICER (CONT'D)  
(In Japanese)  
It's over. The war's over.

The soldiers look to each other with dismay.

JAPANESE OFFICER  
(In Japanese)  
That can't be.

SENIOR OFFICER  
(In Japanese)  
The Emperor spoke himself.

The Japanese soldiers take the news in.

JAPANESE OFFICER  
(In Japanese)  
What about him?

The Senior Officer considers.

SENIOR OFFICER  
(In Japanese)  
It's the Americans who defeated us.  
Let him live.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. JACK'S HOME - NIGHT

Alex opens his eyes, absolute awe. Jack sits quietly.

JACK  
(sadly)  
Many good men died that day. I  
still wonder why He let me live.

Alex sits with mouth agape, wide-eyed.

ALEX  
What just happened?

Alex jumps up and paces the room, animated.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Grandpa! I, I saw everything! You were little, then, you were big, then you were in the war. You almost got killed, twice! How'd you do this?

JACK

I didn't do anything.

ALEX

But I lived it! I felt the hot sun in Kansas, the bullets whizzing by. About puked when we left that kid in India. You ran away and met those hobos. Your family sucked. Holy shit, your whole life sucked! You --

JACK

-- Boy! --

ALEX

-- wore the same clothes all the time! That's sick. Damn, you kicked that fat kid's ass! Boom! Fist to face, seee yaaa!

JACK

Alexander! God answered my request, that's who. How, only He knows.

Alex calms. He takes a deep breath as he stares at the fire.

ALEX

And that's how Joe died?

JACK

Yes, that's how Joe died.

ALEX

Wasn't your fault, grandpa.

Jack leans forward and takes Alex's hand.

JACK

Just as it isn't your fault that your brother died.

Alex tears up. The hurtful memory overwhelms him.

JACK (CONT'D)  
(tearful)  
And it was wrong, so very wrong for  
your father to blame you.

Jack looks to the fireplace.

JACK (CONT'D)  
I can still see that bastard,  
standing over you, belt lashing,  
blaming you.  
(pause)  
Damn that man! How dare he do that  
to my grandson.

Both take a moment.

ALEX  
Doesn't hurt what he said. He's a  
dick.

JACK  
There's no shame in admitting that  
it does, Alex, no shame at all.

ALEX  
Dad did tell us not to swim in the  
river. Daniel saved me, I couldn't  
find dad to help him. I --

JACK  
-- And I couldn't run fast enough.

Alex takes this in. He straightens.

ALEX  
At Joe's grave, what did you say?

JACK  
I promised I would live enough life  
for the both of us.

ALEX  
And you did.

JACK  
Yes, but the things I'd seen, the  
life I lived, made me doubt my fellow  
man. I forgot Earl's lesson.

Jack motions to the small chest again.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Take the coin, boy.



Alex examines the coin from the chest, tosses it in the air.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. OMAHA - APARTMENT - DAY (1947)

A coin in the air. It comes down onto Jack's hand. A dingy abode.

KOPECKIE

Damn, heads! You always win.

JACK

Ha! Have a good sleep. Hope the bugs don't get ya.

Kopeckie flops down on a worn sofa while Jack takes to the bed. Lights out.

KOPECKIE

These contractors we work for, ever notice they don't know nothing we don't know?

JACK

Doesn't take a lot of smarts to stack boards. What ya getting at?

KOPECKIE

Hell, Jackie, you got smarts, you saved your money. Instead of working for the builder, why not be the builder?

JACK

Think I could do it?

KOPECKIE

Ya got a Nile's worth of ambition.

JACK

Yea, why not? Suppose you're gonna tag along till I'm rich.

KOPECKIE

I'll help ya get there.

EXT. JACK'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY (1952)

A bustling construction site. Smaller tract homes in various stages of construction. Amongst the chaos, Jack and Kopeckie go over plans laid out in the bed of Jack's pickup.

A PLOT PLAN of a residential street ending in a circle. Lot lines laid out. A much larger lot at the terminus of the circle.

Jack points to a smaller lot.

JACK  
Should be trimming it out by now.  
What's the hold up?

Kopeckie points to the large lot.

KOPECKIE  
That.

Jack turns to admire his own home under construction on the large lot. The same home Jack lives in at the beginning.

Several workers toil as they side the home.

JACK  
Oh no, not pulling 'em off my baby.

KOPECKIE  
Still don't know what you're gonna  
to do with all that room.

JACK  
Wanted something that says, I got  
more than you.

KOPECKIE  
Big enough for a wife and ten kids.

JACK  
Yea, and after they suck your heart and  
wallet dry, tell me how wonderful it is.

Jack notices a woman and young daughter admiring a tract home located adjacent to Jack's lot. He approaches.

JACK (CONT'D)  
That the one you want?

The woman turns and smiles a beautiful smile. The woman is MARY. Nicked by life, but class to the core. Her daughter Carla (3) hides behind her.

MARY

Oh, just wishing.

JACK

Last one that hasn't sold. Would be a great starter for the three of ya.

MARY

Three? Oh, well, it's just me and my daughter. Don't even have a job just yet.

JACK

Kind of work you do?

MARY

Oh, bookkeeping, secretarial.

JACK

Really? How about doing some work for me? Build I can do, numbers, not so good. Maybe can even make a deal on the house.

Mary beams at her good fortune.

INT/EXT. JACK'S HOME - DAY

Mary comes to the door, pie in hand. In her reflection off the sidelite, she checks her lipstick, smooths her dress. After a deep, nervous breath, she rings. Jack answers.

MARY

Hi. Wanted to say thank you for helping me move in, the job, and --

JACK

-- Pie!

He snatches the pie and trots towards the kitchen.

MARY

Yea, pie.

Mary follows. Her eyes wide, awed by an entry open to the second story. A wide staircase. Walls and floor finished in rich, crafted woods.

MARY (CONT'D)

Wow.

IN THE KITCHEN

Jack, oblivious to Mary, grabs a fork and digs in. He notices Mary staring back.

JACK  
(muffled)  
I like pie.

They laugh.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Hey! Wanna see my favorite room?

Jack grabs Mary's hand.

JACK (CONT'D)  
C'mon.

IN THE MASTER BEDROOM

a large bed predominates, sparsely furnished. Mary takes a step back.

JACK  
I don't mean this room.

Jack points to the master bathroom.

JACK (CONT'D)  
This room.

IN THE MASTER BATHROOM

black and white tiles adorn wall and counter-top, mosaic floor tiles.

MARY  
Oh my! Now I have seen everything,  
a shower, a bath, and two sinks!

JACK  
Did it all myself.

MARY  
Suppose you have someone in mind  
for the other sink, Mr. Jaeger?

Jack fumbles.

JACK  
Let's head downstairs.

## ON THE STAIRWAY

a passion in Jack's voice.

JACK

I know that modern stuff is popular,  
but I wanted something classic,  
something not done much around here.

## IN THE LIVING ROOM

Jack runs his hands along the woodwork.

JACK

All hardwood floors and paneling.  
Every piece of trim I did myself.

MARY

You love building, don't you?

Jack shrugs.

JACK

Pays the bills.

## LATER

Jack and Mary share a cocktail while seated on a glider next to each other. Tiki torches burn. Mary watches Jack devour another piece of pie.

JACK

Can I ask something?

MARY

Sure.

Jack looks for words.

MARY (CONT'D)

Oh, lord. I know what's coming.

JACK

Never mind then.

MARY

(big sigh)

Let's just say, when it comes to  
other women, some husbands can't  
help themselves.

JACK

Oh.

Mary looks down.

MARY

Never saw it coming.

(pause)

But, doesn't matter. Just look at me now. I've got Carla, a nice job, and a beautiful new home. I have Jack Jaeger to thank for that.

Their eyes meet.

MARY (CONT'D)

So, my turn. Why the big house?

Jack shrugs.

JACK

Dunno, didn't have much as a kid.

MARY

And your family?

JACK

Ha! Mom and brother are dead, dad's a drunk, and my sister, well, she's a disappointment.

MARY

That's awful!

JACK

Yea, but, doesn't matter. I got myself.

Mary frowns on this. Jack notices.

JACK (CONT'D)

C'mon, everybody seems to think ya have to marry your high school sweetheart and start popping out babies. I wouldn't know what to do with a baby.

Jack takes the last bite.

MARY

You know, maybe you're right. You don't always have to follow the recipe.

(MORE)

Sometimes, you can take what you have in front of you and find a way to put it all together.

Again, their eyes meet.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Might even find it all comes out tasting, even, sweeter.

As they go in for the kiss the glider falls backwards, spilling Mary on top of Jack. The awkwardness pulls them back.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Well, I better go.

JACK  
Yea, yea, see ya tomorrow.

Mary walks off, then turns back.

MARY  
(coy smile)  
Thanks for sharing your passion.

JACK  
My passion?

MARY  
The house, silly.

Jack admires Mary's form as she walks away.

JACK  
Hmm?

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

A contractor's office only a man could love. Mary hums a tune while she goes about her work. Kopeckie comes into Jack's glass-walled office.

KOPECKIE  
Nice move, buddy. She's great.

JACK  
Yea, she'll do well.

KOPECKIE  
And tell me you haven't noticed she's a doll.

JACK  
Cute, but if she's divorced she's  
made some man miserable. Besides,  
she's got a kid.

KOPECKIE  
Okay, Debbie Downer. About time  
you did something other than work.  
Tonight, we're getting out.

Mary smiles at Jack through the office glass.

KOPECKIE (CONT'D)  
And, she's got her eye out for you.

Jack tosses a pencil at Kopeckie.

JACK  
Get to work.

As Kopeckie trots past Mary's desk, he leans to her.

KOPECKIE  
(whispering)  
He'll be there.

Mary smiles up at Kopeckie.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A party in full swing. A warm greeting for Jack and Kopeckie.  
Martinis pour, a jukebox spins, revelers dance away.

Through the door come Mary and BONNIE, a hearty farm girl.  
Mary dresses classy, not in-line with other party-goers.

Jack and Kopeckie share a laugh with some men when Jack spots  
a woman who stops him in his tracks. DARLEEN, beauty in  
curves, all about self and consuming men's souls.

One of the women Darleen talks to gestures towards Jack.  
Darleen glances at Jack, a flirtatious smile.

JACK  
Wow! Who is that?

KOPECKIE  
The most beautiful women ever.

But Kopeckie's eyes lock on Bonnie. She locks back.

KOPECKIE (CONT'D)  
Gonna be a good night, Jackie.



Kopeckie, the predator, dances up to his voluptuous prey.

MARY

Kopeckie! Thanks for inviting us.

Kopeckie, laser focused on Bonnie, doesn't acknowledge Mary. Bonnie surrenders to the beast. They dance.

LATER

A GENTLEMAN chats Mary up, she feigns interest. Mary watches for Jack but instead spots Kopeckie and Bonnie shaking it like there's no tomorrow.

Jack talks to a group of men. He looks around the room for Darleen. She seems to have disappeared.

A voice behind.

DARLEEN

Suppose I'll have to introduce us.

Darleen stands close. Jack stares stupidly. He puts his hand out to shake.

JACK

Hi, I'm Jack.

Darleen doesn't produce her hand. She moves close enough that her breasts lightly touch Jack. She's in control.

DARLEEN

I know.

JACK

Heard of me?

DARLEEN

The women all talk about you. But, it seems you're just not interested. Why is that, Jack?

JACK

Oh, oh! No, I'm interested in women, just not them. I --

DARLEEN

-- I'm Darleen Farouche.

Darleen holds out her hand now.

JACK

Hi, I noticed ya.

DARLEEN  
Right away, far as I could tell.

JACK  
Oh, yea. Uh, where you from?

DARLEEN  
The city.

JACK  
The city?

DARLEEN  
New York City. You've heard of it?

JACK  
Oh yea, sure.

DARLEEN  
You're in the construction biz?

JACK  
Yea, I am. Have my own company.  
Always been good with my hands.

DARLEEN  
Oh, good with your hands.

Darleen pulls Jack's arms around her and snuggles into her man. Jack goes with it.

JACK  
So, how'd you land in Omaha?

DARLEEN  
A long story and would probably  
just bore.

Mary stands forlorn as she watches her Jack with Darleen. She puts down her drink and exits.

MONTAGE

- Jack and Darleen laugh with the crowd.
- Darleen downs drinks. A seasoned veteran.
- Jack and Darleen share a deep kiss.

END OF MONTAGE

Jack and Darleen wrapped in each other's arms.

DARLEEN

So, the party continue at your house?

Jack's a goner. A big smile.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - MORNING

Mary and Kopeckie work when Jack waltzes in to start his day.

JACK

Mary.

MARY

(tersely)  
Mister Jaeger.

Puzzled, but lets it go.

Darleen bursts through the door. Mary's eyes narrow.

JACK

Darleen!

DARLEEN

Hello hot stuff.

Darleen sashays past Mary's desk.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)

Young lady, coffee, two sugars.

Mary reluctantly crosses to a coffee pot adjacent to Kopeckie's desk where he spits chew into a cup.

Kopeckie points to Darleen. He puts his hands around his throat in a choking gesture.

Mary and Kopeckie overhear Darleen and Jack talk and can see them through Jack's glass office walls.

JACK

That's actually Mary's job.

Darleen puts on a pout and walks coyly to Jack.

DARLEEN

Oh, but then we could spend the whole day together. I always wanted to be an accountant.

Mary can't believe what she hears.

JACK  
Uh, well, okay, I guess.

DARLEEN  
Oh now, you are a charm!

Mary's face maddens. She looks over at Kopeckie's spit cup. She pours spit into Darleen's coffee.

KOPECKIE  
(hushed tone)  
Mary!

Mary looks at Kopeckie - too evil?

Darleen grinds against Jack.

DARLEEN  
Somebody's gonna get a big thank  
you tonight.

Kopeckie cringes. He gives Mary the nod.

Mary delivers the coffee with an overly pleasant smile.

MARY  
Your coffee.

Darleen takes the cup and sips.

DARLEEN  
Oh, yummy. Has a hint of tobacco.

She takes a big gulp.

Kopeckie loves it.

JACK  
Mary, you know how you're saying  
you're real busy? I'd like Darleen  
involved in keeping the books.

MARY  
Involved? Sure that's a good idea?

Mary gives Darleen a fake smile. Darleen reciprocates.

MARY (CONT'D)  
To be honest, I've always enjoyed  
the responsibility of --

DARLEEN  
-- Jack is the owner here!

JACK  
C'mon now, it's done.

DARLEEN  
Yes, I start tomorrow.

Mary, shaken, stomps away.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)  
Sometimes you just have to put  
those kind of people in their  
place. Well, gotta go.

With Darleen clear, Kopeckie comes into Jack's office.

KOPECKIE  
See you're still dating Darleen?

JACK  
You bet.

KOPECKIE  
Not getting serious, are ya?

JACK  
Why?

KOPECKIE  
Hey, she's got a great set of gams  
and all, but don't ya think it's  
time to let it go.

JACK  
Stop.

KOPECKIE  
Seriously, she's trouble. Have you  
ever wondered why she's so vague  
about her past? Everything about  
her says she's one of them, them  
booby dancers.

JACK  
Enough!

KOPECKIE  
Has she ever said anything about  
family, or how she landed here?  
You gotta wonder, don't ya?

JACK

Look, she can be a handful, but when people see I can land a doll like that, well, they look at me different, like I'm somebody. She'll help take us far.

KOPECKIE

Or to the cleaners.

Jack grabs his tool-belt and readies to leave.

JACK

Don't worry. Like I said, don't want a damn family.

Jack leaves his office.

KOPECKIE

Mary's better!

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Jack, Darleen and a pack of male INVESTORS stand around a conference table studying building plans, Darleen about to pop out of her inappropriate dress. The investors take as much notice in Jack's prize as his pitch.

DARLEEN

Now you boys can believe in my Jack. He'll take good care of you.

INVESTOR

Looks like he's taken very good care of you.

Good old boy laughter. Darleen feigns embarrassment.

DARLEEN

Now aren't you sweet.

Jack and Darleen exchange an admiring glance.

INT. JACK'S CAR - NIGHT

Jack and Darleen leave Jack's driveway. Lights radiate from the now occupied tract homes. One sparse tree pokes up from the middle of each yard.

JACK

Jennie and the gang gonna be at the party?

DARLEEN

Yes they are.

JACK

That is one crazy dame.

DARLEEN

Remember, these people have contacts, and money.

Darleen motions to the tract houses along the street.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)

More money than you'll ever have hanging around your friends here in, Jackville.

JACK

Stop.

DARLEEN

Jack, people like that work, raise their kids and die. We're not doing that. We're gonna to get rich, move to a real city and never look back.

JACK

We?

DARLEEN

Uh, yes, we.

Jack searches for words.

JACK

You understand I'm not thinking long term here, don't ya?

DARLEEN

Uh, excuse me?

JACK

Look, when the fun's over, what's mine is mine, and what's yours is yours. We both leave this happy. Right?

DARLEEN

(softly)

We'll see about that.

JACK

What's that?

DARLEEN

Nothing.

INT. STEAK HOUSE - NIGHT

Dimmed lighting. Tufted naugahyde booths, lighted ranching panoramas line the walls. Men and women dress to the hilt.

A hostess in black gown leads Jack to Darleen's booth. An empty martini glass and a full martini on the table.

JACK

So?

DARLEEN

Have a drink first.

JACK

What's the emergency?

Darleen slugs it, deep breath.

DARLEEN

You're going to be a daddy.

Jack stares back, blankly.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)

You know, a papa, father, padre.  
Hello, Jack!

JACK

No.

DARLEEN

Look, I don't like it either. But good god, what did you expect? You're like a damn, drunken monkey in that bed. Doctor confirmed this morning. And now, we got planning to do.

JACK

Planning?

DARLEEN

Oh, don't you think for a moment you're getting out of this, Jack Jaeger. You got me this way and now, you're marrying me!

Jack looks around the room, not wanting to break decorum.



JACK  
That was never the plan. Don't want  
marriage, and I don't want family.

DARLEEN  
Now you have both. A woman like me  
is not going to raise bastard  
children. I deserve better.

JACK  
But, I --

DARLEEN  
-- I'm not going away, so get used to  
it. And don't you dare tell anyone  
about baby. Let them do the math.

Darleen gathers herself.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)  
And right now, we celebrate.

Jack hangs his head.

A black gowned hostess, Alex, holds a a tray of drinks. He's  
aghast at his appearance. Alex looks to the sky.

ALEX  
Seriously?

To get a better look, Alex takes a couple awkward steps in  
the high heels he wears. He looks upon Jack and Darleen as  
she babbles away MOS.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
(referring to Jack)  
You're so screwed, dude.

An inebriated BUSINESSMAN smacks Alex's butt.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
Whoa!

Alex throws a drink in the Businessman's face.

EXT. CHURCH STEPS - DAY

Jack and Darleen emerge as husband and wife. Darleen revels  
as the center of attention. A sparse, unenthusiastic crowd  
congratulate the couple.

Bonnie and Mary stand by the door of the church as Kopeckie  
joins them.

KOPECKIE  
Pooping a corn cob woulda been less  
painful than that.

MARY  
(sadly)  
Oh Chuck, stop. He got what he  
wanted.

BONNIE  
I know I got what I wanted.

Kopeckie and Bonnie look down at their wedding rings. Bonnie  
growls a tiger growl. Kopeckie snarls back.

INT. LIMOUSINE - CONTINUOUS

Jack and Darleen drive away.

JACK  
Sure were a lot of no-shows.

DARLEEN  
Just jealous, Jack. They're all  
just jealous.

She grabs her husband and kisses him.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A plain, clinical room. Darleen huffs and puffs as a nurse  
tries to dab her forehead. Darleen sweeps her hand away.

DARLEEN  
Stop it!

A possessed look on her face. She yells to the confused,  
scared DOCTOR attending her.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)  
Twins! How the hell could you miss  
that! You dumbass!

She throws a pillow at him.

EXT. MARY'S HOUSE - DAY

Jack rings the doorbell. Baby Michael and John in a  
stroller. Mary opens.

JACK  
 Hey, sorry to burden ya, but  
 there's a party we have to go to.  
 The baby-sitter cancelled and --

MARY  
 -- and you'd like me to watch them.

JACK  
 If ya could.

MARY  
 Again?

JACK  
 Look, these people have contacts,  
 and money. It's for the good of  
 the company.

Mary considers, reluctantly nods okay.

JACK (CONT'D)  
 Hey, thanks.

Jack trots away, Mary yells after him.

MARY  
 A blessing, Jack.

JACK  
 Huh?

MARY  
 Children, they're a blessing, not a  
 burden.

JACK  
 (confused)  
 Yea, sure.

Jack continues on.

INT. MID-CENTURY MODERN HOME - NIGHT

A cigarette stubbed out in a large, chock-full ashtray. A raucous party revealed. Thick cigarette smoke drifts among cocktail-holding partygoers.

Darleen puffs away as she watches an inebriated Jack singing loudly along with other men that have formed a kick line. As Jack's kick reaches it's apex, he falls to the floor.

Darleen jaw drops as she eyes a face she knows. She saunters up to RICK, a dark, dubious character. He leans against a pillar smoking a cigarette, a smug smile on his face.

DARLEEN

And what the hell are you doing here?

RICK

Back at ya.

Rick lights a cigarette Darleen holds to her lips.

RICK (CONT'D)

Was suggested I get lost for a while. What better place than this?

(pause)

See ya found yourself another mark.

DARLEEN

Actually, was kind of enjoying this. He's not a bad man.

RICK

Hell has frozen over! Never thought I'd hear that coming outta your mouth.

DARLEEN

Has gotten a little complicated.

RICK

Might be able to help you out.

Rick produces a card.

RICK (CONT'D)

Tomorrow, noon, Got some friends I'd like ya to meet.

As Rick exits, Darleen considers.

EXT. LAS VEGAS, NEVADA - MCCARRAN AIR FIELD - DAY

Darleen and Jack exit a plane onto a stairway. A "WELCOME TO LAS VEGAS" sign in the background.

Jack eyes the surroundings.

JACK

It's a desert, nothing but a damn desert.

DARLEEN

It may be, but big money is flocking  
in and we're getting a piece of it.

EXT. LAS VEGAS, NEVADA - EMPTY LOT - DAY

Jack, Darleen, and Rick shadow PICOTELLO, a short, thick man wearing a gray fedora and long coat. Picotello walks quickly, head up, arms swaying out around his belly.

An animated Picotello speaks MOS as he points with the blueprints he clutches. Abruptly, PICOTELLO stops and looks at Jack.

PICOTELLO

So Jaeger, ya in?

JACK

It's all so quick, would take all I  
got right --

PICOTELLO

-- Things move fast here, Jaeger.

DARLEEN

Jack, this is our chance to make it  
big.

PICOTELLO

Got guys that can write it up today.

Jack contemplates.

PICOTELLO (CONT'D)

Look, Jaeger. If ya don't want in,  
fine. There's a line of others  
waiting. Your number just came up  
'cause of my friend Rick here.

Rick notices Jack's continued hesitation.

RICK

Jack, if it makes ya feel better,  
have Darleen stay a while, she'll  
be your eyes. You go back to your  
kids and business. We do all the  
work here.

DARLEEN

Suppose I could.

Jack considers.

PICOTELLO  
Clock's ticking.

Jack thinks a moment, undecided. Then, nods affirmative.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Mary, at her desk, sits with Kopeckie. She points to a bill.

MARY  
Did you tell me about this?

KOPECKIE  
Sorry.

MARY  
You can't just go out and buy  
things without telling me.

Kopeckie avoids her gaze. Mary holds up a muddied, crumpled mass of receipts.

MARY (CONT'D)  
And what am I supposed to do with  
this?

Kopeckie hangs his head like a shamed dog.

In walks Louis with his wife, LAURA.

LOUIS  
Hello there, is Jack in?

MARY  
He certainly is. Just a moment.  
Jack, someone is here to see you.

Jack comes out.

JACK  
Yes?

LOUIS  
Jack, it's me, Louis.

JACK  
Oh my god, Louis!

They embrace.

JACK (CONT'D)  
What are you doing here?

LOUIS  
Moved to Omaha. Promised I'd be  
back. Jack, this is my wife, Laura.

JACK  
Laura, good to meet you.

LAURA  
Nice to meet you.

JACK  
Earl, how is he?

LOUIS  
Dad's fine. Lives down in Kansas  
City now. That man got himself a  
good job, married, even put me  
through college.

JACK  
No kidding? Learned so much from  
that man.

LOUIS  
And now Jack, got a job here.  
Understand you're the best builder  
there is. We're looking for a home.

Jack's demeanor immediately changes, he thinks for words.

JACK  
Oh, well, Louis, that might be hard  
right now --

KOPECKIE  
-- What do you mean, we got lots  
left up by --

JACK  
-- It's just, well, some people  
aren't willing to, you know, have  
other people living next to them.

LOUIS  
Other people?

JACK  
Louis, I got a lot of money tied up  
in an investment, I gotta make some  
quick sales.

Louis fumbles, embarrassed.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Might cause trouble for you too.

MARY  
Jack! Stop it.

LOUIS  
Trouble?

Louis shakes his head in disgust.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
C'mon, Baby.

They leave quietly. Kopeckie glares at Jack.

KOPECKIE  
Of all my friends, you're the  
hardest to call a friend.

JACK  
I'm your only friend, Kopeckie.

KOPECKIE  
Oh yea! Well, humility has left  
you. I quit.

Kopeckie stomps out. Mary gets up from her desk and gathers her things. Tears in her eyes.

JACK  
You too?

MARY  
It's not just this, Jack, it's...

Mary backs away. She looks for words.

MARY (CONT'D)  
You told me once about what Earl  
said, what he said about respect.  
I was hoping you heard him.

Mary leaves quietly. Jack angrily flips a typewriter off her desk.

INT/EXT. JACK'S TRUCK - DAY

Jack drives down his street. He waves to a group of GATHERED NEIGHBORS, Mary and Kopeckie among them. They all look away.

JACK  
Just jealous.



INT. JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack the only one in the office. Jack speaks on the phone.

JACK

I can't believe we're overdrawn.  
There has to be enough money.

(pause)

That's the problem, I can't get  
hold of my wife, can't get hold of  
anyone out there.

INT. LAS, VEGAS, NEVADA - BAR - DAY

A seedy place of little pomp. Picotello and Rick laugh it up  
as they down drinks in the mostly empty room.

Jack bursts through the door.

JACK

Picotello, what the hell's going  
on?

A nervousness in the room.

PICOTELLO

Jaeger, what you doing here?

JACK

Not a speck of dirt's been moved,  
nothing! Where's the equipment I  
bought? Where's my wife?

PICOTELLO

It's all good, Jaeger. Settle  
down.

Jack picks up a chair and readies to crush it over the duo.

JACK

Where's Darleen?

PICOTELLO

Whoa, Jaeger. Let's not bother  
these good people. C'mon, lets go  
outside and talk.

Picotello ushers Jack to a side door.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Jack and Picotello face to face.

PICOTELLO

Sometimes, deals just don't work  
out. Told you there was some risk.

From the side door, two THUGS appear. Jack looks around warily at the trio surrounding him.

PICOTELLO (CONT'D)

Go home, Jaeger, go home to your kids  
and don't come back. Ya wouldn't want  
anything bad to happen back home, would  
ya?

Anger overcomes sense. Jack swings at Picotello, smacking his jaw. The Thugs grab Jack from behind, Jack slips their grip and lands a punch to one.

The Thugs regain their grip. Picotello joins in as a weakened Jack absorbs the punishment.

EXT. BAR - SAME

Rick exits the bar and spies Darleen, suitcase in hand.

DARLEEN

Still want me?

Rick smiles a drunken smile.

RICK

Hop in!

Rick tosses her suitcases into the voluminous trunk and flicks his cigarette at a pedestrian on the sidewalk before he hops in.

The pedestrian, Alex, jumps away from the cigarette as he ambles by, observing Darleen's deceit.

INT. RICK'S CADILLAC - CONTINUOUS

Rick's attention waivers between road and his prize.

RICK

Tell ya, dolly, with a body like  
that, hard to believe ya got two  
kids.

Darleen takes a puff as she stares out the side window.

DARLEEN

Not any more.

EXT. ALLEY - SAME

Picotello and the Thugs stand over a crumpled, bloodied Jack. Picotello wipes his lip.

PICOTELLO  
I'll give ya this, Jaeger, ya got a  
hell of a punch.

JACK  
Won't get away with this. Darleen  
will back me up!

Picotello and the Thugs laugh.

PICOTELLO  
Yea, sure she will.

Uncharacteristic compassion from Picotello.

PICOTELLO (CONT'D)  
Look, you don't seem like a bad  
man, you just got stupid.

Picotello reaches in his pocket and pulls out a coin. The same coin Alex pulls from the chest decades later. He flips it onto the ground beside Jack.

PICOTELLO (CONT'D)  
Here, any time you find yourself  
pining for her, take a look at  
this, take a good long look, and  
remember how you feel right now.

As the trio departs, Picotello yells over his shoulder.

PICOTELLO (CONT'D)  
Find someone with a heart, Jaeger.

Through his bloodied eyes, Jack looks closely at the coin. The imprint says "RICK'S PLAY RANCH" and features a "TOPLESS SHOW GIRL".

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. JACK'S HOME - NIGHT

Alex opens his eyes and recovers himself. Jack waits quietly in his chair.

ALEX  
What a bitch!

JACK

But I'm the one that bought into her ways. It's that arrogance and my own stupidity that brought me down.

Alex contemplates.

ALEX

Grandpa, about Darleen.

Alex points to his chest.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Were these real?

Jack stares back at him, incredulous.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Guess they'd have to be. Probably only had like, sawdust or something to put in there back --

JACK

-- Your mother never complains about you dropping your shoes off right at the door, does she?

ALEX

Huh?

JACK

That night you got your truck stuck and rode home with a friend, your mother woke up on the couch and, not seeing your truck, she called me in a panic. The center of her world was missing. But then, as we spoke, she looked over at the door and there they were, those big shoes. She knew you were home, she knew you were safe. Swore right then she would never complain, wherever you left them.

ALEX

She's never left my side.

JACK

Nor will this family.

Alex absorbs the thought.

ALEX

How'd things turn around for you?

JACK

I came to understand the worth of  
that nasty, old napkin.

Alex examines the napkin. In a child's writing he makes out,  
"LOVE YOU DADDY, LISA". In better writing, the names "MIKE",  
"JOHN", "CARLA", and "MARY".

ALEX

Not crap at all.

Alex closes his eyes and smiles. A pro now, he readies for  
another journey. A glow emanates from the napkin.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. JACK'S HOME - JACK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (1957)

A napkin wipes fog from a window facing Jack's front yard.  
From the cleared area, a "FOR SALE" sign waves in wind and  
rain.

Jack stands at that window, tearful. He trudges back to his  
bed, deep in thought.

Lightening, a loud clap of thunder.

Little feet scamper towards Jack's room. Michael and John  
crawl into bed holding Howdy Doody and a stuffed rabbit.  
Jack looks upon the boys. He strokes their hair.

QUICK FLASHBACK

Jack strokes Joe's hair at the hospital where Joe died.

BACK TO SCENE

Jack covers his boys and wraps them with a protective arm.

EXT. JACK'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Halloween. Superman, princesses, robots and spooks run  
between houses in their clever costumes.

Mary hands out candy from a table in her driveway. CHILDREN  
approach, excited to see Mary.

CHILDREN

Trick or treat!

MARY

Oh! Look at you!

Mary hands them candy, hugs before scurrying off.

Come the Jaegers. John and Michael, dressed in plain white sheets, toddle along towards Mary. Jack walks a few steps behind with head down, embarrassed.

MARY (CONT'D)

(to departing group)

Bye, bye.

JOHN AND MICHAEL

Mary, Mary!

John and Michael run to Mary.

MARY

Oh my, scary ghosts!

Mary places candy in their buckets, they scamper off.

John falls on the concrete and cries. He runs back to Mary. She takes him onto her lap and comforts him.

Jack stares at Mary, admiringly. John, better for the hug, runs towards home with Michael. Jack continues to stare.

MARY (CONT'D)

Did you need something, Jack?

JACK

Oh, no.

Jack takes a step, turns back.

JACK (CONT'D)

I mean, I sometimes wish Darleen would have been more like, you.

MARY

We shouldn't be having this conversation.

JACK

Oh, yea, sorry.

Mary pities the man.

MARY

Jack, just look in their eyes.

JACK

Why?

MARY

(exasperated)

Never mind.

Jack goes on, a last look back. A little princess approaches and hugs Mary.

MARY (CONT'D)

Oh, how precious!

INT. JACK'S HOME - NIGHT

John and Michael wander about the living room, sheets on.

JOHN AND MICHAEL

Boooo! Boooo!

Michael smacks into a wall. Jack shakes his head.

He takes off Michael's sheet, plops him onto his lap and stares into his eyes. Michael stares back just as intently.

Between Jack and Michael, John pops up. The brothers enter into a serious stare-down with dad. Brows furrow. Serious turns to laughter and giggles.

EXT. JACK'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A major cereal spill. John watches as Jack cleans up.

Michael dashes by, toilet paper tucked into his pants and still attached to the roll.

MICHAEL

I pooped, I pooped, I pooped.

John runs through the cereal to break the outstretched roll, crunching and spreading cereal about. The boys twirl in the paper till completely wrapped.

A frazzled Jack plops on the floor, defeated.

An idea.

JACK

Boys, we're going for a little ride.

EXT. SOUTHWEST, KANSAS - CEMETERY - DAY

The site of Joe's grave. Not so desolate as before. Green has made a comeback. Mature trees break up the barren landscape.

Jack kneels before Joe's grave. Michael points to Joe's headstone.

MICHAEL

What that?

JACK

Boys, I once had a brother. But he died a long time ago. Almost twenty five years and I've never even bothered to come check on him.

Jack addresses Joe's headstone.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey Joe, kept that promise to live enough life for the both of us. Problem is, never stopped to think about how I was living it.

(pause)

One more promise, brother. From now on, I'll live that life right.

EXT. OMAHA - LOUIS'S HOME - DAY

Jack stands on the porch. He pleads MOS, repentant, as Louis listens. Louis hesitates, takes his friend into his arms.

EXT. OMAHA - FLOPHOUSE - DAY

Jack tops a flight of stairs. He finds the room for which he searches and knocks.

Nellie answers, shocked. A BABY in a playpen babbles away as a TODDLER runs in the background. She looks around, embarrassed by her condition. Silence.

JACK

Nellie, I'm sorry, I...

Nellie jumps into her brother's arms and cries.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's okay, it's okay now.



INT/EXT. JACK'S TRUCK - DAY

Jack, his boys, Nellie and her two children trek on down the road. Smiles and chaos as children jump up and down in the bed of the pickup.

EXT. DOWNTOWN OMAHA - DAY

Jack speaks to a bum. The Bum points down an alley.

Jack searches that alley. A dirty, unshaven Fritz sits against a building.

JACK

Dad?

Fritz doesn't even turn his head.

FRITZ

That my boy?

JACK

Yea, dad.

FRITZ

What you doing here?

JACK

Came for ya, to take you back home with me.

FRITZ

Don't need my troubles in your home.

(pause)

I did hear ya got two boys.

JACK

Two fine boys. Love 'em to death.

Jack stands awkwardly, embarrassed at emitting the "L" word.

FRITZ

Wish I could feel such things.

Jack looks to Fritz, shocked at this admission.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

It wasn't your fault.

JACK

What's that?

FRITZ

Joe. It was never your fault, son.  
It was my own.

Fritz sobs. He throws a pint bottle against the opposite building, glass shatters.

Jack takes a couple of steps back. Fritz waves him off. Jack hesitantly walks away.

EXT. JACK AND MARY'S STREET - DAY

Mary and Carla pull into their driveway. She looks to Jack's home where Jack and Nellie unload his pickup filled with Nellie's households. Jack puts his arm around Nellie. He kisses her cheek.

MARY

Oh, that man!

Jealousy overcomes her. Mary storms to a row of hedges separating their properties. She glares at Jack.

Jack notices and comes over. A hopeful smile.

JACK

Mary.

MARY

Almost had me believing you.

JACK

Huh?

MARY

Moving another one in, huh? Even has kids. This will be interesting.

Jack looks around, confused.

JACK

That's my sister, her kids.

MARY

Oh right, Jack Jaeger, I saw you.  
You will never change!

Mary huffs away. Jack throws his hands over his head.

JACK

You are an impossible woman, Mary!  
Impossible!

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Mary and Bonnie enter a checkout lane. Bonnie points to a box of detergent in their cart.

BONNIE  
Up to eighty nine cents now. It's  
ridiculous.

Nellie checks out customers in a nearby lane.

MARY  
Bonnie, who is that woman?

BONNIE  
Jack's sister, Nellie. You know  
she moved in with Jack, don't you?

MARY  
Oh, no!

INT. JACK'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Jack cleans as John and Michael eat breakfast.

MICHAEL  
Good toast, Mr. Wrinkles.

JACK  
What?

JOHN  
Moms here call you Mr. Wrinkles.

Jack looks himself and the boys over. Yep, wrinkled clothes.

The doorbell rings.

MICHAEL  
I'll get it.

Michael runs from the kitchen.

MICHAEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Hi Carla.

Jack snaps to attention. Michael and Carla enter.

JACK  
Hi Carla.

CARLA  
Hi Mr. Jaeger.

JACK  
So, how's your mom?

CARLA  
Good.

JACK  
Want some cinnamon-sugar toast?

JOHN  
Cinni-sugar toast good.

CARLA  
Sure.

Jack hurriedly fixes the toast while the boys and Carla jabber. He spreads the sugar, reaches in the cupboard for cinnamon. He spreads it liberally.

JACK  
Here ya go.

CARLA  
Thanks.

A huge bite. Mere distaste turns to terror. Carla spits out the toast and runs screaming from the house.

Jack checks the label on the bottle of "cinnamon".

JACK  
Oh no!

EXT. MARY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A nervous Jack knocks, Mary answers.

JACK  
(sheepishly)  
Hi.

MARY  
Hello.

JACK  
I, I made cinnamon toast and...

Carla runs to the open door, stops when she see's Jack, screams, and runs off.

CARLA (O.S.)  
He's mean!

JACK

I'm sorry!

Jack holds out the bottle of spice, a "CAYENNE PEPPER" label.

MARY

Oh, well, thanks for explaining.  
I'll give her some milk.

Mary starts to close the door.

JACK

Mary, I'd like to see you sometime.

MARY

Doesn't seem I'm your type.

JACK

Look, Darleen was a mistake. I  
realize that now.

The door swings wide open. Mary stomps towards Jack, backing him up.

MARY

But you tolerated it, Jack. As long as she turned a client's head or got you a new deal you were okay with her. A man isn't all ambition and money.

JACK

Oh, come on, I wasn't that bad.

MARY

You weren't that bad? You were arrogant, money-hungry! I don't think you even loved her. You were in lust, Jack Jaeger!

JACK

In lust?

MARY

Lust is all below the belt, love's above it too. Do you even understand that?

JACK

I, I don't know.

MARY

I'm looking for that man that sees each new wrinkle as just another beauty mark. Is that you?

Silence from Jack.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm not your type.

Mary stomps back inside and slams the door. Jack stands there, stunned.

Just as suddenly, Mary emerges again and sits down on a milk box.

JACK

That is my sister.

MARY

I know, I know. I just...

Mary stares ahead, deep sigh.

MARY (CONT'D)

... when he didn't come home that night we called the police. The stupid, obedient wife and perfect baby daughter, waiting for the loving husband to come through the door. He never did.

(pause)

All we ever heard was he found himself a younger, prettier party girl.

Mary looks to Jack.

MARY (CONT'D)

It's not just you, Jack. I have my own laundry list of problems.

Jack kneels before her.

JACK

I see it in their eyes.

Mary doesn't recall the reference.

JACK (CONT'D)

You said to look into the boy's eyes and tell you what I see.

MARY

And what do you see, Jack?

JACK

My whole world.

Mary's eyes widen, deep breaths, a smile. Caution returns. She kisses Jack on the cheek and heads inside.

MARY

It's a start.

EXT. JACK'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

A beautiful spring day. Neighbors tidy up, spruce up, plant.

IN FRONT OF MARY'S HOME

Mary plants flowers. She looks towards Jack's house where Jack plays with his boys and Nellie's children. A different "For Sale" sign in Jack's yard.

Jack notices Mary. He gives a hopeful wave.

Mary, embarrassed, returns her gaze to her garden. A moment later, she sneaks another peek. She smiles.

IN JACK'S FRONT YARD

Jack spins John around in circles. He notices Kopeckie and his family in their front yard and lets John go.

JOHN

Dad!

JACK

Oh, sorry!

Jack approaches Kopeckie.

IN KOPECKIE'S FRONT YARD

Kopeckie, a small cooler beside him and wearing a sombrero, slugs beer as he sits amid his sparse, weed-ridden lawn. Jack sits next to Kopeckie and kicks at the dirt. Both look out at the street.

JACK

Told ya to get the sod package.

Kopeckie looks around him. He pulls a beer from the cooler and offers it to Jack. A slug of beer in unison.

JACK (CONT'D)  
How's working for Copeland Brothers?

KOPECKIE  
Horrible.

Another slug in unison. Kopeckie looks to Jack's house.

KOPECKIE (CONT'D)  
Not selling, huh?

JACK  
Seems people want to look out on houses the stature of their own. Damn thing's sucked me dry.

A silence.

JACK (CONT'D)  
You're a lucky man, Kopeckie.

KOPECKIE  
Me?

JACK  
Think about it. You got a wife that loves you, and you're a hero to your kids. More than I got.

Kopeckie looks to his family. Bonnie, cat-eye glasses and head scarf on, turns and blows an adoring kiss.

An OLDER SON has his BROTHER pinned. The older son hacks a wad of spit and dangles it inches above his brother, then sucks it back up.

KOPECKIE  
You sure?

JACK  
Yea, I'm sure.

KOPECKIE  
Tell ya, raising kids is the biggest pain in the ass you'll ever love.

JACK  
You're a right smart man, Chuck.

An awe shucks face.



KOPECKIE

Don't think no one's ever said that  
about me.

Kopeckie grabs another beer.

KOPECKIE (CONT'D)

Regretting things with Mary, aren't  
ya?

JACK

Mary? No, I'm --

KOPECKIE

-- Oh, come on, I see you. Like a  
love drunk teenager, looking her  
way every time you're out.

Jack has to laugh at himself.

JACK

Managed to screw that up too.

Another slug in unison. Jack focuses on Mary across the way.

JACK (CONT'D)

Took being with someone meaner than a  
snake to see what beauty really is.

KOPECKIE

You really mean that, don't you?

Jack nods his head.

A car drives past and stops in Jack's driveway. Jack gets up  
to greet the driver.

JACK

What's he doing here?

IN MARY'S FRONT YARD

Mary notices an animated REALTOR wave a "SOLD" sign to Jack.  
Jack and the realtor talk. A subdued Jack waves him towards  
the front door.

Mary's eyes go wide, she breaths hard. She looks over to  
Kopeckie. Kopeckie notices the meeting too.

The realtor hangs the sold sign and grabs paperwork from his  
car. Jack and the realtor enter Jack's home.

Mary throws down her gardening tools and runs to Kopeckie.

MARY  
We can't let him go!

KOPECKIE  
Huh?

MARY  
We have to stop this.

KOPECKIE  
It's too late, Mary, besides...

Kopeckie considers.

KOPECKIE (CONT'D)  
You love him, don't you?

Mary nods "yes". Kopeckie grabs Mary's hand.

KOPECKIE (CONT'D)  
Let's go!

INT. JACK'S HOME - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Jack and the realtor sit at a table. Jack puts pen to paper.

Kopeckie rushes in.

KOPECKIE  
Jack, stop!

JACK  
What are you doing here?

KOPECKIE  
Don't sign, Jack.

JACK  
Chuck, I have to.

KOPECKIE  
No, you don't.

REALTOR  
Says who!

Mary emerges from behind Kopeckie.

MARY  
Says me.

JACK  
Mary?

MARY

Don't do this, Jack. You love this house. You belong here. You the boys, Nellie and her children, you all belong here.

JACK

Mary, I wish I could, but I can't afford --

MARY

-- We'll find a way. Remember, I'm the one that's good with numbers.

KOPECKIE

And I'm the one that's good with, uh, hey, I'm with ya!

JACK

Place holds some bad memories.

MARY

We'll dust them away.

Jack gets up from the table and approaches Mary.

JACK

We?

Mary looks to Jack. He presses.

JACK (CONT'D)

And you, Mary, do you belong here?

MARY

Is that an invitation?

JACK

(big smile)

Yea.

Tears fills Mary's eyes. She jumps into Jack's arms. The disgruntled realtor throws papers into the air. Kopeckie bear hugs the surprised realtor.

EXT. JACK'S CIRCLE - DAY

A neighborhood Fourth of July party begins.

MONTAGE - FOURTH OF JULY

-- bikes, trikes, and wagons form a patriotic parade.

-- flags wave. Abundant red, white, and blue.  
-- women put food out onto tables set up in the circle.  
-- a line of grills, manned by husbands, smoke away.  
-- children light off fireworks.  
-- a Kool-Aid and Lemonade stand compete for business.

END MONTAGE

Kopeckie sits with his boys. He shows them a bottle rocket launcher he's made.

KOPECKIE

This here, I call the CK4. You put  
the fuse right here in this slot.

Louis and Laura come with their CHILDREN. Jack and Mary greet them warmly. He introduces them to a NEIGHBOR.

JACK

This is my good friend Louis, his  
wife Laura.

NEIGHBOR

Nice to meet you all, welcome,  
welcome.

Jack sits in a webbed chair and lights sparklers for the boys. On one side sits Louis. On the other, a rough, but cleaned up Fritz. Nellie sits beside Fritz.

All smiles on Jack. He locks eyes with Mary and mouths, "I love you". Mary looks down flirtatiously and mouths "I love you" back.

In a gaudy flag shirt, Alex stands shuffling a ball back and forth between hands. He smiles as he gazes upon Jack.

A voice blares.

DUNK TANK VOLUNTEER (O.S.)

Ya gonna throw it or what? C'mon!  
Afraid you throw like a girl?

Alex stands in a long line at a dunk tank. He frowns as he stares back at the volunteer. Alex hauls back and hurls the ball, hitting the bulls eye and dunking the astonished volunteer.

Alex moves to a webbed folding chair as he continues to observe Jack and Mary. He smiles.

Alex looks down to see a SNOT-NOSED FAT KID staring at him.

SNOT-NOSED FAT KID  
You're big.

ALEX  
Yea, and you're frickin'  
disgusting. Go away little dude.

An older, noisy car pulls up amongst the picnic tables and scatters party-goers. Darleen emerges, dressed more for a nightclub than a Fourth of July party.

Jaws drop, people stop, burgers go ignored.

Darleen prances confidently up to Jack. Up close, Darleen has lost her luster, abundant make-up, wrinkled, and worn.

DARLEEN  
My, my, this hot weather sure is  
hell on a girl's hair.  
(deep breath)  
Hello, Jack.

Darleen does her best sexy. Jack backs away.

JACK  
What in the hell are you doing here?

DARLEEN  
I'm back, baby. Back to claim my  
man. Oh I know, this is all a bit  
awkward, especially with all these,  
these people around. But I'm ready  
to be that woman you always wanted.  
Don't ya want that?

JACK  
No.

DARLEEN  
Excuse me? Now Jack, you don't  
know what you're saying. Those  
boys, they need a momma. You're  
not gonna let them grow up without  
a momma now, are ya?

Darleen scans the crowd.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)  
Where are them little rascals  
anyway?

JACK  
You're no mother, Darleen.

Jack puts his arm around Mary.

JACK (CONT'D)  
This woman, this woman here is more  
of a mother than you will ever be.

DARLEEN  
Her? The boring little peasant girl?  
God knows what you see in her.  
(whisper)  
Or what you see in these people.

Darleen fakes a smile to the crowd.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)  
Come on now, Jack, you gotta dream.

Jack scans the entranced crowd. They look to Jack.

JACK  
This is my dream.

Darleen's eyes lock on Mary's ring.

DARLEEN  
I am your wife, and I am the mother  
of those children!

JACK  
You call yourself a wife, a mother?  
No, Darleen, you are nothing more  
than a liar, a thief and a whore!

Jaws achieve new lows. Mothers cover children's ears.

DARLEEN  
You were never good enough for me!  
You're the thief, Jack. I wasted my  
best years on an ignorant sod buster.  
I deserved something better.

Darleen looks around nervously as she senses the disdain.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)  
I did!

Darleen huffs back towards her car.

Kopeckie, bottle rocket in hand, gets an evil glare. Jack  
gives Kopeckie the nod.

The bottle rocket takes off, landing square in Darleen's posterior. She turns back to the gathered neighbors.

DARLEEN (CONT'D)

Oh! You're horrible! You're all horrible, horrible people!

She turns back to her car. A black hole where the rocket did its burn.

Mary looks to Jack and throws her arms around him. Applause and smiles from the neighbors.

Alex, from his chair, grins from ear to ear.

ALEX

Now that's my grandpa.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. JACK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alex opens his eyes again.

JACK

The years since that time have been more wonderful than I could have ever imagined. I found my peace.

Alex smiles.

ALEX

Because you did the right thing.

A gratified smile on Jack. Jack leans forward and takes Alex's hand.

JACK

Alex, what Earl said so many decades ago still rings true, no man should ever, ever put that on his son.

(pause)

In my years, I have seen men waste entire lives embroiled in bitterness and anger. Please Alex, please son, never be that man.

Alex nods agreement. He embraces his grandfather as never before.

JACK (CONT'D)  
You know, that hospital bed ain't  
worth a shit. Would you help me up  
to my room?

ON THE STAIRWAY

a built-in chair lift. Alex helps Jack onto the attached  
chair and off he goes. As the lift slowly progresses, Alex  
keeps step with the lift.

QUICK FLASHBACK

A younger, healthy Jack carries toddler Alex up the same  
stairs, singing and giggling.

BACK TO SCENE

Jack gives Alex a silly wide grin.

JACK  
Oh, what a ride.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex helps Jack to his bed.

JACK  
Oh yes, this is better, much, much  
better. Alex, could you hand me  
that picture of your grandmother.

Alex studies the picture. A "YOUNG BEAUTIFUL MARY" stares  
out.

ALEX  
Grandma Mary was beautiful.

JACK  
In so many ways.

Jack tenderly kisses the picture and places it against the  
pillow where Mary would have laid her head.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Funny thing about death. As a kid,  
you fear it as this dark tragedy.  
Later, you accept it as inevitable.  
And then, if you live long enough,  
you actually come to welcome it.



ALEX

Don't! Don't say that, Grandpa.  
You can't really mean that?

JACK

After tonight, I'm more certain  
than ever that this is just the  
beginning of a long, wonderful  
journey.

A peaceful smile comes over Jack as he closes his eyes. Alex  
turns to leave.

He walks with new-found reverence through the house.

IN THE LIVING ROOM,

Alex runs his hands along the woodwork as Jack did when Mary  
was shown the home so long ago. He stops and gazes upon  
family photos.

IN THE HALLWAY,

a doorway filled with decades of NOTCHES shows the height of  
several family members. He smiles as he finds his the  
highest.

AT THE ENTRY

Alex gives the home a last look.

EXT. JACK'S HOME - NIGHT

Alex comes out the front door. Tattoo girl waits in her car.

TATTOO GIRL

What the hell?

ALEX

Hey, think I'm just gonna go home.

TATTOO GIRL

You shit'en me? You asshole! I  
wasted my whole night on you.

ALEX

Better than wasting a lifetime  
together.

Her face maddens.

TATOO GIRL

Dick!

Tattoo Girl floors it. The finger appearing out the open car window.

INT. ALEX'S HOME - NIGHT

At the door, Alex immediately takes off those big shoes, pauses, then kicks them to the side.

A television blares its nonsense as Lisa sleeps on the couch. Alex turns off the television, covers her, and kisses her forehead.

ALEX

Love you, mom.

Alex leaves for his bedroom. Lisa opens her eyes and grins ear to ear.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex retrieves a framed photo from a dresser drawer. He crawls into bed and stares at it. The "FISHING PHOTO FRAME" holds the same picture of "JACK AND ALEX FISHING" as Jack gazed upon earlier. Alex runs his finger over it as did Jack.

INT. ALEX'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Alex sleeps. The picture of Alex and Jack lay beside him. A knock at the door.

LISA (O.S.)

(crying)

Alex.

ALEX

Huh?

LISA (O.S.)

Alex, it's grandpa.

Alex's head lifts from the pillow. His head shudders with the pounding in his chest.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

On legs strong, toddling, and behind walkers, mourners pour in to pay respects to Jack Jaeger.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

At the entrance, John, Michael, and Lisa greet a stream of arrivals. Alex stands with other grandchildren and great grandchildren within hearing distance.

A distinguished group arrive.

MICHAEL

Mr. Mayor. Thank you for coming.

Next in line, Louis and several younger family members. A warm greeting between families.

LOUIS

He's up with the lord now,  
children, he's up there.

Louis smiles, animated.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Someone else has come back too.

Family members part. An elderly couple shuffle forward, Chuck and Bonnie Kopeckie.

LISA

Oh, my lord! Chuck, Bonnie!

More hugs, tears of mixed emotion.

KOPECKIE

I'm so sorry I couldn't make it  
back these past few years.

MICHAEL

No worry. Heard so many Kopeckie  
stories, it's like you never left.

KOPECKIE

Louis says you're keeping the house  
in the family.

MICHAEL

Wouldn't think of selling it.

Rejoicing, high-fives from the grandchildren and great grandchildren at this news.

The Judge approaches Alex. Alex lowers his head, embarrassed. He pats Alex on the shoulder.

JUDGE

Sorry for your loss, son.

Alex smiles up at him.

GREAT GRANDCHILD  
 (whispering to Alex)  
 Thought everyone grandpa knew was  
 gone.

ALEX  
 Not even close.

Alex turns to see Melissa and Baby enter. Several family members, Alex not among them, leave the pews to greet them. Much fussing over Melissa and Baby.

LATER

The eulogy. A packed audience listens as a PASTOR speaks.

PASTOR  
 We have one other family member who  
 asked to say some words. Alex.

The pastor motions Alex to come forward, stunned looks and chatter from the audience.

Alex plods to the front. At the podium, he fumbles.

ALEX  
 Probably surprised to see me up here.

A hushed laughter.

ALEX (CONT'D)  
 Not real sure how to say all this.  
 (Big gulp)  
 Been thinking about grandma and  
 grandpa's house, about how everyone  
 always ended up there. Didn't seem  
 to matter when we came, something was  
 always going on. Grandma would be in  
 the kitchen cooking, making sure we  
 were stuffed. Grandpa was always  
 fixing, something. Kids would be  
 running around. I remember how  
 grandma saved the cork to every  
 bottle of wine. Said it reminded her  
 of all the love shared in that house.  
 (pause)  
 She sure liked her wine.

More hushed laughter.

Alex searches his pocket and finds a slip of paper.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I figured it out. That house has seen fifty five Christmases and at least a couple hundred birthdays. And in their yard, we played a thousand Super Bowls and World Series games. We trashed the yard with swing sets, kick-balls, slip'n slides, our dogs. But grandpa didn't care, as long as he could see us happy and playing. And so a thousand times over, grandpa put new seed down, watered, and brought it back.

Alex chokes up.

ALEX (CONT'D)

A lot like he did with me.

Alex fumbles then exits the podium. His steps reverberate in the silenced room. He plops down next to Lisa. She embraces him.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

The last of the mourners emerge from beneath a tent protecting Jack's coffin.

Beneath the tent, Alex stands, silent and alone, before Jack's coffin. He places his hand on it and closes his eyes.

Something unknown breaks his prayer. He glances up. Melissa and Baby look back at him.

ALEX

(to coffin)

I know, grandpa.

Alex walks to Melissa.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I, I don't know about getting married and all, but --

MELISSA

(tearful)

-- Alex, I never asked for that.

Melissa turns Baby to Alex.

MELISSA (CONT'D)

Please, just please hold your son.

Alex hesitates, he takes Baby and gazes deeply into his eyes.

ALEX

Wow.

Alex, Melissa, and Baby walk to another grave close to Jack's. Alex kneels before that grave.

The headstone reads, "DANIEL JAEGER, MARCH 5, 1991 - JULY 8, 2005, LOVING SON AND BROTHER".

ALEX (CONT'D)

Hi brother. Bet it's nice to have grandpa up there with ya.

(pause)

Haven't been the best person, but I understand some things now.

(pause)

I can promise you this. From now on, I'm going to live enough life for the both of us, and I will live it right.

Slowly, his head rises, a redeemed smile.

INT/EXT. COLLEGE STADIUM TUNNEL - PRESENT - DAY

Players await introduction onto the field. A hulking, bearded Alex stands at the front of the pack. Head slaps and confident jabber heard over a cacophony of stadium buzz.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Senior defensive captain and Academic All American, number forty eight, Alex Jaeger!

As Alex jogs onto the field a tremendous roar engulfs the stadium.

Alex looks to the front row of the stadium where a throng of family members cheer enthusiastically. Among them, Melissa and Baby.

Alex blows Melissa a kiss. She reciprocates.

As the sun beams down on him, tears of joy fill his eyes. He raises his arms in triumph.

FADE OUT.