

Promise, Texas

by

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FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

The PITTER-PATTER of rain scratches against the window.

Inside, RAPID TYPING fills the room.

A "CHAPMAN PANTHERS" pennant clings to a side wall. Below it hangs, a corkboard filled with pictures --

Among them, a PHOTO of THREE YOUNG BOYS posing as muscle men.

Past the corkboard a lamp dangles, illuminating a corner of the room. Hovered over a laptop types, a YOUNG MAN. His fingers glide with swiftness striking the keys of the laptop.

On the monitor, the ringers of a screenplay. The icon flashes on the screen, then --

TWO SHARP STRIKES OF THE KEYBOARD

and the flashing icon drops two lines, holding steadfast against the vast whiteness of the page.

The young man's fingers begin to type, moving with the musical rhythm of Beethoven's Fifth. The sound of FINGERS CLOUTING THE KEYS slowly MORPHS into the WHIZZING OF SPEEDING CARS --

EXT. HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

-- as a '98 Mercury Mountaineer flies down the highway, swerving through traffic.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR/HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON

The RADIO DIAL CRANKS.

(SUBTITLE)  
FOURTH OF JULY - 2002

RADIO DJ (V.O.)  
(in a thick Texas accent)  
Yee haw! It's five o'clock in  
Texas. Next up on The Wolf, another  
of your Texas country favorites.

JACKSON SLADE (18) a middle of the road kid, coasts down the highway, weaving through traffic.

RYAN HUNTER (18) and ruggedly attractive in a "Texas-redneck" way, crashes shotgun. He gulps down a can of Bud Light.

In the back middle bounces, AJ FAME (18) and pertly shy. We recognize them as the boys in the photo.

Next to AJ, a case of Bud Light clings to the seat.

Jackson veers into the right lane, approaching a white van.

JACKSON

Put the beer in the back.

AJ turns and sets the beer in the trunk next to an old baseball mitt, bat and bag.

Hunter reaches for the wheel and POUNDS THE HORN, startling Jackson.

JACKSON

What the hell are you doing!?

HUNTER

If he's gonna drive like a little bitch then I'm gonna treat him like one.

A.J.

Just go around him Jackson.

Jackson pulls into the middle lane, as Hunter rolls down his passenger side window.

JACKSON

Don't do it.

HUNTER

Stop being such a vag.

The Mountaineer pushes next to the van. A portly MEXICAN DRIVER glances over, agitated.

Hunter leans out the window and flips the Mexican the bird.

Jackson floors the gas, speeding by. Hunter slides back in and rolls up the window, his head bobbing to the music.

HUNTER

Yeah! Now turn this shit up!

Hunter BLASTS THE VOLUME, as Jackson whips into the right lane, cutting off a car.

A HORN ERUPTS.

HUNTER

In America we call these highways  
asshole! Learn how to drive on one!

Hunter reaches for the horn, but Jackson smacks him away.

The Mountaineer rides the middle lane, whipping past cars.  
Jackson glances into the rear view mirror spotting --

a COP CAR rushing down the highway, LIGHTS FLASHING.

JACKSON

Shit, cop!

A.J.

Think he clocked you?

AJ whips around, catching the car.

JACKSON

Fuck, I don't know.

Hunter chugs his can and tosses the empty in the back.

HUNTER

No big deal, just speed up.

A.J.

It's a cop, Hunter!

HUNTER

So?

Jackson eases off the gas. The speedometer slows - 90...85...

The cop advances fast; LIGHTS FLARING and HORN BELLOWING.  
Jackson slows and works towards the shoulder.

Suddenly, the cop

DARTS

into the middle lane, shooting past.

Jackson eases onto the access road and the Mountaineer rolls  
to a halt at a red light. He scans the car --

AJ breathes quicker. Hunter lounges untroubled.

HUNTER

Fuckin' cops. I need another beer.

The light turns green. Jackson pulls left past a sign --

"ENTERING ALLEN, TEXAS -- POP. 42,344"

EXT. CITY OF ALLEN WATER TOWER - AFTERNOON

A rustic water tower overlooks a busy baseball field littered with Little Leaguers. An American flag waves from the fence.

EXT. MAIN STREET - AFTERNOON

Old Town Allen; antique shops and family owned restaurants. A few people strew about.

A store front window reads "HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY". A truck drives by, a small American flag flapping from its window.

EXT. OLD FIRE STATION - SUNSET

A fire truck is parked out front. A flag hangs from the back.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - SUNSET

The sun sets over the barren countryside.

EXT. HUNTER'S HOUSE/ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Bright stars scatter the sky. Moonlight pours over Jackson, AJ and Hunter as they sit atop the roof drinking Bud Light.

Jackson takes a swig and grimaces.

JACKSON

How come we always drink Bud Light?

HUNTER

It's tradition.

JACKSON

Your tradition.

HUNTER

Unlike you, us true Texans like to drink our true Texas beer.

Hunter finishes his can.

HUNTER

Beer me.

AJ dives into the case and tosses a beer to Hunter.

JACKSON

True Texans?

HUNTER

Yeah, true Texans. You're boltin' first chance ya get, Hollywood.

Hunter cracks the can and chugs.

JACKSON

As opposed to what? Sticking around and becoming a glorified townie with you? I'd rather take Iowa.

HUNTER

There's at least horses in Iowa. How many horses are in California?

A.J.

There's horses in California.

Hunter drinks.

HUNTER

Yeah, well where the fuck are you gonna ride one?

AJ peers to his watch, then back to the sky.

A.J.

Should be starting any minute now.

Jackson eyes the sky. A chilling breeze flickers at his face.

JACKSON

You guys remember the first time we did this?

A.J.

Yeah. That was like a long time ago.

HUNTER

Not that long ago. You sound like my mom.

AJ chuckles.

HUNTER

Why's that funny? It's not funny.  
She was always pulling that "I  
remember when you were a baby,"  
bullshit.

A.J.

Whatever. You're over it.

HUNTER

Fuck off. I don't take wise cracks  
from two beer queers.

A.J.

Screw you!

Hunter guzzles. Jackson hunches in silence, fingering the tab  
of his can. AJ takes a drink, catching Jackson's sullen face  
from the corner of his eye.

A.J.

You miss her, don't ya?

Hunter backhands AJ across the chest. Jackson breaks from the  
can, casting his eyes into the dark sky --

as a FIREWORK ERUPTS lighting up the night.

EXT. JACKSON'S HOME - NIGHT

A modest two-story home. Freshly cut grass. Typical suburban  
Texas living. Jackson's Mountaineer is parked out front.

The night morphs into morning --

EXT. JACKSON'S HOME - MORNING

-- as the sun scalds the house.

(SUBTITLE)

Fourth of July - 2000

A PAPERBOY rides by and flings a paper at the Slade's home.  
It SLAMS against the door and falls to the "WELCOME" mat.

PETER SLADE (late 40's) opens the door. A former Army  
colonel, who over the years has given up sit-ups for the  
occasional beer and any semblance of ice cream. He's a shadow  
of his youthful self.

He picks up the paper and closes the door.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME/KITCHEN - MORNING

Peter tosses the paper onto the table, next to ANNE SLADE (mid 40's), coffee in hand. She's the assiduous mother of two. Her age begins to show, but with resilience she hides it; still lovely.

Peter sits, digs through the paper and seizes the "SPORTS" section.

ANNE  
Should be a good fireworks show  
tonight.

PETER  
Uh huh.

KAITLYN SLADE (18) enters and snatches the "ARTS" section.

ANNE  
You going tonight, Kaitlyn?

KAITLYN  
Going where?

ANNE  
The fireworks show.

KAITLYN  
Nope. It's just the same shit as  
last year.

ANNE  
Don't say shit.

KAITLYN  
Oh my god, who really gives a fuck  
what I say!

ANNE  
Don't say the "F" word to me, I'm  
your mother!

PETER  
(still reading)  
Don't say fuck to your mother,  
Kaitlyn.

KAITLYN  
You two just love to piss me off in  
the morning don't you!?



INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - MORNING

A compost of dirty and clean clothes litter the room. Movie posters clutter the walls. A typical teens room except for --

The numerous awards that garnish the shelves. Among them:

"BEST HIGH SCHOOL NEWS PROGRAM" and "MOST PROMISING SCREENWRITER"

A laptop lies on the desk. Above it, hangs an empty corkboard.

Past the awards, shifts Jackson asleep in bed. Sunlight from a nearby window blankets his face.

In the background, the arguing continues. Rolling over, a younger Jackson (16) rubs the sleep from his eyes.

JACKSON

God, do they ever shut up!?

He kicks his feet off the bed, wobbles up and grabs a nearby shirt from the floor.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME/BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A ZIPPER SCRATCHES straining to drown out the argument below.

Jackson pees and by the look on his face this is today's high point. He shakes and tucks; a spot trickles onto his shorts.

JACKSON

Shit.

FLUSH!

INT. JACKSON'S HOME/KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The yelling intensifies, as Jackson ambles down the stairs.

ANNE

You're 18. If you hate living here so much why don't you move out!?

Kaitlyn quiets, as Jackson enters thrusting open the fridge. He snatches a carton of orange juice, unscrews the top and takes a swig; catching his mother's ire.

ANNE  
Don't drink straight from the  
carton Jackson.

He waves her off, finishes his chug and tosses the empty carton into the trash.

JACKSON  
Morning.

Jackson falls to the table and rifles through the paper.

PETER  
(peeping up)  
Rangers won.

He ends his search and nabs a slice of bacon from the table.

PETER  
Don't forget, ball practice today.

Jackson thumbs through the ads and takes a bite.

ANNE  
Should be a nice fireworks show  
tonight, Jackson.

JACKSON  
Yep. Should be.

Kaitlyn peers from the paper, rolling her eyes. Anne takes a sip, then reaches for the "HOMES AND GARDENS". A familiar silence falls over the family.

SMACK!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Hunter tosses a baseball bag into the back of a beat up hell-hole of a Chevy truck. Scrap metal doesn't look this shitty.

HUNTER  
Don't forget my dad's in Odessa for  
the weekend, so my house tonight.

Jackson pops the trunk of his Mountaineer and tosses his bag inside. A glove, bat and a few tools scatter the back.

JACKSON  
We're getting Coors Light, Hunter.

HUNTER

Oh, come on! This is Texas. How many times I gotta explain this to you. We only drink Bud Light in Texas. You might as well be pissin' on the Texas flag.

JACKSON

If I'm buying, we're getting Coors Light.

A.J.

Yeah, Coors Light and females.

JACKSON

You got a girlfriend.

A.J.

Are we having a party or a circle jerk? Bring some females.

HUNTER

Fine, fuck it, but it's people like you that caused the Alamo to fall.

Jackson glares at AJ.

JACKSON

Females!? Cadence isn't gonna be too cool with that.

A.J.

Something has to keep you two busy when she gets drunk. You know how she gets.

JACKSON

It can't be medically healthy for a girl to be that horny?

HUNTER

They're called nymphos.

A.J.

You try telling her that, Jackson. You're her best friend.

Hunter throws the driver side door open.

HUNTER

My house at seven. Don't be late.

He climbs in, shuts the door and leans out the window.

HUNTER

Now if you excuse me ladies, I have to go home and whack it. A man's gotta have a healthy amount of masturbation in his life.

Jackson slams the trunk shut. Hunter's truck grinds and pulls out of the parking lot.

JACKSON

Is his Dad ever home anymore?

A.J.

Don't start. It's not his fault his dad's a wondering drunk.

JACKSON

That doesn't mean Hunter has to follow in his stumbling footsteps.

Jackson and AJ climb into the car.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR/GAS STATION - NIGHT

The gang rest, parked outside of a Gas Station/Liquor Mart. AJ chills in the backseat, cell phone plastered to his ear.

JACKSON

It's not gonna work.

HUNTER

Yes it will.

A.J.

(into the phone)

Are you mad at me honey?

JACKSON

Have you looked at AJ, lately? He looks like he's pushing twelve.

A.J.

(re: the phone)

Don't be mad at me.

JACKSON

No offense, AJ.

A.J.

None taken.

(re: the phone)

Not you. I was talking to Jackson.

HUNTER

You're such a whipping boy! Get off the phone!

JACKSON

Tell Cadence I said hey.

A.J.

She says hey back. And she said fuck you Hunter.

(he listens)

Okay - love you too. Bye, baby.

Finally, he hangs up.

JACKSON

Trust me on this one, Hunter.

A.J.

Wait, what's going on!?

HUNTER

Yeah, but if my senses are right, then that old clerk inside leans towards the back end of the steer, if you know what I mean. He'll eat up a little thing like AJ.

A.J.

No way! There's gonna be no eating anything of me involved.

HUNTER

Come on, this is just like takin' a bullet for someone, 'cept you can't die. I'd take a bullet for you.

A.J.

Screw you!

HUNTER

See, you can't even say fuck you. Ya had to say screw you. That's what a bitch would say. Now get your fine feminine ass in there.

AJ slumps back in his seat.

HUNTER

When have I done you guys wrong?

This doesn't help to erase their unwillingness.

HUNTER

You wanna get drunk tonight or not?

EXT. GAS STATION/PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The three strut "ULTRA COOL ACTION STAR SLO-MO STYLE" through the parking lot. Hunter slaps AJ's ass. He jumps, as the automatic doors slides open and they enter.

INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUE

They parade past the STORE CLERK to the back freezers.

Hunter flings the freezer door open and reaches for a case of Bud Light. Jackson smacks the glass, his eyes pelting Hunter with that "hand on your porn stash" glare.

HUNTER

Oh, right. Shitty beer night.

He eases the Bud down and stretches for a case of Coors Light.

INT. GAS STATION COUNTER - MOMENTS LATER

Hunter throws down the case, as AJ pulls his wallet.

STORE CLERK

This gonna be it for y'all?

A.J.

Yeah, just the beer and go ahead and throw in some Juicy Fruit.

STORE CLERK

Alright, just gonna need to see some I.D. then son.

AJ leans against the counter. Seductively, he bats his eyes.

STORE CLERK

Are you some type of fag, boy?

The clerk winks. AJ steps back, curling in disgust.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The boys slump on the curb. AJ pops a stick of Juicy Fruit into his mouth. Jackson hunches, fiddling with his keys.

A.J.  
I think he winked at me.

HUNTER  
Told you he liked it in the deuce.

A.J.  
Shut up. You owe me.

HUNTER  
Guess we'll just move to Plan B.

A.J.  
Plan B? We didn't have a good plan  
A. What the hell makes you think  
Plan B is gonna be any better?

Hunter pulls a toothpick from behind his ear.

HUNTER  
Confidence.

He works the toothpick against his teeth. Then, his eyes  
light up. Across the lot, a Mexican fidgets with the pumps.

HUNTER  
Confidence and I'm slightly  
bilingual.

JACKSON  
(off Hunter's look)  
Hell no! We're not hitting some  
random guy up for beer.

HUNTER  
Why don't you take your pink  
panties off and stop being such a  
girl. If it scares you that much,  
then just sit tight. Unlike you two  
pussies, I can handle mine.

Hunter stands and pounces towards the pumps.

A.J.  
He's not really bilingual is he?

JACKSON  
He can barely speak English.

EXT. PUMPS - CONTINUE

Hunter approaches the Mexican, struggling in broken Spanish.

HUNTER

Hola...

He steals a peek to the back windshield of the El Camino - "JUAREZ". Behind it, a black Lancer rolls into the pumps.

HUNTER

...Juarez!? Mi Amigos y me...um  
dinero for beer?

Juarez's eyebrows curl. Constipation isn't this rough on people.

JUAREZ

Cerveza!? Si, si.

Hunter whips around, firing Jackson and AJ a thumbs up.

INT. GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Juarez pops the freezer door and lunges for a case of Corona.

HUNTER

No amigo. This ain't fuckin Mexico.

He sets the Corona down and leans for a case of Coors Light.

HUNTER

No. Bud Light.

Hunter points to the correct case.

HUNTER

Bud Light. Coors Light, no. Bud  
Light, si. Don't they teach this  
shit once you cross the border?

Juarez doesn't budge.

HUNTER

Are you fucking retarded, ese?

Hunter seizes Juarez by the hand and guides him to the beer. Together, they lift.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MEANWHILE

Jackson and AJ wait on the curb.



A.J.  
 Old man's never gonna buy it. No  
 way man, not happenin.

AJ spins around, peeking through the store window.

Across the lot, a CUTE GIRL steps from the Lancer. A smooth  
 glide in her step entraps Jackson.

A.J.  
 But if it works he better get Coors  
 Light.

INT. GAS STATION - MEANWHILE

Juarez plops the case on the counter. The Clerk glares back,  
 as Hunter digs into his pocket and pulls back a crumpled wad  
 of cash. He shoves the wad into Juarez's hand. Juarez lays  
 the cash on the counter, next to the beer.

STORE CLERK  
 What the fuck do you think you're  
 doing?

HUNTER  
 Earning my merit badge for  
 international relations.

STORE CLERK  
 This man can't buy you beer.  
 (to Juarez)  
 You can't buy him beer, sir.

JUAREZ  
 No ingles. Espanol.

Juarez nods with a smile. Hunter slaps Juarez on the back,  
 pushes the cash towards the clerk and grabs the beer.

STORE CLERK  
 I'm not allowing this.

HUNTER  
 Look, Juarez here had a hard day  
 rolling burritos. They may deny him  
 his green card, but don't take away  
 his beer too. Fall down and pretend  
 you broke a hip or something  
 Gramps. It's called deniability.

The clerk yanks the case back and sets it behind the counter.

STORE CLERK  
Get the fuck out of my store before  
I call the cops!

Juarez turns to Hunter, cowering like a red-headed stepchild.

JUAREZ  
Federali!?

EXT. PARKING LOT - MEANWHILE

Jackson stands, leaving his keys behind on the curb. He eyes the girl at the pumps, PROMISE DAWSON (17), fair with a soft face. Very cute, girl next door type.

A.J.  
Where are you going?

JACKSON  
You wanted females, right? Well,  
I'm handling mine.

Jackson moves to the pumps, a swagger in his step. He approaches Promise from behind and pauses. He takes a deep breath and finally taps her on the shoulder. She whirls around, pump in hand and douses Jackson's pants in gasoline.

PROMISE  
Oh my god! I'm so sorry.

Jackson hops back, frantically wiping at his soaked crotch.

JACKSON  
No, no it's okay. It's only a  
little gas. Can't do any harm,  
right?

PROMISE  
Yeah...sure.

An awkward silence settles. Perplexed, she eyes Jackson.

PROMISE  
Do I know you? You look familiar.

JACKSON  
Don't think so. I'm Jackson.

PROMISE  
Promise.

JACKSON  
Yeah, why would I lie?

PROMISE  
No, Promise. That's my name.

JACKSON  
Oh...that's different.

PROMISE  
Uh, thanks.

JACKSON  
I mean in a good way. It's  
resplendent.

PROMISE  
Resplendent?

JACKSON  
Yeah, you know, elegant,  
stunning...pretty.

PROMISE  
Thanks, I guess. Never have been  
called resplendent before. Bone-  
able, but never resplendent.

Jackson cracks a smile.

PROMISE  
So can I help you with something or  
was the wet spot enough?

JACKSON  
Oh, right, I mean as much as I love  
having gas and all.

He stops, red-faced. She smirks. Jackson looks around  
nervously, glancing back at the store and AJ.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUE

Behind AJ, Hunter strolls out the door, sans the beer.

HUNTER  
What's Jackson doing?

A.J.  
He's handling his.

AJ looks up to Hunter, instantly catching the problem.

A.J.  
Where's the beer?

HUNTER  
Ace in there popped an artery.

AJ climbs to his feet.

A.J.  
Well, that's it. Time to go home.

A twinkle sparks Hunter's eye. He scoops the keys off the curb and flings them at AJ.

HUNTER  
I got an idea. Start the car and pull around front.

A.J.  
What? No. What are you gonna do!?

HUNTER  
Hey, Alex Trebek, quit with all the questions and just do it.

Hunter marches back into the store.

A.J.  
Ah, crap.  
(to Jackson)  
Hurry up man, I think Hunter's about to do something stupid!

INT. GAS STATION - MEANWHILE

Hunter ducks his head and lurks past the counter. Distracted by a customer, the clerk is oblivious.

EXT. GAS STATION/PUMPS - MEANWHILE

JACKSON  
I gotta jet, but, well - we're having a kickback tonight. Just a few friends. Anyways, it'd be cool if you came by.

PROMISE  
Is that an invitation?

JACKSON  
Let's call it retribution for the  
pants.

INT. GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Hunter digs for a case of Coors Light, but hesitates...

HUNTER  
If I'm goin' to jail it's gonna be  
damn worth it.

He releases the Coors. His hand glides to the Bud and  
snatches a case, as the freezer swings shut.

Hunter strolls towards the exit past a display of Jack that  
lines the way. He shrugs and nabs a handle as he passes.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - MEANWHILE

AJ throws the car into reverse and whips out.

A.J.  
We're so screwed.

INT. GAS STATION - MEANWHILE

The clerk rings a case of beer. The CUSTOMER shields the  
clerk's view, as Hunter inches towards the door.

EXT. PUMPS- MEANWHILE

BRAKES SLAM

Jackson twists around. His car, engine running, waits in  
front of the store.

Furiously, he searches his pants. Nothing.

Past the car, Hunter creeps towards the entrance, beer and  
liquor in hand.

INT. GAS STATION - CONTINUE

The customer drops his pen and bends down, shattering  
Hunter's cover. The clerk grows with rage.

STORE CLERK  
You little fucker!

HUNTER  
Oh shit.

Hunter darts for the door. The clerk reaches under the counter fumbling for a

SHOTGUN

Hunter pauses, waiting for the automatic door to slide open.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - CONTINUE

AJ reaches over and flings open the passenger door.

A.J.  
Move it!

EXT. GAS PUMPS - CONTINUE

Jackson's babbling fades with the excitement.

JACKSON  
Oh shit. I gotta go!

Jackson steps towards the car, but stops and twists around.

JACKSON  
I'll see you there?

PROMISE  
I can't. I already got plans.

Torn and dejected, Jackson shoots for the car, but stops, a last ditch attempt. He turns and flashes Promise a sweet smile and then beelines it for the Mountaineer.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - CONTINUE

Hunter dives into the front seat and slams the door shut.

HUNTER  
Where's Jackson!?

OUT THE WINDOW

Jackson scurries for the car.

INT. GAS STATION - MEANWHILE

The clerk storms around the counter.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - CONTINUE

Hunter's eyes whip to the store door and spot the clerk. His eyes glide down the clerk's side and widen at --

HUNTER

Oh fuck! He's got a shotgun!

A.J.

Why's he have a shotgun!?

HUNTER

It's Texas. Who doesn't!?

The store door slips open. The clerk stops and COCKS. He raises the gun and eyes Hunter.

Suddenly, the back door flies open and in plunges Jackson.

JACKSON

GO!!!

AJ slams the gas and the car PEELS OUT, just as the clerk FIRES, skimming past the Mountaineer.

STORE CLERK

Damn homos!

EXT. GAS PUMPS - MEANWHILE

Promise watches her admirer speed away. She closes her gas tank, as a smile arches across her lips.

Beside her, the shotgun blast has ripped off one of Juarez's side mirrors. He plucks it from the ground.

JUAREZ

(in broken English)

Mother fucker!

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

AJ speeds, crashing from the adrenaline rush. Hunter calmly fiddles with the radio. Jackson springs from the back seat.

JACKSON  
What the hell was that!?

HUNTER  
Sometimes in life you have to take  
chances.

JACKSON  
For beer!?

HUNTER  
Hey, this isn't just beer, it's a  
livelihood, man. This...  
(holds up the Bud Light)  
Is the official drink of Texas.

Jackson examines the case. His eyes grow with intensity.

JACKSON  
I said Coors Light you asshole!

Jackson leaps forward, but Hunter twists around struggling to  
fend off Jackson's throe.

AJ squares at "10 and 2", sweat beading off his forehead.

A.J.  
Cut it out! We're going to jail! My  
parents are going to be pissed!

Jackson gives up and slumps back into his seat, as --

Hunter reaches back, and STRIKES him on the cheek. Jackson  
lunges, but halts at Hunter's coiled fist and middle finger.

HUNTER  
We're not going to jail. The old  
man's not gonna call the cops for a  
case of beer and a handle of Jack.

A.J.  
He won't call the cops, but he sure  
as shit can shoot at us! I swear to  
God you're gonna get me killed  
Hunter! From now on, any decisions  
you make go through me first.

HUNTER  
What the fuck does that mean!?

AJ and Jackson stop. Their eyes, like bullets, riddle Hunter.



HUNTER

Don't put this shit all on me. This is just as much your fault as mine.

AJ resigns and drives. Jackson sinks back in his seat. Hunter pulls a can from the case and cracks it open.

HUNTER

So, you get that hot chicks number?

JACKSON

You're hopeless.

HUNTER

Cause she was hot man. I'd do her.

Hunter drinks with a sniff. His nose wrinkles in disgust and he turns, his eyes falling over Jackson's crotch.

HUNTER

Whew! Man, you smell like ass. You ever think about tryin' some of that Summer's Eve shit?

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The Mountaineer charges past a field of grazing cows.

EXT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A battered one-story home rests amongst a large empty field. Several vehicles, including Jackson's Mountaineer, clutter the street. COUNTRY MUSIC roars from the house.

A PAIR OF GIRLS flaunt up the sidewalk to the front door. They open it, revealing a small party in progress and enter --

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - CONTINUE

-- and continue past the beer bottles that litter the house. A FEW TEENAGERS kickback drinking and mingling.

The girls pass through the living room, towards the back door. AJ slides it open, as the girls slip past him.

AJ enters the house and coasts

INTO THE KITCHEN

Hunter lingers by the counter, surrounded by CADENCE GRACE (16) cute and blunt, and JENNY PANKRATIOS (16) and attractive, but in much more promiscuous fashion.

Three empty shot glasses toil on the counter in front of Hunter. AJ hugs Cadence from behind and kisses her cheek.

CADENCE

Hey Bubby. Hunter is just making us some drinks.

A.J.

Of course he is.

HUNTER

This drink, ladies, is known as a buttery nipple.

Hunter glances down at Jenny's chest and grins.

HUNTER

I see some of us are already familiar with the nipple portion of the drink.

CADENCE

Shut up Hunter!

HUNTER

What!?

Hunter carefully pours the Schnapps into the shot glasses.

Jackson enters and flings open the fridge. He grabs a beer, and cracks it open.

A.J.

It's getting late. Looks like mystery girl isn't coming.

Jackson takes a long swig. Hunter drops the Baileys onto the counter and makes a masturbation motion with his hand.

HUNTER

I say fuck her. You still got Jill.

Hunter holds up his palm, fingers spread. Vaguely it resembles the name "JILL". He continues "jerking off".

HUNTER

Start warmin' that bad girl up, 'cause it's gonna be a long, lonely night.

Hunter downs a shot, as Cadence back hands him. A drop spills onto Hunter's shirt. Quickly, Hunter laps it up.

CADENCE

Forget about it Jackson. If she wasn't into you, then she's obviously not worth it.

JACKSON

Thanks. I'll remember that next time me and Jill have some alone time together.

Jackson repeats the crude jerking off motion, takes another gulp and wanders outside to

EXT. HUNTER'S BACK PORCH - CONTINUE

This place is country-twang/Redneck landscaping at its best.

A shed to the left has been "Frankenstein-ed" into a shoddy tiki bar. To the right, a wooden barrel converted into a cooler. A mucky glorified kiddie pool rests in the distance.

Christmas lights hang from aluminum planks above and an assortment of plastic lawn furniture collects on the actual porch.

Jackson takes a seat at the table, leans back and drinks.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - MEANWHILE

CADENCE

Why you always have to be such an ass? You know he's never had much luck with girls.

Cadence abandons the kitchen and slips through the back door.

HUNTER

Whatever.

Hunter dangles an arm around Jenny. He downs a shot with his free hand, as his "occupied" hand caresses Jenny's breast. Startled, she slaps him away.

JENNY

Hunter!

HUNTER

My bad.

EXT. HUNTER'S BACK PORCH - MEANWHILE

Cadence pulls up a seat. Jackson takes another guzzle.

CADENCE  
What is that oh so lovely smell?  
Armani? Or is that Exxon?

JACKSON  
(between gulps)  
Something like that.

CADENCE  
So what'd she look like?

JACKSON  
Who?

CADENCE  
Britney Spears. Who do you think?

JACKSON  
I don't see the big deal. All I did  
was invite her over.

CADENCE  
Yeah, but come on. That's not  
normally your style.

JACKSON  
I didn't know I had a style.

CADENCE  
You don't. You get a number at  
least?

JACKSON  
Nope.

Jackson drinks.

JACKSON  
But I would've if it weren't for  
the Dukes of Hazzard in there.

Cadence pulls a pack of cigarettes from her pocket and plucks one into her mouth. She offers to Jackson, but he waves her off.

CADENCE  
Alright, but that just means more  
cancer for me.

She searches fruitlessly for a lighter. Jackson sets his can down and digs in his pocket. He pulls a lighter, sparks and raises it to Cadence. She leans in and lights her cigarette.

CADENCE

You don't smoke, but you carry a lighter around?

Jackson shrugs. Cadence takes another drag.

CADENCE

I need some sex.

Jackson shifts in his chair, unfazed.

JACKSON

So Mister and Miss Virgin are a thing of the past now?

CADENCE

No. We're still virgins. And yes we're still waiting til marriage.

JACKSON

Bullshit! What you two do isn't holy or virginal. You're the horniest girl I know.

CADENCE

Horny...

She takes another drag.

CADENCE

...but not slutty.

Jackson lounges back in the flimsy chair and drinks.

JACKSON

You sure about that?

Cadence leans in, her supple lips daring Jackson.

CADENCE

You know for AJ's best friend you sure seem quite interested in our sex life.

JACKSON

(just as sultry)

Just trying to get some ideas for me and Jill.

He raises his hand and roughly "masturbates" the air. Cadence takes a long drag, extinguishes the cigarette and stands. Jackson takes another gulp.

CADENCE

Go easy on the silver bullets stud.  
I hear they rip your liver to shit.

She softly kisses the top of his head and slips inside. Alone, Jackson drinks.

EXT. HUNTER'S BACK PORCH - LATER

The stars glint in the night. Alone at the table, Jackson stares into the sky. Five empty cans spread the tabletop.

The backyard is mostly empty.

GIRL (O.S.)

It's quite resplendent isn't it?

JACKSON

To some people.

Sitting up, he twists around. Promise poses in the doorway.

JACKSON

It's you?

PROMISE

It's me.

JACKSON

No, I mean you came?

PROMISE

What, you shocked?

JACKSON

A little.

She moves to the table, taking a seat next to Jackson.

JACKSON

I thought you had plans tonight!?

PROMISE

Yeah, well my plans fell through.  
Some stuff kinda came up.

JACKSON

Nothing too bad I hope.

PROMISE

It'll pass.

Hunter stumbles through the back door, a cockeyed cowboy hat slacken on his head. A beer clings in each hand. The can on the right doubles as a spit cup. Appropriately, he shows us this, as he staggers towards the pair.

HUNTER

Woo! I'm so drunk!

Jackson drops his head in embarrassment, as Hunter examines Promise. His drunken drool responds with approval.

HUNTER

Where's your drink little lady?

PROMISE

Jackson here hasn't offered me one.

Hunter's eyes assault Jackson. Hunter's beyond offended.

HUNTER

That just won't do. Here, let me get you one.

Hunter fumbles at the cans on the table. Then, down to his own, a strain of confusion crossing his face. Finally, he sets the spit can in front of Promise and pulls up a seat.

PROMISE

Bud Light?

HUNTER

Only the best for you, baby.

PROMISE

I'm more of a Coors girl.

Hunter growls.

HUNTER

Figures. Damn women.

Hunter bellows with laughter. Then, with sudden seriousness he stops and takes a drink from his beer.

HUNTER

Fuck me. I'm so drunk.

He chugs. Promise grabs the spit can and raises it.

HUNTER

I love it! So, what's your name?

Off guard, she pulls the can back and sets it on the table.

PROMISE

Promise.

HUNTER

Promise? Was your mom like some big flower power child or something?

PROMISE

Yeah, sure.

HUNTER

(enamored)

Wow, that's really cool.

JENNY (O.S.)

Hunter, hurry up. It's your deal.

In the doorway, Jenny leans topless, but hiding herself well.

HUNTER

Oh shit...

Hunter springs from the seat, grabbing his beer. He stands and puckers his fingers in a weed smoking signal.

HUNTER

Excuse me, but I gotta make like a hippie and blow this joint.

He bows to the two and stumbles back inside.

HUNTER

Whose got my dip can!?

PROMISE

He's not very good with the ladies, is he?

JACKSON

Not exactly.

PROMISE

Allen High School.

JACKSON

What about it?



PROMISE

That's where I know you from. You go to Allen, right?

JACKSON

Yeah.

PROMISE

So do I. That's where I recognized you from. You do that morning newscast thing.

JACKSON

That's me, but most people usually like to add, what a queer after they find that out. Though I've heard that douche bag substitutes quite nicely. Whatever's your preference.

PROMISE

Homo.

JACKSON

Okay, thanks. Guess that works too.

PROMISE

Look, I'm just throwing out possible combinations here.

JACKSON

Yeah, thanks again.

She reaches for the spit can and raises it to her lips. Jackson notices and swiftly rips the beer from her grasp.

JACKSON

I don't think you wanna drink that.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - LATER

AJ and Cadence kiss on the couch. Suddenly, she thrusts AJ down and quickly mounts him.

Past the couch, Jenny pulls a half-naked (frilly cooking aprons count as clothing, right?) Hunter into the hallway.

JENNY

Ride me big boy!

A LIGHTNING-LIKE CRACK rips from outside.

EXT. HUNTER'S BACK PORCH - MEANWHILE

FIREWORKS BURST high into the sky startling Jackson and Promise.

Promise eyes the sky in awe. Jackson doesn't turn. Instead, he just studies Promise with a coy smile, then clutches her by the hand.

JACKSON

Follow me.

Jackson stands from the table and leads Promise to

EXT. HUNTER'S HOUSE/SIDE YARD - CONTINUE

A ladder leans against the house. Jackson climbs. Promise follows.

EXT. HUNTER'S ROOFTOP - MOMENTS LATER

The pair are locked on the colorful sky, mesmerized.

Without breaking gaze, Promise slides her hand into Jackson's palm, wrapping her fingers in his.

Jackson turns, meeting Promise's eyes. Through her gaze he can see the twinkle of the fireworks reflecting against his own face. He's smitten. Its clearly a moment.

Slowly, he leans in, their lips pushing towards one another.

CRACK!

The blast of the firework shatters the engagement and they both turn back to the sky, hand-in-hand.

EXT. JACKSON'S HOME - MORNING

The Mountaineer rolls up and Jackson exits, haggard and hungover, but smiling.

Jackson stops at the front door and digs in his pocket. He pulls out a piece of paper, but shoves it back. In the other pocket, he pulls out his cell phone - "10 MISSED CALLS".

JACKSON

Oh shit.

The door flies open. Peter stands, pissed. Jackson lowers his head and slips inside.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME - CONTINUE

PETER  
Where the hell were you all night!?

Peter slams the door.

JACKSON  
Chill out, Dad.

Peter pokes Jackson. Jackson stumbles back a step.

JACKSON  
What the hell is that for!?

PETER  
You chill out! Don't forget who the adult is here, Jackson. All we ask for is a simple phone call.

JACKSON  
It's not a big deal. Get over it.

Jackson starts off, but Peter grips his shoulder and sniffs.

PETER  
Have you been drinking?

Jackson shrugs him off and storms up the stairs.

PETER  
It's about time you get your head out of your ass and grow up!

A door slams.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hunter sleeps on the couch. Beer cans engulf the house.

The front door opens and in stumbles TERRY HUNTER, life's spare tire. Perpetual drunkenness roughs out his eyes.

He kicks around the trash and staggers through the hallway.

A door shuts, waking Hunter. Hunter takes a quick look around, shifts on the couch and falls back asleep.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Jackson lays in bed, paper in hand - "PROMISE 972-555-4030".  
He snatches the phone from the night stand and dials --

He quickly, hangs up and tosses the phone on the bed.

Jackson stands and drifts to the desk. He flips open the  
laptop, but pauses, drawn back to the phone.

He wanders back to the bed and snatches the phone. His finger  
shakes as it hovers over the power button, then --

It RINGS. Jackson jumps. Then, answers.

JACKSON  
Hello...just a minute. Dad!

INT. JACKSON'S HOME/KITCHEN - EVENING

The family sits around the dinner table. A bowl of stir fry  
rests in the middle. Quietly, they scoop food onto their  
plates, as Peter stands.

PETER  
I gotta grab a drink.

Jackson forks at the bowl, fishing out pieces of chicken.

ANNE  
Why don't you try some vegetables?

JACKSON  
I don't like 'em.

Anne grabs the scooper and loads up on veggies. Then, slaps a  
mountain of them onto Jackson's plate.

JACKSON  
I'm not gonna eat that.

ANNE  
Nonsense. It's good for you.

KAITLYN  
Why don't you just let him eat what  
he wants to eat?

ANNE  
Excuse me, was I talking to you?

KAITLYN

It's his dinner. He's not a little kid anymore!

ANNE

You sure still act like it though.

KAITLYN

This isn't about me!

The arguing escalates. Jackson digs through the vegetables, as Peter marches back in, two beers in hand.

PETER

Knock it off Kaitlyn!

KAITLYN

It's -

PETER

I said knock it off!

He cracks the beers and slides one to Jackson.

ANNE

What are you doing?

PETER

If he wants to get drunk, let him get drunk. Come on, drink up.

Peter takes a drink. Jackson ignores the beer.

ANNE

I thought we already discussed this.

PETER

He's a big boy now. Big enough to do whatever he wants.

(to Jackson)

Go ahead drink it big man.

Peter pushes the beer to Jackson. Jackson ignores him and forks out another hidden piece of chicken.

PETER

I said drink it!

Kaitlyn storms to her feet.

PETER

Where do you think you're going!?

KAITLYN

This is stupid. I'm leaving.

PETER

No you're not. Sit down.

Peter SLAMS his hand against the table.

PETER

I said sit down!

Kaitlyn slinks back into her seat in silence. Jackson pokes around the onions on his plate.

PETER

Drink it God damn it. I didn't open it for my health.

Peter picks up the beer and shoves it into Jackson's face. Jackson slaps the bottle away.

PETER

My beer not good enough for you?

Peter grabs Jackson's mouth. His fingers pry at Jackson's lips. Jackson fights to squirm free, but Peter's grip tightens.

Peter pours the beer down Jackson's throat, choking him.

ANNE

That's enough Peter! You're acting like a child.

Peter releases his hold, as Jackson fights off a fit of COUGHS. Then, Peter storms to his feet and starts to leave.

PETER

I'm not raising a disrespectful prick in this house.

Jackson gulps down a glass of water, calming himself. Anne sips her wine as the familiar silence avalanches over the family.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - LATER

Jackson paces the room, phone in hand. He stops and dials.

PROMISE (V.O.)

Hello?

His grip loosens and the phone drops.

INT. PROMISE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUE

Gobs of music posters and pictures smother the walls.

PROMISE (V.O.)  
Hello? Who is this?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION - JACKSON AND PROMISE

Jackson bolts to the ground, recovering his fumble.

JACKSON  
Is Promise there?

PROMISE  
This is her. Who is this?

JACKSON  
It's Jackson. From last night.

PROMISE  
(kiddingly)  
Jackson...Jackson? The name sounds familiar, but...

JACKSON  
You know, from last night? You gave me gas.

Jackson cringes.

PROMISE  
Oh, that Jackson.

His face relaxes, if only slightly.

PROMISE  
I got so many Jackson's calling me  
I can't keep them all straight.

But not for long.

PROMISE  
So what's on your mind? It's Jackson, right?

She smirks. Jackson isn't amused.

He circles the room, stopping at his desk. A Post It note slapped onto a stack of papers eyeballs him - "CHECK OUT THESE SCHOOLS. - DAD"

He sweeps the stack to the floor.

JACKSON

What are you up to?

PROMISE

You mean before you interrupted me and my boyfriend making out?

She awaits his response, but a speechless shock mutes him.

JACKSON

Boyfriend? I didn't know you had a boyfriend.

PROMISE

I don't, well I did but not anymore. You seem pretty nervous.

JACKSON

I'm - I'm not - alright a little.

PROMISE

It's okay. It's kind of cute.

Jackson beams. His smile could've relit the whole East Coast. A BEEP interrupts Promise.

PROMISE

Hold on one sec.

Promise pulls the phone from her ear and checks the caller ID beeping in, but she ignores it.

PROMISE

Sorry. So what's on your mind?

JACKSON

I was wondering...

Jackson pauses. A deep breath.

JACKSON

I was wondering if you'd like to go out sometime.

PROMISE

Oh, really? Like when?



JACKSON

Um, well...

Promise checks her alarm clock - "10:06 PM".

PROMISE

What about tonight?

Jackson checks his own clock. It mirrors hers.

JACKSON

Isn't it kind of late?

PROMISE

Not really. Just sneak out.

Jackson's lip curls in doubt.

PROMISE

Come on, don't puss out on me now.

Jackson lowers onto the bed, contemplating.

JACKSON

Alright. When?

PROMISE

Midnight. Vaughan Elementary.

JACKSON

Okay. Midnight.

PROMISE

Bye, Jackson.

JACKSON

Bye.

INT. PROMISE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUE

HEATHER DAWSON (late 30's), attractive but trying too hard stands in the doorway working on her earrings.

HEATHER

I'm going out tonight. Keep an eye on your brother. I'll be home late.

PROMISE

You could have at least asked me.

HEATHER

I'm telling you.

PROMISE  
Sorry I can't. I'm busy.

HEATHER  
Then get unbusy.

PROMISE  
This is bullshit.

HEATHER  
Shut up Promise.

Heather leaves the doorway just missing Promise's middle finger.

EXT. JACKSON'S HOME - NIGHT

Two lit windows loom bright in the darkness; each on opposite sides of the house.

The light on the left flicks off. Moments later, the light on the right follows.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson lies in bed. The bedside alarm clock flips "11:52 PM". Jackson pulls the covers back, kicks his feet out and slides off the bed.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME/FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson reaches for the front door, grasping the knob.

From the bedroom, Peter erupts a LOUD SNORE.

Quickly, Jackson flips the latch, pops the door open and steps outside, clapping the door shut behind.

EXT. VAUGHAN ELEMENTARY - LATER

Jackson walks along a dimly lit sidewalk.

Jackson stops and waits under a street light. In the distance FOOTSTEPS approach. Jackson looks around nervously as Promise steps out from the darkness.

JACKSON  
You came?

PROMISE  
 You keep thinking I'm going to just  
 blow you off, don't you?

JACKSON  
 It's this nervous male  
 compulsiveness in me.

EXT. VAUGHAN ELEMENTARY PLAYGROUND - LATER

Side-by-side they swing, as Jackson scans the playground  
 nervously.

PROMISE  
 What are you doing?

JACKSON  
 Making sure your Dad isn't gonna  
 jump out and rip me a new one.

PROMISE  
 Don't worry.

JACKSON  
 How come you're so sure? You sneak  
 out often?

PROMISE  
 A couple times. You?

JACKSON  
 First time. Til tonight I was a  
 sneaking out virgin.

PROMISE  
 Uh oh, watch out, someone's cherry  
 got popped tonight.

Jackson stops rocking and continues searching.

PROMISE  
 Trust me, no large man is going to  
 hop out. And if he does you better  
 kick his ass cause he's not gonna  
 be my dad.

Jackson basically ignores Promise and keeps searching.  
 Finally, Promise drags her swing to a stop.

PROMISE  
 When my mom got pregnant with me,  
 my dad ran.

(MORE)

PROMISE(cont'd)

Signed all the papers and everything. So, I'm officially a legal bastard.

Jackson finally stops searching and turns to Promise forgivingly.

JACKSON

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to -

PROMISE

It's not your fault. How would you have known?

Jackson drags his swing to a halt, holding on Promise.

JACKSON

If you don't mind me saying, he would be so lucky to see you now.

A smile stretches Promise's face, locking in Jackson's eyes.

PROMISE

I don't mind.

Promise leans into Jackson. Her eyes close, as she inches forward. Jackson follows, leaning in. Softly, their lips brush against one another.

Promise pulls back and opens her eyes. She leans back in the swing and rocks.

Jackson imitates, a shy grin creeping across his face. He draws too far back, as the seat of the swing slips from his rear, knocking him to the ground.

Promise bursts with laughter. A SNORT slips her. She covers her face, red with embarrassment, but still giggling --

INT. MALL PHOTO BOOTH - DAY

Promise and Jackson walk through the mall, holding hands.

JACKSON

There's no way I'm buying a pink shirt.

PROMISE

You're too homophobic.

JACKSON

Whatever, as long as I'm not in a pink shirt, I don't care.

They approach a photo booth. Promise darts towards it, dragging Jackson behind her.

PROMISE  
Come on.

INT. PHOTO BOOTH - CONTINUE

Jackson sits. Promise drops onto Jackson's lap. He grimaces.

JACKSON  
Ouch.

PROMISE  
Sorry.

Promise readjusts. She pulls a dollar from her pocket and inserts it into the machine.

PROMISE  
Ready?

She leans back and poses with a smile.

The CAMERA FLASHES.

Jackson blinks feverishly. Then, Promise licks the side of his face --

FLASH!

JACKSON  
Thanks.

PROMISE  
You liked it.

She wipes his face and grabs him by the cheeks. She kisses him --

FLASH!

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - DAY

ON THE TV SCREEN

A gun wielding video game plays.

BAM!

Head shot. A pedestrian drops dead.

Hunter sits on the couch working the controller. Terry steps through the back door, a slight stagger in his step. In his hand, a Smith and Wesson .22.

Terry stumbles past Hunter. He lays the gun on the coffee table and heads for the hallway.

Hunter eyes the gun --

BAM!

On the screen, Hunter's character takes a bullet to the head.

INT. PROMISE'S HOME/DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

(SUBTITLE)  
FOURTH OF JULY - 2001

Promise, Jackson, JEFF (14), Promise's brother and BRIAN REED sit at the table. Heather enters and slaps a plate of burgers onto the table.

HEATHER  
It's nice to finally meet you,  
Jackson. Promise never brings any  
of her boyfriends home.

This makes Jackson smile.

JACKSON  
It's my pleasure Miss Dawson.

HEATHER  
Please, call me Heather.

JACKSON  
Yes, Miss Dawson - I mean Heather.

Heather sips her wine, dismissing the slip up.

HEATHER  
Promise tells me you play baseball.

JACKSON  
A little.

HEATHER  
That's nice. Jeff used to play.

JACKSON  
(feigning interest)  
Oh, really?

Jeff pushes his grungy, "Seattle-sound" hair from his eyes and bites into his burger.

Heather scoops grilled onions onto her plate and passes the bowl to Promise. She piles a handful on her plate, then slaps a stack onto Jackson's.

PROMISE

Try these. They're good.

HEATHER

Promise loves onions. You should really try them.

Jackson forces a smile and reaches for one. With pseudo anticipation, he raises the onion to his lips.

BRIAN

So Jackson, what do you want to do when you grow up?

As if harvesting the plague, he flings the onion down.

JACKSON

Film.

BRIAN

Like movies?

JACKSON

Uh huh.

BRIAN

What part? Like direct?

JACKSON

Write mostly.

BRIAN

Hope there's some money in that.

JACKSON

It's not really about the money.

BRIAN

Never is, just kind of necessitates that way. Besides, if you end up marrying Promise you'll need a lot of it. She's pretty high maintenance, just like her mother.

Brian winks at Promise and bites into his burger.

HEATHER

Can you go to college for that sort of thing?

JACKSON

Yes, ma'am.

BRIAN

Where do you plan on going?

JACKSON

Wherever gives me a scholarship, hopefully. California would be nice though.

Brian laughs.

BRIAN

Might want to hang on to this one Promise. Sounds like he's got some actual direction in his life.

Heather sips her wine. Under the table, Promise slides her hand over Jackson's leg and squeezes. He jumps, his leg jarring against the table. Quickly, Promise plucks an onion from her plate and shoves it into Jackson's mouth. He GAGS.

HEATHER

How do you like those onions, Jackson? Made them myself.

Like shit through a hose, he gulps and forces a swallow.

JACKSON

They're great.

EXT. JACKSON'S HOME/DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Stars scatter in the sky. Promise and Jackson lie on the driveway, staring towards the night.

JACKSON

Who was that guy at dinner?

PROMISE

That's Brian. Mom's new boyfriend.

JACKSON

He's kind of nosey.



PROMISE

He's just being nice. At least he doesn't beat her or cheat on her.

JACKSON

Do you and your mom get along?

PROMISE

Sometimes. She does what she has to for us. She hasn't had it easy.

The stars twinkle, as a light darts across the sky.

PROMISE

Look, a shooting star.

JACKSON

I think that's a plane.

PROMISE

Uh huh, okay, smart ass.

The light pulls away and a calmness overtakes the night.

PROMISE

Was all that talk about being a writer true?

JACKSON

Yeah, I guess.

PROMISE

So that mean you're gonna leave me for sunny California?

JACKSON

Whose being the smart ass now!?

PROMISE

Is that your dream, to be a writer?

JACKSON

Yeah. I mean its what I like to do. What about you? What's your dream?

PROMISE

I don't have one.

JACKSON

Come on. Everyone has a dream.

PROMISE

Not me. I want to do nothing.

JACKSON  
Nothing?

PROMISE  
Yep. Do nothing and be happy doing  
it. I don't know, maybe I'll start  
a family one day, but that's not  
happening anytime soon.

JACKSON  
That's still a dream.

PROMISE  
Guess so.

Jackson rolls over, his face daring Promise's.

JACKSON  
You know what?

PROMISE  
What?

JACKSON  
I did like that whole hanging onto  
me comment Brian made tonight.

PROMISE  
Oh yeah? You did?

Jackson kisses her.

JACKSON  
Yeah, I did. Smartest thing he said  
all night.

Jackson climbs on top of Promise and kisses her again.

PROMISE  
Does this mean you're gonna write  
me into one of your scripts,  
Shakespeare?

JACKSON  
Nah, not a chance in hell.

His lying smile fools no one. He pecks her.

PROMISE  
You seem pretty confident tonight?

JACKSON  
Yeah well, every confident man  
needs a beautiful...

Kisses her lips.

JACKSON  
...strong...

Kisses her cheek.

JACKSON  
...intelligent woman beside him.

Kisses the tip of her nose.

PROMISE  
Are you trying to seduce me,  
Jackson?

Jackson works his way towards Promise's neck.

JACKSON  
Maybe.

PROMISE  
Well it's working.

Promise glides her nails against the back of Jackson's neck. Jackson shivers and pulls back, studying a loose strand of hair that strays across Promise's eyes. Jackson's hand flitters, as he gently wipes the hair away. Promise peers into his eyes with a smile.

PROMISE  
What?

JACKSON  
Nothing, I just...I never realized  
how beautiful your eyes were.

Promise grabs Jackson's head and pulls him down, meeting him with a kiss. Jackson trembles at her soft touch.

Finally, his hands move, sliding along the ridge of Promise's hips with a shudder. He grasps her shirt and inches it up.

JACKSON  
I love you.

PROMISE  
I love you too.

EXT. HUNTER'S HOUSE/ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Empty beer cans scatter around Hunter and AJ as they drink.  
METAL CLATTER rattles as Jackson climbs onto the roof.

HUNTER

Looky there. It's lover boy. How  
was the hot date?

JACKSON

Blow me, Hunter.

HUNTER

Hope she did at least, cause you  
missed the fireworks you fuck. What  
happened to startin' a new  
tradition? Let that fly right out  
the fuckin' window huh asshole?

JACKSON

Give me a break and toss me a beer.

AJ hauls a can from the case and flips it to Jackson, but  
Hunter intercepts.

HUNTER

No way. Only my true friends can  
drink my true Texas beer. Tell jizz  
stain over there to find his own.  
Maybe he can pull some Coors Light  
out of his ass to drink.

AJ jerks the beer back and tosses it to Jackson.

HUNTER

Whatever. It's Bud Light.

JACKSON

Fresh piss in a can. Mmm, Love it!

HUNTER

Being from Texas and not drinking  
Bud Light -

JACKSON

(like a daily Prozac)  
Is like pissing on the American  
flag. I know. I've heard it enough.

HUNTER  
Texas flag! And it is Home-nuts.  
You better not pull this bullshit  
again, you hear me? Beer and bros  
before bitches.

A.J.  
You're such an idiot. Do you even  
hear half the shit you say?

HUNTER  
Don't even get me started on you  
Andrew James. Cadence is  
practically leading you around by  
your dick.  
(takes a drink)  
So was it worth it tonight or not?

JACKSON  
Yeah it was worth it.

HUNTER  
So you got some then?

JACKSON  
It's not like that.

HUNTER  
Don't tell me you think you love  
the girl?

Hunter breaks out in an OBNOXIOUS SUCKING SOUND.

HUNTER  
You hear that? That's the sound of  
your balls recoiling into your  
stomach. She's got you by the nuts  
man. You're so pussy whipped and  
you're not even getting the pussy.  
You're worse. You're just a  
glorified case of blue balls.

A.J.  
There's no such thing.

HUNTER  
Hey ass jockey, did I ask what you  
thought!? Blue balls are the real  
deal. I know from experience.

A.J.  
Not true.

HUNTER

Look bud. Not everyone has a girlfriend whose psycho sematic for dick and feels it's her life's goal to suck every drop of man juice from your piston. That's a pretty awesome obsession Cadence has, I admit it, but just not very common.

JACKSON

That is pretty cool man.

Jackson cracks his can and takes a swig.

HUNTER

It's true. Trust me. Blue balls are God's way of kicking you in the nuts and then sticking around to point and laugh in your face.

Hunter chugs, then pounds the empty on the rooftop.

INT. PROMISE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bedroom window slides up and in climbs Promise.

The CREAK OF BED SPRINGS and FEMALE MOANS echo through the stillness of the house.

Promise pulls the window down, but it falls, BANGING louder than she expected.

The moans stop momentarily, but quickly pick back up with greater vigor.

EXT. CADENCE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Typical girl room. Bright colors. Practically a thousand pictures. Empty bottles of alcohol pose as flower vases.

Cadence lays in bed. An open copy of "COSMO" coddles her lap. Jackson mills the room, moving along the picture frames.

CADENCE

It really happened like that?

JACKSON

Yeah. It was nice. Why?

CADENCE

Cause as sweet as that is and all,  
you lost your virginity on a  
driveway. I wouldn't be surprised  
if she walked away with ant bites  
scattered across her ass...did she?

JACKSON

No. It just kind of happened.

CADENCE

Well from a girl's point of view,  
concrete and sex, they don't mix.

JACKSON

You haven't had sex.

CADENCE

I've had my share of dry humping  
and believe me nothing involving  
concrete is any good. It doesn't  
exactly scream a night of passion  
when it looks like your cat used  
your ass for a scratching post.

JACKSON

Whatever.

Jackson picks up a photo --

In it, a younger Cadence and Jackson hug.

CADENCE

Do you love her?

JACKSON

Who?

CADENCE

I'll take that as a no.

JACKSON

Sorry.

Jackson gapes at the photo, then sets it down.

CADENCE

So do you?

Jackson wanders to the bed and flops down.

JACKSON

I think so.

CADENCE

Careful player. You're seventeen. Nowadays the average age of marriage is like thirty. And even then the divorce rate is like half. And look at those Sex and the City girls, they're like forty something and still bitching about love. You think love is real, but why do all these idiots keep getting divorced?

JACKSON

What about AJ? You saying after two years you don't think you love him?

Cadence flips a few pages in the magazine, unabashed.

CADENCE

It's different. I just use him for the hot sex.

Jackson scrutinizes her. She scans the magazine, then flings it down succumbing to his penetrating eyes.

CADENCE

Okay, so it was like three minutes tops, huh?

JACKSON

Like two, maybe.

CADENCE

Damn. Two pump chump.

JACKSON

More like one pump dump.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hunter moves through the room, picking up empty beer cans. A RUSTLE breaks, as Terry shuffles from the hallway.

TERRY

Whatcha doin'?

HUNTER

Just cleanin' up a little.

TERRY

Fuckin' girl.



Terry tramps into the kitchen. Hunter continues cleaning. A beer cracks and Terry rambles into the living room, falling onto the recliner.

HUNTER  
Isn't it a little early?

TERRY  
Shit...

Terry checks the clock - "12:15 PM".

TERRY  
It's five o'clock somewhere.

EXT. PROMISE'S HOUSE/FRONT DOOR - DAY

Jackson knocks. Heather answers, shooting Jackson an ominous motherly "I don't know how you fucked up, but you did" glare.

JACKSON  
Is Promise home?

HEATHER  
Hold on.

Moments later, Promise steps outside and shuts the door.

JACKSON  
Hey.

Jackson leans in for a kiss, but Promise pulls away.

JACKSON  
What's wrong?

PROMISE  
Just don't, okay? My mom might see.

JACKSON  
We've been together awhile. I think it'd be okay if she saw us kiss.

PROMISE  
You don't know my mom like I do.

JACKSON  
Well, yeah, obviously not.

PROMISE  
She knows.

JACKSON  
Knows what?

Promise nods like Jackson should know. Now he gets it.

JACKSON  
What!? You told her!?

PROMISE  
No, but she heard me sneaking back in and this morning she started asking all these questions and we got in this big fight.

JACKSON  
Dammit...I should do something.

PROMISE  
Like what, Jackson? Tell my mom you deflowered her only daughter? Just go home. I'll call you later.

JACKSON  
Let me try to fix this.

PROMISE  
You can't exactly fix this. I'll handle it. Call me later, okay?

She pecks his cheek, then edges inside. Jackson steps to her.

JACKSON  
Wait...

The door shuts in his face, squashing his...

JACKSON  
I love you.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jackson sinks over the desk staring blankly at the laptop. A stack of envelopes grows next to the phone on the desk.

Jackson grabs the phone from the desk and dials. It RINGS.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION - HEATHER'S BEDROOM AND JACKSON

Heather stalks to the phone; mid-attire for the evening. Her robe distracts from her half finished make-up.

HEATHER

Hello?

JACKSON

Is Promise there?

HEATHER

She can't come to the phone right now.

Heather springs to hang up.

JACKSON

Wait, don't hang up.

HEATHER

Who is this!?

JACKSON

It's Jackson, ma'am.

HEATHER

She's grounded from the phone Jackson. I'm sorry, you'll just have to live for tonight. I'll tell her you called.

JACKSON

Actually, I was wondering if I could talk to you.

HEATHER

I'm kind of busy. Can you make it quick?

Jackson stands and circles the room. Mothers obviously aren't his strong suit, but what the hell.

JACKSON

I realize you probably aren't very happy with Promise right now, or even me for that matter for last night, but I just -

HEATHER

You just what?

JACKSON

I just never meant any disrespect to you or your family.

Heather's eyes narrow with puzzlement.

JACKSON  
I really do care about your  
daughter and in no way would I ever  
hurt Promise in any way.

HEATHER  
You slept with my daughter!?

JACKSON  
I know, but I wouldn't have if I  
didn't love her. That's what I'm  
trying to say.

Heather draws back punch-drunk in silence.

JACKSON  
Hello?

The LINE GOES DEAD.

INT. HEATHER'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

The phone lies alone on the bed.

HEATHER (O.S.)  
Promise!

BANG!

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A door SLAMS. Hunter lounges on the couch, flipping channels  
on the TV. Terry steps from the hallway, a beer in hand.

Hunter glances to his father, as Terry grabs a coat off the  
recliner and exit the front door, slamming it behind.

EXT. PROMISE'S HOUSE/BEDROOM WINDOW - NIGHT

Knuckles lightly RAP against the window.

JACKSON  
(whispering)  
Promise, wake up.

Jackson TAPS harsher.

JACKSON  
(louder)  
Promise.

Blinds swing up. Through the window, a jaded Promise kneels and slides the window open.

PROMISE  
What do you want Jackson?

JACKSON  
Come out with me.

PROMISE  
I don't think so.

JACKSON  
Why not?

PROMISE  
Because it's late and I'm tired.

JACKSON  
Okay. Then what about just talking?

PROMISE  
I don't think that's really a good idea either. I'm going back to bed.

Promise reaches for the window.

JACKSON  
Wait.

PROMISE  
What, Jackson!?

JACKSON  
Why are you acting like this?

PROMISE  
Because I don't want to deal with you right now. I can't believe what you did tonight.

JACKSON  
What do you mean?

PROMISE  
You know exactly what I mean. What the hell made you think it'd be a good idea to tell my mom we had sex? Are you really that stupid?

JACKSON  
You said she knew.

PROMISE

I said I thought she knew.

JACKSON

How the hell was I supposed to know that?

PROMISE

This really isn't a good time.

JACKSON

Then when Promise?

PROMISE

Not right now. I'm not even supposed to see you anymore and frankly, I don't really want to.

JACKSON

You're gonna let your mother dictate your life like that?

PROMISE

Yeah, I am. She's my mother. You're not. You don't know what it's like living my life. You have two happy parents. You live a perfect little life. Things aren't all fairy tales in the real world.

JACKSON

You know that's not true.

PROMISE

No, but it is Jackson.

JACKSON

And what about last night? Didn't last night mean anything to you?

PROMISE

It was the next step. What'd you think it was...love?

JACKSON

Maybe I did.

PROMISE

It's sex, Jackson. Not life or death.

JACKSON

If you don't love me then why'd you say it?

PROMISE

Because you did.

Jackson stumbles back, her words rasping through him.

JACKSON

That's it? You're just gonna throw me away like this!?

PROMISE

It's not the first time I've had to take out the trash.

Promise BANGS the window shut and the blinds fall.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR/HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Jackson drives. Flashes of headlights zip by, as Jackson tunnels in on the road lines ahead.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Hunter and AJ play "MADDEN" football. A KNOCK at the door interrupts and Hunter pauses the game, mid-play.

A.J.

Hey!

HUNTER

You're over it.

Hunter scoots to the door and opens. Under the porch light, slumps Jackson, a cosmos of hell on Earth.

HUNTER

You okay, Jacks?

Jackson enters and falls to the couch. Hunter sits beside him.

HUNTER

What happened? You look like ass and you don't smell much better.

JACKSON

I think me and Promise broke up.

HUNTER  
That blows. And just when you  
started getting some sex too.

A.J.  
You want to talk about it?

JACKSON  
Not really.

Silence. Then, Hunter, like an A.D.D. child, can't stand it.  
He springs from his seat.

HUNTER  
Get up man. We're not sitting  
around all night moping.

A.J.  
He doesn't look up for partying.  
Maybe we should just chill tonight.

HUNTER  
No way. That's depressing and sad.  
You got to get right back up on the  
saddle and ride that bitch til the  
wheels fall off. This is exactly  
what a friend like me is for.

Hunter scoops his keys and phone off the coffee table.

HUNTER  
We're gonna go out to that party  
and drink the night away. Just like  
my boy Johnny Cash would've done.  
Come on, let's go.

JACKSON  
Whatever.

HUNTER  
Sweet, let's go then.

A.J.  
You sure? We don't have to go.

Hunter plops back down next to Jackson.

HUNTER  
Look man, I know you fell for her  
pretty hard, but fuck her. If she's  
gonna end up turning you into a  
pile of shit like this, then fuck  
her.

(MORE)



HUNTER(cont'd)

What you need is a good night out  
with your new best friends, the  
three J's.

(counting on his hand)

Jose...Jack...and Jim. Hell, it's a  
date!

A.J.

It's an orgy with three drunk guys.

Hunter flicks AJ off, as his CELL RINGS. Hunter answers.

HUNTER

Yo.

Hunter listens.

HUNTER

Whoa, hold up cowboy!?

Vague yelling seeps from the phone.

HUNTER

Are you threatening me!?

More yelling.

HUNTER

You're god damn right, you fuck!  
Why don't you stop blowing smoke  
and strap on a pair!?

Hunter pulls away from the phone.

HUNTER

That little fuck nut hung up on me.

A.J.

Who was that?

HUNTER

I don't know.

A.J.

What'd you do to piss him off?

HUNTER

What do you mean what'd I do!?

A.J.

You know you did something.

HUNTER

You know that is so typical of you.

A.J.  
Hunter!

HUNTER  
He said I fucked his girlfriend.

A.J.  
Well, did you?

HUNTER  
I don't know. Probably.

Hunter fidgets with the phone, then stands.

HUNTER  
Let's go. I'm getting shitty  
tonight and we're calling this  
asshole back.

Hunter storms out the door.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson pounds down a seemingly endless country road. Hunter sits shotgun. AJ rides bitch in the back. A "DEPRESSING LOVE SONG" erodes from the radio.

HUNTER  
What's this shit?

Hunter fiddles with the dial, stopping on country. He leans back content, as his cell phone RINGS.

HUNTER  
Speak to me?

Familiar SCREAMING strains from the phone.

HUNTER  
If you really want to settle this,  
then let's stop playing around and -

Hunter stops.

HUNTER  
He hung up again!?

Hunter glares at the phone.

A.J.  
Just ignore it man.

HUNTER

Hell no! That fucker called and hung up. Do you know how many minutes that's costing me? I'm not made of money. I don't have this unlimited minutes shit.

A.J.

Stop your bitching and just turn the phone off.

HUNTER

No way. In five minutes I'm on my weekend plan.

Jackson swings a right and pulls up on a crowded farm field.

Cars and trucks scatter the field. MUSIC blares from somewhere. Kids stumble around, beer in hand. Jackson parks and shuts the car off.

HUNTER

Give me the keys.

JACKSON

What?

HUNTER

I don't want you doin' anything stupid tonight. Give 'em to me.

JACKSON

Forget that.

A.J.

Just give him the keys Jackson.

JACKSON

Whatever.

Jackson flips the keys to Hunter and walks to...

EXT. FIELD PARTY - CONTINUE

A load of teens linger drinking and partying. Two kegs park near a truck. The boys approach, as Hunter pumps the keg, grabs a cup and fills it partially.

A.J.

Would you hurry up already?

HUNTER

Hold on.

He tests the brew.

HUNTER

Bud Light. Good shit.

A HOT GIRL flaunts by, smiling in Hunter's general direction.

HUNTER

Hello.

Hunter hustles off. AJ steps in and pumps the keg, as Cadence parades up and throws her arms around him.

A.J.

Hey baby.

They kiss.

CADENCE

Come on, I want you to meet a friend of mine.

She grabs AJ by the hand and drags him off.

A.J.

You cool, Jacks?

JACKSON

Yeah. I'll be fine.

Jackson pumps the keg and fills his cup.

EXT. FIELD PARTY - CONTINUE

The hot girl leans against a truck, surrounded by friends. She sips her beer, as Hunter creeps in on his prey.

HUNTER

Excuse me.

HOT GIRL

Do I know you?

HUNTER

Probably. The name's Hunter. And fuck me if I'm wrong, but did you just walk by and smile at me?

HOT GIRL

Uh, no!

Hunter pats the side of the truck.

HUNTER

Guess I was wrong! So you wanna do it here or you got some place more comfortable?

She SLAPS him and storms off.

HUNTER

Come on, let's get liquored up and rape each other!

HOT GIRL (O.S.)

Asshole!

Hunter toasts the hot girl...

HUNTER

Fuck you too.

...and chugs.

EXT. FIELD PARTY - CONTINUE

Jackson wanders alone drinking, feeling quite nice. Cadence and Jenny spot him and head over.

CADENCE

Hey cutie. You know that stuff impairs your inhibitions.

JACKSON

(sarcastically)

Sweet. That's what I'm going for.

Jackson finishes off the beer and flings the cup.

CADENCE

That bad, huh?

JACKSON

Nah. Things are great. Got lots of beer to get me hammered. I'm surrounded by shitloads of people I don't know. And all I want to do is wake up with the biggest fucking hangover so I can forget this entire day ever existed.

CADENCE  
Sounds productive. Where's Promise?

JACKSON  
See now that, that's not funny.

CADENCE  
Wasn't supposed to be. If you don't want to be here, why don't you just go home?

JACKSON  
Can't. I'm the designated driver.  
(points to Cadence's cup)  
You gonna drink that?

CADENCE  
Planning...

Jackson snatches the cup and downs it.

CADENCE  
...on it.

JACKSON  
Now excuse me ladies, but I gotta find some more beer.

Jackson stumbles, but regains his composure and rambles by a RANDOM GIRL, smacking her on the ass.

RANDOM GIRL  
Hey!

INT. FIELD PARTY - MEANWHILE

A SMART GIRL chills on a tailgate. Beside her, ANOTHER CHICK. Hunter swaggers in and wedges between the two.

HUNTER  
Hey, it's Whitney, right?

SMART GIRL  
Do I know you?

HUNTER  
I'm Hunter.

SMART GIRL  
Oh yeah, I've heard about you.

HUNTER  
Good things only I hope.

He drapes his arm around her.

SMART GIRL  
Usually not.

She shrugs it off.

HUNTER  
That sucks.

Hunter takes a drink. An extra dose of liquid courage.

EXT. FIELD PARTY - MEANWHILE

Jackson is back at the keg. He fiddles with the pump, but struggles in his drunken state, as Jenny slithers in.

JENNY  
Need a little help with that?

JACKSON  
Can you spray this thing in my  
mouth?

She giggles.

JENNY  
That's cute.

JACKSON  
It's not supposed to be. I just  
want some beer. Here...

Jackson tilts his head back and opens wide.

JACKSON  
...pour it in here.

JENNY  
I got a better idea.

JACKSON  
Shots?

JENNY  
Better.

Jenny grabs his hand and tugs Jackson after her.

JACKSON  
Shots and beer!?

INT. FIELD PARTY - MEANWHILE

Hunter bides on the tailgate. He holds up a condom.

HUNTER  
This is a magical thing baby. It's  
called a condom. If we put this on,  
we can have sex.

Whitney stands and charges off. AJ enters and sits.

A.J.  
The swing and the whiff. You seen  
Jackson?

HUNTER  
Nope.

A.J.  
I'm kind of worried about him.  
Cadence said he looked like hell.

HUNTER  
His girlfriend just broke up with  
him. Course he looks like hell.  
What he needs to do is get shit  
housed and hook up with some random  
chick. That'd fix him real quick.

A.J.  
I don't know. Maybe we should just  
take him home.

TWO HOTTIES strut by, catching Hunter's attention.

HUNTER  
No way. It's just gettin' good.

Hunter's CELL RINGS. He answers.

HUNTER  
Howdy fucker.

The HOWLING from earlier strains from the phone.

HUNTER  
Alright man, now you're really  
dicking up my night!



MORE SCREAMING. Hunter hangs up.

A.J.  
Same guy?

HUNTER  
Yep. And he's on his way.

They stand. Hunter leads the way towards Jackson's car.

A.J.  
Who is he?

HUNTER  
I don't know and I don't care.

Adrenaline bleeds from Hunter's eyes.

A.J.  
What are you gonna do?

HUNTER  
What do you think I'm gonna do?

A.J.  
Man, come on. You're asking for  
trouble here.

HUNTER  
I can handle mine. How big do you  
actually think he can be, huh!?

Hunter stops and squares up to AJ.

HUNTER  
I can't back down now.

A.J.  
This is stupid.

HUNTER  
Look, you got my back or not, bud?

EXT. FIELD PARTY/TRUCK BED - MEANWHILE

Jenny pops the tailgate and slides onto its edge. Her skirt crimps on the truck bed, revealing a glimpse of her smooth upper thigh.

Jenny pats the spot next to her. Jackson, beyond drunk, sways in place. He looks around confused.

JACKSON  
Where is everyone?

JENNY  
Who cares.

Jenny seizes Jackson's hand and yanks him onto the truck.

JACKSON  
We need more alcohol.

Jenny slides a hand up Jackson's leg and caresses his thigh.

JACKSON  
Cause I need alcohol to get drunk.

JENNY  
You know, I've always thought you  
were an attractive guy.

JACKSON  
Thanks.

Jenny's hand rides higher, practically groping his crotch.  
Her grip grows firm, as she leans into Jackson's ear.

JENNY  
(whispering)  
Fuck me, Jackson.

Jackson jerks away.

JACKSON  
I can't. I'm drunk.

JENNY  
Yes you can. You know you want to.

She rubs his chest and twists her body towards Jackson. Then  
in one smooth motion slides onto his lap.

JACKSON  
No, I can't. I'm in love. And it's  
not with you.

Jenny tugs Jackson's shirt off.

JENNY  
There's no such thing as love.  
There's just those who fuck...

Jenny shoves Jackson down and straddles his torso.

JENNY  
...and those who don't.

JACKSON  
I can't do this.

Jackson fights to sit up, but Jenny thrust him back down, pinning his arms with her legs. She leans into Jackson's ear and like a snake tongues it.

JENNY  
Come on Jackson. You know it'll  
feel so good.

Jenny licks Jackson's ear and then saltily nibbles his earlobe.

EXT. FIELD PARTY - MEANWHILE

Hunter and AJ search groups of partiers.

HUNTER  
Where the fuck is he?

A.J.  
I don't know. Maybe he left.

HUNTER  
He can't leave. I have his keys.

EXT. FIELD PARTY FRONT YARD/TRUCK BED - MEANWHILE

Jenny kisses Jackson's chest, slinking her way towards his waist. She unbuttons his pants and slips her hand inside.

JACKSON  
I really think you should stop.

Jenny grabs him.

JACKSON  
Oh, God!

JENNY  
You still want me to stop?

JACKSON  
No. Don't stop.

Jenny lifts the hem of her skirt and settles on top of Jackson. She grinds into Jackson and moans.

JENNY  
Fuck me Jackson.

EXT. FIELD PARTY FRONT YARD/JACKSON'S CAR

Hunter pops the trunk and grabs a baseball bat.

A.J.  
Whoa! What are you doing!?

HUNTER  
It's just for intimidation.

Hunter unzips Jackson's baseball bag and pulls another bat.

A.J.  
Someone's gonna get hurt.

HUNTER  
Yeah and if I'm not careful it's  
gonna be me. I'm not writing a  
check my ass can't cash.

Hunter slams the trunk shut. In the distance, MOANS ECHO.

A.J.  
You hear that?

HUNTER  
Someone's gettin' lucky.

A ROAR ERUPTS. TIRES SQUEAL. Whirling around, they spot --  
a truck PEELING around the road. Dirt and rocks kick from the  
dust, as the truck slams to a stop in front of some partiers.

A muscular jock hops from the passenger side, JAMIE PALLAS  
(17). He YELLS to the group gathered around, as Hunter and AJ  
listen from Jackson's car.

JAMIE  
Where is that faggot!?

Nobody answers.

JAMIE  
Where is he!? I know he's here!

Jamie rips his shirt off, showing off his bulging muscles.

JAMIE  
Come on, you wanted a shot at the  
champ! Here's your chance!

EXT. FIELD PARTY/JACKSON'S CAR - CONTINUE

HUNTER  
You ready?

A.J.  
Does this look like a fighter? I'm  
a lover, man.

HUNTER  
Come on.

Hunter flips the second bat to AJ and stalks towards the  
truck. AJ clutches the bat, his knuckles growing white.

JAMIE  
Maybe I'll just call his bitch ass!

Jamie pulls a cell phone from his pocket and scrolls through  
the "J's" in his phone book. Hunter storms towards Jamie, as  
AJ approaches the driver side.

JAMIE  
Lets go ya fuckin' redneck! It's  
time to get your ass handed to you,  
ya little bitch!

Hunter pauses behind Jamie. His fingers clench the bat.

Jamie hits "SEND" on his phone. Seconds later, Hunter's cell  
RINGS.

Jamie smiles. Hunter cocks the bat, as Jamie turns. Their  
eyes meet and Hunter unloads, SMASHING Jamie across the face.  
Jamie's muscled body drops like free weights.

HUNTER  
Whose the bitch now!?!

From the driver's seat, DARYL (the driver) glares at Hunter.

METAL TAPS against the driver side window startling Daryl. He  
turns just in time to see AJ HAYMAKER the bat through the  
window.

AJ reaches through the shattered glass and grabs Daryl's  
hair, driving him face first into the steering wheel.

The HORN BLARES.

EXT. FIELD PARTY/TRUCK BED - MEANWHILE

The ECHO OF THE HORN interrupts Jackson. He stops Jenny.

JACKSON  
You hear that?

JENNY  
Hear what?

Jackson shoves Jenny aside and sits up, spotting Hunter laying into Jamie.

JACKSON  
Oh shit!

Jackson jumps from the truck, struggling to buckle his pants.

EXT. FIELD PARTY - CONTINUE

Daryl tries to throw the car into drive, but AJ reaches for the bat and SLAMS the butt into Daryl's face. Then, AJ swings the door open and pulls Daryl from the truck.

AJ pounces on him, thrashing fist after fist into Daryl.

A large crowd begins to form around the truck, as Hunter rears back and BOOTS Jamie with the heel of his Justin's.

HUNTER  
Whose the champ now!?

Hunter spits on Jamie. Bloodied and beaten Jamie struggles to his knees, but Hunter quickly shoves him back down.

HUNTER  
I didn't say get up, did I boy!?

Hunter closes his palm around the bat and turns to the truck.

Hunter winds up and CRACKS the bat into the side door. He pulls back and connects with the side mirror, TEARING it off.

In the distance, Jackson stumbles towards the fight.

AJ pounds Daryl's face. Blood SPURTS from his nose.

Hunter climbs the car hood, bat in hand. He settles and PULVERIZES the bat head through the windshield.

A GROUP OF GUYS CHEER Hunter's destruction.

AJ pulls back and raises his fist. Daryl cowers, trying to shield his face. AJ swings --

But suddenly the fist is caught, jarring AJ. AJ shrugs it off, knocking his wallet loose from his back pocket. AJ turns ready to punch, but stops when he sees Jackson.

JACKSON

We gotta get out of here!

On the hood, Hunter BELTS into the rooftop.

JACKSON

Hunter, let's go!

POLICE SIRENS RING out in the night. Hunter takes one last WHACK at the roof and hops down.

Jamie lays crumpled in a heap, bleeding and breathing heavily. Hunter spits on him, then cocks his fingers like a gun and "shoots" Jamie.

HUNTER

Whose the champ now, huh!? And stop fuckin' up my cell phone minutes!

The three scuttle for Jackson's car. Behind them, Daryl lays bloody and shaken. He struggles to his knees coughing. Blood trickles from his mouth. He grabs AJ's wallet from the ground, pockets it and crawls to Jamie.

EXT. FIELD PARTY/JACKSON'S CAR - CONTINUE

Jackson searches for his keys. Hunter pulls them from his pocket and unlocks the car.

JACKSON

Give me the keys!

HUNTER

You're too drunk to drive.

JACKSON

So are you!

A.J.

So is everyone! Just drive Hunter!

Hunter jumps into the driver's seat and tosses the bat into the trunk. AJ climbs in the front and Jackson reluctantly into the backseat. Hunter cranks the car and PEELS OUT.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - CONTINUE

JACKSON  
What the fuck was that!?

HUNTER  
Who? The guy?

JACKSON  
No, the fucking bat! Are you out of your God damn mind!?

HUNTER  
I couldn't have taken that guy. You saw how big he was.

JACKSON  
You could have fucking killed him!

A.J.  
Oh shit! I think I'm bleeding!

Hunter swerves off the dirt road and onto the street. Jackson grabs AJ's hand.

JACKSON  
That's not your blood.

A.J.  
We're so screwed!

Hunter gases it.

JACKSON  
Slow down, Hunter! We don't need the cops pulling us over.

A SIREN sounds. BLUE LIGHTS FLASH from behind.

JACKSON  
This is just fucking great!

HUNTER  
Put the bats in the back and act calm.

AJ yanks at his seat belt, as Hunter slows onto the shoulder. Jackson chunks the second bat into the trunk.



Hunter fiddles with the radio, tuning to "OLD PEOPLE" music. AJ frantically wipes at the blood on his hand.

A POLICE OFFICER strolls up, scanning his flashlight through the car. Hunter rolls down his window.

HUNTER  
Can I help you officer?

POLICE OFFICER  
You boys were going pretty fast coming onto the road back there.

HUNTER  
Sorry officer. My friend back here isn't feeling too well.

Hunter leans in.

HUNTER  
Explosive diarrhea. Damn squirts.

The officer blinds Jackson with his light.

POLICE OFFICER  
We had some reports of underage drinking tonight. Already pulled over three others for drinking and driving. None of that going on here, is there?

HUNTER  
No sir. None of that here.

The flashlight whips to Hunter. Hunter squints back.

POLICE OFFICER  
Ryan Hunter.

HUNTER  
Yes, sir?

POLICE OFFICER  
I knew your mother, son.

HUNTER  
Small world. Can we leave now?

POLICE OFFICER  
Step out of the car. All of you.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson, Hunter and AJ lean against the Mountaineer. The officer, statuesque by his squad car, works the radio.

HUNTER

Just say you both were too drunk to drive and I told you I was sober.

JACKSON

We can't do that.

HUNTER

Just do it. You both got clean records. This kind of shit fucks you permanently. No use in us all going down. We all know I'm just gonna end up at one of those ITT Tech things anyways.

The officer marches back and pops the trunk. Settled next to the bats rests a case of Bud Light. He reaches into the car.

A.J.

(murmurs)

The bats?

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)

What's this, Ryan?

The officer strolls around the car, beer in hand.

HUNTER

I believe that's beer, sir.

POLICE OFFICER

I'm gonna have to confiscate this.

The officer tramps back to the squad car.

HUNTER

That Barney Fife asshole is gonna drink all my beer!

JACKSON

Shut up Hunter!

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - EARLY MORNING

The darkness of the morning blankets the empty road. Peter drives in silence. Beside him, Jackson's body hangs haggard in the seat. Finally, Peter breaks the silence.

PETER

Is this how you thank us? By going out and getting yourself arrested!?

JACKSON

I wasn't arrested.

PETER

You should be damn glad that officer ate that load of bullshit you fed him, cause I'm not biting.

Peter cruises past an intersection.

PETER

This is the sort of shitty decisions that screw up your future! You really want to throw that away? It's stupid, Jackson. It's fucking stupid!

Peter quiets. Jackson stares out the window, subdued by the glow of the street lights that dart above.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME - LATER

The front door opens. Peter steps into the darkness followed by Jackson. The hall light flips on, as Anne staggers down the stairs.

ANNE

It's about time. What happened?

PETER

Everything's taken care of. He's just lucky the police didn't want to charge him with anything.

JACKSON

Get off my back! So I drank some beers. Nobody died.

PETER

You think it's any better you were in the car drunk!?

(MORE)

PETER(cont'd)

You think that makes it okay!?  
You're wrong, bucko. Keep acting  
like this, because right now you're  
the one screwing up, not me!

JACKSON

Fuck it. I don't have to take this.

Jackson starts off. Peter grabs Jackson's shirt and yanks him back.

PETER

You'll take whatever I decide to  
dish out. You better start  
recognizing whose the adult here!  
You got me!?

He pokes Jackson in the chest. Jackson swipes his hand away.

PETER

So now you want to act tough!?

Peter jabs Jackson, jarring him against the front door.

JACKSON

Don't touch me.

Peter leans in, stone cold in Jackson's face.

PETER

You want to be a big man!? Do ya!?  
Is that what you want!?

ANNE

Just let it go, Peter.

PETER

Stay out of this, Anne.  
(to Jackson)  
Come on! Do something big man!

Peter pokes Jackson again, jolting him harder into the door.

Peter scours down towards Jackson's hands, as Jackson curls his fingers into a fist.

PETER

Now you want to hit me!? Go ahead,  
take a swing.

Peter steps back and drops his hands.

ANNE

Knock it off Peter!

PETER

Go ahead. Here's your shot. Hit me.  
Show me how much of a man you are!

Jackson stares into Peter, their eyes lit with rage.

PETER

Hit me!

Jackson holds his gaze, his fists growing tighter. Finally, Jackson breaks from the showdown and opens the front door, fleeing through and slamming it shut.

EXT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - LATER

A police car rolls to a stop. Hunter's Chevy sits out front. Beside it, a battered pickup hugs the curb. Its front wheels trample the lawn. It looks like something out of "Redneck Monthly".

I/E. POLICE CAR - CONTINUE

Hunter pops the door open.

POLICE OFFICER

If there's anything you ever need,  
you just give me a ring. It's the  
least I could do for your mother.

Hunter steps out of the car.

POLICE OFFICER

And stay out of trouble, ya hear?

Hunter shuts the door.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - CONTINUE

Hunter steps inside the dark house. A beer can CRUNCHES under his foot. From the backyard, he hears --

BAM! BAM!

Hunter kicks the can aside and heads through the back door.

EXT. HUNTER'S HOUSE BACKYARD - CONTINUE

Terry FIRES off a few rounds from his .22 at a line of empty beer cans twenty feet away. He misses with every shot.

Terry shifts and takes a drink from a nearby beer, as Hunter steps from the back door and slides it shut.

TERRY  
That you Hunter?

HUNTER  
Yeah.

Terry finishes off the can and heaves it towards the others. He FIRES at it - BAM, BAM, BAM! Missing with each shot.

TERRY  
Fuck.

Terry cracks a new beer and goes to work on the fresh can.

TERRY  
You're out late, boy.

HUNTER  
Just out with some friends.

TERRY  
Still hangin' round those two losers?

HUNTER  
(appeasing)  
Yeah, sure Dad.

Terry chugs the beer, crushes the can and drops it to the ground. He stumbles to Hunter and hands him the gun.

TERRY  
Make yourself useful for once and put this away.

Terry stalks through the sliding door and into the house.

Hunter fingers the gun. He steadies his hand and raises it, eyeing the fallen can.

HUNTER  
Boom.

EXT. VAUGHAN ELEMENTARY - LATER

Jackson kicks along under the occasional street light.

EXT. PROMISE'S HOUSE - LATER

From a distance, Jackson gazes at the house with endearing eyes.

EXT. JACKSON'S HOME - EARLY MORNING

Jackson reels up the sidewalk and steps to the front door. Like a pro, he stealthily works the knob and enters.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME - CONTINUE

Softly, Jackson pushes the door closed and begins up the stairs. A RUSTLE downstairs catches his attention.

ANNE

Jackson?

Jackson wheels around and spots his mother half-asleep on the couch. Jackson climbs down the stairs and moves to her.

ANNE

Are you okay?

Jackson takes a seat next to her, but doesn't answer.

ANNE

He only does it because he cares about you hun. We're here if you need to talk, you know that right?

JACKSON

I know. It's just been a rough night. I'm sorry about all of this.

ANNE

We love you, hun. Get some sleep. You look exhausted.

Jackson tucks the blanket tighter around his mother, stands and trudges up the stairs.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jackson wanders in and shuts the door. He collapses, crumpling face first onto the bed.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME/KITCHEN - MORNING

Anne scans the "HOMES AND GARDENS" with her coffee. Peter reads his sports. Kaitlyn downs a glass of OJ and darts out.

KAITLYN (O.S.)  
I'll be home after work!

ANNE  
Have a good day.

The front door shuts.

Anne BANGS her coffee on the table, her eyes piercing Peter. Annoyed, he tilts the paper, meeting her blow head on.

PETER  
What!?

ANNE  
Don't you think you went a little hard on him last night?

PETER  
He doesn't know hard. He walks around here ignorant that what he's doing could affect everything he's worked towards.

Peter lifts the paper back up.

PETER  
That kid is so God damn talented, but his poor decisions are going to come back to bite him in the ass.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

Jackson lays awake in bed listening to the echo of his parents' argument.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME/KITCHEN - MEANWHILE

ANNE  
So, getting into a shoving match was supposed to do what exactly?

PETER  
My father did it to me and it straightened my butt out.



Anne stands from the table.

ANNE

You're not your father, Peter.

She storms out.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

Jackson rolls over.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE BACKYARD - DAY

Steaks SIZZLE. Hunter hovers over the grill, a frilly apron around his waist and a beer in hand. At the table, Jackson bounces a tennis ball against the house. AJ sits beside him.

A.J.

Come on bud.

JACKSON

I don't know. What makes you think she wants to do it anyways?

A.J.

She told me so.

Not surprised, Jackson chunks the ball against the wall.

A.J.

It's our three year and I really want to make this perfect for her. Come on Jackson. It's either you or I have to ask Hunter.

Hunter flips a steak, then picks his butt.

JACKSON

He's got more experience with the ladies.

A.J.

If I want to contract syphilis.

HUNTER

It was a canker sore, ass!

A.J.

Come on. Cadence is like your little sister. You have to help me make this perfect for her?

JACKSON

Do you love her?

HUNTER

Sheeeiit, fuck love! The only thing a man needs to love is his beer and his sex. Love is just another four letter word like shit or fuck or ass.

Hunter chugs. Jackson catches the ball and turns to AJ.

JACKSON

Do you?

A.J.

Yeah, well - I don't - I think so.

Jackson hurls the ball back against the wall.

JACKSON

Try writing her a letter. Tell her how you feel. Something like that.

A.J.

I don't know how I feel. I'm not any good with that emotional stuff.

JACKSON

It doesn't matter if it's any good as long as it comes from the heart. You're not writing a fuckin' novel.

HUNTER

No way man. That's gay! Very, very gay! Huge gay sign approaching on the left side of our tour bus. It says round trip ride to homo life. Check your balls at the door. It's right there in fucking neon, flashing you in the face.

JACKSON

Were you breast-fed from a keg or have you just drank yourself retarded!? The longest relationship you've had is with your subscription to Playboy.

HUNTER

I read the articles.

JACKSON  
Like a blind man watches porn. Just  
shut up and grill.

A.J.  
You think it'll really work?

JACKSON  
Stop being such a girl. It'll work.

A.J.  
Alright, I'll give it a shot.

Hunter flips the steak and pours a small amount of beer on  
top. He's perplexed; a remedial student in an advanced class.

HUNTER  
Blind men can't watch porn. Dumb  
ass.

INT. CADENCE'S ROOM - DAY

Jackson lounges on the bed. He flips through a "COSMO".  
Behind the bathroom door, Cadence dresses.

CADENCE (O.S.)  
I think tonight is the night.

JACKSON  
What happened to the waiting til  
marriage thing or are you starting  
to dig this whole brevity trend?

CADENCE (O.S.)  
What can I say, I'm a slut.  
Foreplay just isn't doin' it  
anymore.

JACKSON  
So, is this like the next step?

CADENCE (O.S.)  
What's wrong with sex being the  
next step?

JACKSON  
A lot. Do you love him at least?

CADENCE (O.S.)  
Maybe.

JACKSON  
Oh, that's bullshit. You told me  
love didn't exist?

CADENCE (O.S.)  
No, Cosmo said it didn't. You're  
too serious all the time. You gotta  
learn to chill out, dude.

JACKSON  
I'm just saying...

The door flies open. Cadence sashays out. She twirls.

CADENCE  
You like it?

JACKSON  
Like a burning skillet.

CADENCE  
Why, thank you.

Cadence mockingly curtsies.

CADENCE  
Still can't believe I'll be wearing  
this the last time I'm pure.

Jackson chuckles.

CADENCE  
What's so funny?

JACKSON  
Pure!? Don't kid yourself.

Jackson motions to a bra and black panties lying on the bed.

JACKSON  
Besides, I thought that was gonna  
be the last thing you were wearing.

CADENCE  
Shut up. You got the point.

Cadence slides to the mirror and examines the dress on her  
body. For the first time, Jackson notices not just a friend,  
but a beautiful woman. He studies the way the fabric of the  
dress glides down Cadence's creamy skin.

CADENCE  
I am too pure.

Cadence ogles her breasts. She cups them and lifts.

CADENCE

So how are you holding up?

Cadence's eyes dart from the mirror to Jackson. Frozen, Jackson catches himself staring and snaps back.

CADENCE

You know, the whole Promise thing?

JACKSON

Could be better.

Cadence flows to the bed, hikes the dress and sits.

CADENCE

Ah, the beauty of life. You never know where it's gonna take you. Sometimes you just have to suck it up and step off the diving board, no matter how deep the water is.

JACKSON

What if I can't swim my way out?

CADENCE

Then you drown.

JACKSON

Thanks.

CADENCE

Sometimes it's better to just jump right in. The baby steps tend to sting worse.

Cadence stands, drawn back to the mirror. She toys at her hair.

CADENCE

Besides, it's been two weeks. That's plenty enough time to be mad at you. She's over it now, but you have to show her you still care.

JACKSON

And what if I can't?

CADENCE

Sounds like a personal problem. But you can't see the miracles in life with your head always down.

Cadence slips back into the bathroom.

INT. JACKSON'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Jackson starts the car. The radio moans a "SLOW LOVE SONG".

Sunlight gleams through the windshield, fighting Jackson. He squints and yanks down the visor knocking something to the floor. He reaches down and pulls back --

Pictures from the photo booth of him and Promise.

He sets the pictures on the dash, admiring Promise's smile.

INT. CADENCE'S ROOM - MEANWHILE

Cadence models the dress in the mirror. She pokes at her breasts, lifting them in judgement.

INT. AJ'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

AJ, pleasantly attired, sits at his desk. He pulls a piece of paper and pen from the drawer and scribbles, "CADENCE,"

INT. HUNTER'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

Hunter, posh in his boxers and wife-beater, "reads" a copy of "PLAYBOY" in bed.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR/COUNTRY ROAD - AFTERNOON

Jackson passes an old battered country church.

INT. CADENCE'S ROOM - MEANWHILE

In the mirror, Cadence shifts and contemplates her earrings.

INT. AJ'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

AJ finishes the letter, folds it and exits.

INT. HUNTER'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

Hunter lays, "skimming" the magazine.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR/COUNTRY ROAD - MEANWHILE

Jackson drives. He glances towards the dashboard and cuddles Promise with his eyes. She smiles directly back at him.

INT. CADENCE'S ROOM - MEANWHILE

Cadence smiles in the mirror. She twirls, approving herself.

INT. AJ'S HOUSE/HALLWAY - MEANWHILE

AJ moves to the front door. He stops at the mirror by the door to look himself over one last time.

INT. HUNTER'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

Hunter reaches into the night stand and pulls a bottle of hand lotion. He lathers his palms and stares towards the magazine with lustful anticipation.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR/HOME - MEANWHILE

Jackson gazes into the photo, captivated by Promise's smile.

INT. CADENCE'S ROOM - MEANWHILE

Cadence's smile percolates through the mirror.

I/E. AJ'S HOUSE/HALLWAY - MEANWHILE

AJ breaks from the mirror and strolls out --

EXT. AJ'S HOUSE - CONTINUE

AJ bends down to lock the door, when suddenly an arm wraps around AJ's neck, choking and ripping him from the door.

AJ struggles to writhe free, but the grasp around his neck tightens, as he fights for air.

From the side, steps --

JAMIE

Jamie cocks his fist and SMASHES AJ across the face. The arm around AJ's neck loosens, dropping him to the pavement.

Jamie towers over AJ. He spits on AJ, then kneels and pummels fist after fist into AJ's face. Blood SPRAYS from AJ's battered nose. Jamie stands.

Battered, AJ lays beaten on the concrete. From his swollen eyes, he COUGHS struggling for breath. Blood retches from his mouth. AJ squints up at --

DARYL

-- standing over him. Daryl raises his fist and HAMMERS AJ across the face. Then, Daryl lifts his heel and STRIKES AJ over and over again, a psychotic rage taking over. Anger shredding through his body.

JAMIE

Cut it out, man! You'll kill him!

Jamie lunges at Daryl and pulls him off of AJ.

The sun languishes over AJ's still body, blood sliding from his head shrouding the sidewalk. His eyes struggle to hold open against the pounding sun high above.

In the b.g., DARTING FOOTSTEPS FILL THE SILENT STREET.

AJ's mouth, agape, chokes in his eternal struggle for air. The FOOTSTEPS GROW FAINTER against the choking. Like the echoes of pounding drums slowly being sucked away, AJ fights for breath in his final somber moment. Then...

SILENCE and a GREAT WHITE LIGHT fill the screen.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE - MOS

Jackson sits at his desk, the laptop open on a blank white page. The icon flashes as he types - "FADE IN:".

The bedroom door pushes open and Peter enters. He ambles to the bed, a sullen expression wearing thin on his face. Jackson recedes his typing and turns to Peter confused.

As Peter talks, Jackson's face smites a blaze of despair.

Jackson stands and dashes out of the room. On the screen, the icon flashes, engulfed in the full whiteness of the page.



INT. CADENCE'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Cadence squirms on the couch. Her black dress shimmers against the gleam of the TV. She fidgets with the remote flipping aimlessly through the channels.

She glances to the clock on the coffee table, then a

KNOCK

shatters the silence, as the SOUND RUSHES BACK.

Cadence flies to the door and swings it open.

CADENCE  
AJ, it's about ti-

Jackson hunches in the doorway. Cadence's heart drops. His expression rips through her.

CADENCE  
What!?

JACKSON  
It's AJ.

CADENCE  
No!?

Cadence shakes her head, as tears rush from her eyes. Jackson grasps Cadence and pulls her tight against him. Cadence breaks down. Her body shakes against Jackson, knocking a tear loose from his eye and sliding down his cheek.

Jackson fights to maintain his strength, as he fingers his pocket. Trembling, he pulls --

AJ'S LETTER

-- and extends it to Cadence. She draws back, her eyes pleading with Jackson.

CADENCE  
I love him.

Jackson pulls Cadence's head against his shoulder and strokes her hair.

JACKSON  
I know.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR/COUNTRY ROAD - SUNSET

The sun sets low against the dusky sky. Jackson rushes down the empty country road. The picture of Promise still hangs from the dashboard. Jackson pulls up to --

EXT. PROMISE'S HOUSE - CONTINUE

-- and throws the car into park. From the window, he sees Promise curled on the bench swing. Jackson shuts off the car and exits.

Jackson drifts to the bench and stands over the swing as it sways gently. The creak of the chains blends with the cold breeze. Jackson sits. Promise holds an empty gaze to the sky.

JACKSON

I'm sorry.

The wind shivers against their faces. Promise is unfazed.

JACKSON

I'm sorry that I find myself laying in bed at night and I can't fall asleep. I just lay there thinking of you, knowing that if I fall asleep then you'll be with me. And we'll smile together and laugh together. But when I wake up, you're gone. And then I fight myself, knowing that what I dream, it isn't real. So, I don't want to fall asleep. Not again. Not without you, because if I do then I know I'll never wake up the same. I need you Promise.

A tear trickles down Promise's cheek. Jackson's hand wipes it away, finally causing Promise to break her gaze. She turns to Jackson, her tear filled eyes meeting his.

PROMISE

I'm pregnant.

Jackson's face flushes thin. He stares at Promise with disbelief. Tears stray against her ashen cheeks. Finally, Jackson wraps an arm around Promise and pulls her tight.

INT. JACKSON'S HOME/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Anne slaps spaghetti onto Peter's plate, as Kaitlyn picks at her salad.

ANNE  
Where's Jackson?

PETER  
He'll be home soon.

The front door opens and Jackson enters.

ANNE (O.S.)  
You're just in time!

Jackson gathers himself and steps into the kitchen. He takes a seat.

ANNE  
How are you holding up?

PETER  
Anne.

Jackson gingerly jabs at his food. Kaitlyn reaches for the bowl and CRASHES over a glass of milk. She jumps to her feet.

KAITLYN  
Shit!

ANNE  
Well don't just stare at it. Get something to clean it up.

KAITLYN  
It was an accident! Give me a sec!

ANNE  
It's not my mess!

KAITLYN  
Nobody said it was!

Jackson pokes at his food, unnerved by the arguing.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Hunter enters the front door of the dark house. The glow of the television emits the only light.

Passed out in the recliner, sleeps Terry. Empty beer cans blanket the chair.

Hunter walks down the hallway. Moments later, the bedroom door shuts, waking Terry.

INT. HUNTER'S BEDROOM - CONTINUE

Hunter kicks off his boots and lays on the bed.

TERRY (O.S.)

Hunter!

Hunter pulls off his shirt. Outside the bedroom door, FOOTSTEPS grow with intensity.

TERRY (O.S.)

That you Hunter!? Don't ignore me boy!

The bedroom door flies open. Terry stands, a beer in one hand and a piece of paper held out in the other.

TERRY

What the fuck is this!?

HUNTER

Winning lottery ticket.

Terry stumbles to the bed. He crumples the paper and shoves it into Hunter's face.

TERRY

Think you're funny smart ass!? Try again!

HUNTER

Public intoxication ticket. I don't know.

TERRY

Are you back talking me?

HUNTER

No, sir.

Terry smacks Hunter across the face. Hunter doesn't flinch.

TERRY

Don't you give me lip.

HUNTER

Yes.

Terry slaps him again, almost knocking Hunter off the bed.

TERRY

Yes, sir.

Hunter shifts, his gaze stern against his father's cold eyes.

HUNTER

Yes, sir.

Terry throws the wadded cell phone bill at Hunter and exits.

TERRY

I'll be damned if you turn out like  
your mother.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jackson sits at his desk. He fondles a picture in his hands. In it, a young Jackson, Hunter and AJ pose as muscle men.

Jackson runs his finger over AJ's face. A knock startles Jackson, as the door pushes open and Peter pokes his head in.

PETER

You busy?

JACKSON

It's your house.

Peter enters and shuts the door behind him. He staggers into the room, admiring the numerous awards that adorn the walls.

PETER

Quite some awards.  
(reading)  
Best screenwriter!? You write!?

Peter lifts the award and examines it. Then, he spots the stack of college envelopes on Jackson's desk and sets the award back down. Various universities imprint the packages -- "USC, NYU, TEXAS, UCLA, CHAPMAN"

PETER

You get a chance yet to look at  
that college stuff I left for you?

JACKSON

Not really.

PETER

Might want to get on that. It's gonna sneak right past you soon.

Jackson ignores him. Peter takes a seat on the bed.

PETER

Look, Jackson, I'm sorry for how things have been lately.

Jackson stares at the photo. AJ smiles back at him.

PETER

When I was your age my father and I got into a fight just like us, but I didn't quite handle things as well then either.

Jackson manages a smile back at AJ.

PETER

I hit him. He gave me a shot and I took it. I'm not saying it was right, but I just wanted you to know that, well, I wouldn't have faulted you if you would've swung.

Jackson sits in silence, lost in the photo.

PETER

You forget, your mother and I - we've been there before. We were your age once too. I guess we all go through it at some point.

Peter looks to Jackson, but receives nothing.

PETER

I know you're confused right now, but this is all just part of growing up. It does work out eventually. We just have to wade through the fields of shit to get there.

Peter stands and inches towards the door.

PETER

Just, no one ever tells you how much it stinks getting there. I'm proud of you Jackson. Me and your mother...we're proud of you.

Peter exits. Jackson lifts the photo and stands. He positions it against the empty corkboard and pierces a tack through it.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - LATER

Jackson lays in bed staring blankly at the ceiling fan above. BLADE-BY-BLADE it raids the room with an empty hollowness.

Jackson clambers off the bed and moves to the desk. He pulls an envelope from the stack, unclasps the brads and slides a --

"CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY APPLICATION"

-- out. Jackson grabs a pen and scrawls his name.

EXT. HUNTER'S ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Hunter and Jackson drink. Hunter finishes his can and flicks it off the roof. He grabs another, cracks it open and goes to work pounding the new beer.

Ignoring his can, Jackson peers stagnant into the dark sky.

JACKSON  
Are you scared?

HUNTER  
Of dying?

Jackson lifts his can and takes a slow gulp.

JACKSON  
Yeah.

HUNTER  
No. You can't kill what's already  
dead.

INT. PROMISE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Promise scribbles in a journal. A letter, "MY DEAREST BABY,".

Outside the room, a FLUSH echoes. Then, Heather bursts into the bedroom, holding a pregnancy test.

HEATHER  
What the hell is this!?

Promise looks up from her writing.

HEATHER  
Are you pregnant!?

Heather storms to the bed, latching her fingers into Promise's hair and pulling her from the mattress.

PROMISE  
Ouch! Stop it.

HEATHER  
Look at me!

Promise hangs her head to the ground. Heather rips her chin up, eyeballing her.

HEATHER  
Is this true!?

Promise's unraveling eyes plead with her mother. Then --  
Heather SLAPS Promise.

Promise falls back, curling onto the bed.

HEATHER  
How dare you do this to me!

PROMISE  
It wasn't my job to raise myself!

HEATHER  
Don't chastise me like this. I  
worked my ass off raising you!

PROMISE  
Yeah, then where's my dad?

Promise's words like a knife, stab at Heather. A tear trickles from Heather's eye.

HEATHER  
Fuck you.

Promise crawls from the bed and falls into her mother's arms. Tears stream from both their eyes.

EXT. ALLEN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY  
Students pile into the school.



INT. ALLEN HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUE

Students talk and hang out. Alone among them, Jackson. A sign hangs near the entrance - "WELCOME BACK SENIORS 2002".

He glances at the sign and moves past it on his way to Promise's locker. Jackson looks around confused. Beside him, a FEMALE STUDENT gathers books from her locker.

JACKSON  
Have you seen Promise?

FEMALE STUDENT  
Who?

JACKSON  
Nevermind.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A TEACHER scribbles a math problem on the board. In his seat, Jackson is lost in a daze. He copies nothing.

The BELL RINGS. He gathers his papers and darts out the room.

EXT. PROMISE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Jackson knocks. Behind the door, laughing grows louder. Then, Heather opens the door. Her laughs quickly cease at the sight of Jackson. Inside, Brian smiles from the couch.

JACKSON  
Is Promise here?

HEATHER  
Go home Jackson.

Heather starts to close the door, but Jackson shoves his foot inside, blocking it.

JACKSON  
I need to talk to her.

HEATHER  
She doesn't want to talk to you.  
Now get the hell off my porch and  
out of our lives!

She kicks Jackson's foot from the doorway, slamming it shut.

Defeated, Jackson slinks back to the car. At the door, he pauses and glances back at the house. Then, climbs in.

INT. PROMISE'S BEDROOM WINDOW - CONTINUE

Promise peers through the blinds watching Jackson. The car revs and pulls away down the street.

EXT. JACKSON'S HOME - AFTERNOON

Jackson flips open the mailbox and pulls a thick packet. In the upper left corner - "CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY".

He rips into the envelope and tears out a sheet of paper.

JACKSON

(re: the letter)

"Dear Mr. Slade, Congratulations on your acceptance to Chapman University under the major of Film Production Directing and Screenwriting. Enclosed is information regarding your Presidential Scholarship covering your full financial needs."

Jackson's hands drop.

JACKSON

Holy shit.

INT. POOL SUPPLY STORE - DAY

A "HELP WANTED" sign hangs in the window. The bell DINGS and a pregnant Promise enters. She waddles to the counter, where Jamie works the register. To his right, Daryl. They don identical aprons.

JAMIE

Be with you in a sec.

PROMISE

I need your help.

Jamie looks up from the register. He recognizes Promise, but from where?

JAMIE

Oh, it's you. I don't know.

PROMISE

I need a job. I can't pay for all these medical bills without one.

JAMIE

So, you cheat on me, get yourself pregnant and now I'm supposed to help you out?

PROMISE

I didn't cheat on you. You cheated on me. I broke up with you when you fucked that girl, or are you too stupid to remember?

JAMIE

You're not exactly earning yourself a job right now.

PROMISE

Look, I'm sorry, but you're my last hope. You know I wouldn't have come here unless I really needed it.

JAMIE

Can you even work like that?

PROMISE

Just give me the application, Jamie.

JAMIE

Same fiery girl I always knew.

Daryl laughs. Jamie fiddles under the counter reaching for an application. He grasps the stack, but stops.

JAMIE

So lets just say I do help you out. How soon before you can start?

PROMISE

Today.

Jamie slides his hand from the stack to an apron, grabs it and tosses it to Promise.

JAMIE

You owe me.

PROMISE

Let's just say you're very slowly  
on your way to forgiveness. Very,  
very slowly.

INT. CADENCE'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Cadence lays in bed glazed in the glint of the television. A ring collects under her eyes from a daze of sleeplessness.

JACKSON

Cadence?

Cadence never even flinches, as Jackson inches in, moving to the bed. He waves his hand in front of her face and SNAPS.

JACKSON

Hey, Cadence?

Cadence's eyes droop heavy. Jackson SNAPS again. Cadence's eyes roll back and she falls, toppling over the bed.

JACKSON

Oh shit.

Jackson catches Cadence's head and sits her back up. He scans the room and spots an empty bottle of pain pills tipped over on the nightstand. Next to it, lies a phone.

JACKSON

Don't do this to me. Don't you  
fucking do this to me.

Jackson grabs the phone and hastily dials, "911". He dangles over Cadence and strokes her hair.

JACKSON

Just hold on, okay? It's going to  
be alright. I'm right here.

OPERATOR

(filtered)

911.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - EVENING

Jackson strains to stay awake, as his body slips deeper into the chair. An open magazine straddles his lap. Hunter enters.

HUNTER

Jackson.

Jackson jars upright.

HUNTER  
How is she?

JACKSON  
Fine. She's fine. They had to pump  
her stomach, but she'll be alright.

HUNTER  
Shit. I knew something like this  
was gonna happen.

Hunter turns and storms out the door.

JACKSON  
Where are you going?

HUNTER  
To Hell.

Jackson stands and darts after Hunter.

EXT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUE

JACKSON  
You don't have to do this.

Hunter stops and turns back, squaring up to Jackson.

HUNTER  
When my father got drunk, I didn't  
do anything. When he beat my Mom, I  
didn't do anything. I'm tired of  
not doing anything Jackson. I'm  
tired of knowing I'm turning into  
him. So yeah, I do have to do this.

Hunter marches off, leaving Jackson behind.

JACKSON  
This isn't going to bring any of  
them back.

Hunter keeps walking.

JACKSON  
Fuck.

EXT. POOL SUPPLY STORE - DAY

Promise pulls off her apron, as Jamie flips the store lights and locks up. Together, they walk towards Promise's car.

JAMIE

Not bad for your first day.

PROMISE

It's a pool store, not rocket science, Jamie.

JAMIE

Don't forget whose helping who out here.

PROMISE

I'm sorry.

Jamie looks at Promise.

JAMIE

Maybe I should follow you home, you know with you being like you are and all. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you.

Promise hits her keys and the car BEEPS. She reaches for the door, but Jamie reaches across and opens it for her.

INT. PROMISE'S BEDROOM - EARLY EVENING

Jamie lies on the bed. Promise staggers from the bathroom towards him. She struggles to unzip her blouse. The girth of her pregnant belly makes it quite difficult.

PROMISE

Can you help me with this?

Slowly, Jamie caresses the zipper down, ogling the small of Promise's back as he zips.

PROMISE

Thanks.

Promise moves back to the bathroom, but jumps.

PROMISE

Oh!

JAMIE

What?

PROMISE

The baby just kicked.

Promise jumps again.

PROMISE

He did it again. You want to feel?

Promise stumbles to the bed. She clutches Jamie's hand and places it on her stomach.

PROMISE

You feel that?

Promise pulls her hand away, but Jamie's doesn't move. A drop of wetness strikes the top of Jamie's hand. He looks up as a tear drips from Promise's eyes. Jamie slides his hand across Promise's face and wipes the tear away.

PROMISE

Look at me.

JAMIE

I am. You're beautiful.

PROMISE

You're just saying that so I don't feel like this fat pregnant chick.

JAMIE

No, I mean it. You're resplendent.

Promise wipes at the tears. With innocence, she looks to Jamie.

PROMISE

What'd you call me?

JAMIE

Resplendent.

Promise smiles. Jamie caresses her face and leans in, kissing her. Suddenly, Promise pulls back and raises her hand to Jamie's chest.

PROMISE

I'm sorry I can't do this. Maybe I made a mistake, but I'm pregnant with someone else's child now.

JAMIE

Then why isn't he here right now?

Jamie slides his hand from Promise's face and clasps her palm. Promise's eyes drape over him, as tears swell in her eyes.

Jamie wraps his arms around Promise and pulls her to the bed.

PROMISE

No. Please don't.

Jamie climbs on top of Promise. Her belly makes it a struggle, but she never fights him off.

Jamie kisses the moistness from Promise's cheeks and reaches for the waistband of her pants. Jamie works Promise's pants, as he kisses her lips.

Tears begin to roll from Promise's eyes.

PROMISE

No, I can't. You have to...

Promise's teary face freezes, as Jamie slides in. A tear trickles down Promise's cheek.

PROMISE

...stop.

Jamie thrusts, as tears drip down Promise's face. She stares out the window towards the sky, lost amongst the night.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - LATER

Jackson speeds down the road. The opened letter rests in the seat beside him. On the dash, the image of Promise's eyes penetrate Jackson. He swings a right onto --

EXT. PROMISE'S STREET - CONTINUE

-- and spots Jamie's truck out front. His eyes grow narrow in anger as he sees Promise climbing in the passenger side. The truck starts up and pulls away.

Jackson pounds the gas, gaining on them. Fire soars in his eyes. Jackson closes on the truck, riding its tail.

Jackson SLAMS THE WHEEL. The HORN BLARES.



INTERCUT JACKSON'S MOUNTAINEER AND JAMIE'S TRUCK

JAMIE

What the!?

Promise swings around, catching Jackson's brooding glare.

PROMISE

Keep driving!

The Mountaineer rides close on the truck's bumper.

Jackson SMASHES THE HORN.

JACKSON

Pull over!

The two cars fly down the country road.

Jackson PUNCHES THE HORN, again.

JACKSON

Pull the fuck over!

Jackson BANGS THE HORN.

The truck swings onto the shoulder and SLAMS its brakes. Jackson whips behind and SCREECHES to a halt. Jamie throws the truck into park and jumps from the vehicle.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUE

Jamie marches towards Jackson's car.

JAMIE

Who the fuck are you!?

Jackson rolls down his window.

JACKSON

Fuck you!

JAMIE

Step out of the car asshole.

Jackson throws the Mountaineer into park and hops out.

JAMIE

You really think you can handle me?

JACKSON  
Wouldn't be the first time the  
champ got knocked out.

JAMIE  
Watch yourself boy or you might  
just end up like your friend.

Jackson grows with anger, as Promise stumbles from the truck.

PROMISE  
What are you doing, Jackson!?

JAMIE  
Wait, this is Jackson!?

Jamie lunges at Jackson. His fist SMASHES into Jackson's face. Jackson falls to the ground. A drop of blood dribbles from his nostrils onto the street. He wipes at his nose.

JAMIE  
That's for fucking my girlfriend!

Jamie's words startle Jackson. Confused, Jackson looks up at Jamie and then to Promise.

PROMISE  
Lets go Jamie.

Jamie climbs back into the truck. Promise opens the passenger door and starts in.

JACKSON  
Is it even my child?

Promise stops and turns back to Jackson.

JACKSON  
Is it even mine?

PROMISE  
I'm putting the baby up for  
adoption. It's better this way.  
Maybe not today, but one day you'll  
see it.

Promise climbs into the truck and closes the door. The truck revs and speeds away.

Jackson watches the truck pull away.

I/E. JAMIE'S TRUCK - CONTINUE

Promise leans against the window. Tears well in her eyes.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - MEANWHILE

Jackson whips down the road. The photo on the dash invades him. Promise's smile stabs at his heart. Jackson rips the picture from the dash and heaves it out the window.

INT. CADENCE'S ROOM - LATER

Cadence lies in bed watching TV. From her doorway, a knock echoes. Jackson pushes the door open, colorless and worn. He moves to the bed and sits. Cadence scoots up next to Jackson.

CADENCE

What happened to your nose?

Jackson's head dangles, as Cadence strokes his hair. Jackson looks up, a tear biting at the corner of his eye.

JACKSON

Do you believe in God?

CADENCE

No.

Jackson stares into Cadence, the certainty in her voice rasping with confidence. It's not what he wanted to hear, but it's what he expected.

CADENCE

If there was a God then AJ would still be here and I - I wouldn't.

Jackson drops his head, choking back a sniffle.

CADENCE

But I do believe in angels, here to watch over, protect and love us. If that's God then so be it, but if it isn't, I'll still be here, having to live my life in this moment loving the people I care most about. And that's all the certainty I can give myself.

Jackson raises his head, his eyes peering into Cadence. He leans forward and kisses her, but Cadence doesn't pull away. Instead, she kisses Jackson back.

Finally, Cadence breaks the kiss. She pulls Jackson to her and hugs him tightly.

JACKSON  
I'm sorry.

CADENCE  
No. Thank you.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - NIGHT

Jackson drives down an empty road. He pulls his cell from his pocket and dials.

HUNTER (V.O.)  
(filtered)  
Hello?

JACKSON  
Where are you?

EXT. HUNTER'S ROOFTOP - LATER

Hunter sits atop the roof, a backpack to his side and a stern gaze towards the sky.

The METAL LADDER CLANKS, as Jackson pulls himself onto the rooftop and over to Hunter.

JACKSON  
What are we doing here Hunter?

HUNTER  
Saying good-bye.

Hunter reaches into the bag and pulls out two cans. He tosses one to Jackson. Jackson catches the can and looks at it --

-- a can of Coors Light. Then, turns back to Hunter.

HUNTER  
For AJ.

Hunter cracks his can. Jackson follows. Hunter raises the can. Jackson follows.

HUNTER

"As sure as night is dark and day is light, I keep you on my mind both day and night. And happiness I've known proves that it's right, because you're mine, I walk the line."

Together, they toast. Silence engulfs the air, as Jackson chokes down the drink. Hunter takes a swig, his eyes never breaking from the sky.

HUNTER

You ever wonder what's out there, you know, besides us? How in all the universe, maybe it's just us?

JACKSON

I never really thought about it.

HUNTER

I do. It makes you feel alone.

Jackson sips, then stares into his can, his fingers toying at the tab. He stops and casts his eyes into the dark sky as --

-- a FIREWORK ERUPTS illuminating the night. A blanket of color cloaks the boys.

I/E. PROMISE'S HOUSE - MEANWHILE

From the bedroom window, the FIREWORKS BLAST, flashing light through the dark room revealing a neatly decorated baby room: hand painted clouds ruffles the walls, teddy bears overrun the crib. In front of the window, a rocking chair sways...

In it sits Promise, rocking her BABY to sleep. She gazes out the window at the show in the sky.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Jackson tapes an overstuffed box closed, lifts it and exits.

Left behind, the remnants of what once was: a primly made bed, bare walls and mostly emptiness, except on the desk, a large pile of neatly stacked white papers beckons.

INT. HUNTER'S HOUSE - MEANWHILE

Terry sleeps in the recliner. Empty cans sweep his body. On the end table beside him lies Terry's .22. A hand reaches out and with quiet precision slides the gun from the table.

INT. CADENCE'S ROOM - MEANWHILE

Cadence lies in bed. Tears strangle at her eyes. In her hands, she toys at the corner of AJ's letter --

INSERT - AJ'S LETTER

"Cadence,

I love you.

- Andrew James"

She smiles.

EXT. JACKSON'S DRIVEWAY - EARLY MORNING

Boxes overflow the Mountaineer. Peter climbs into the driver seat, as Jackson exits the house and tosses in the last box.

Jackson closes the car door and turns to his mother.

Anne takes a deep breath fighting back her emotions. She reaches out and pulls Jackson close, squeezing him with earnest. Her bottom lip quivers and tears swell in her eyes.

Finally, Anne releases her grasp and pulls back to dry her eyes. Then, forces a smile.

The Mountaineer cranks and Jackson climbs in.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - CONTINUE

Jackson and Peter drive in silence. Jackson stares out the window entranced by the street lights that whip by.

EXT. POOL SUPPLY STORE - MEANWHILE

Dawn breaks over the misty dew of the morning sky. Jamie works the store lock, as Daryl kicks around behind him.

A SCREECH OF BRAKES SHRILL. They whirl around and see --  
Hunter's truck pounding to a stop. Hunter leaps from the  
driver side, .22 drawn. He...

COCKS

and eyes Jamie. Then...

FIRES

The bullet pierces Jamie's skull, SHATTERING THE STORE WINDOW  
behind him.

Daryl takes off running. Hunter turns and without  
hesitation...

COCKS AND FIRES

ripping into Daryl's leg. Daryl drops to the pavement  
writhing in pain and clutching at his leg. He fights to crawl  
along the sidewalk, his nails scraping against the cement.  
The blood from his leg smears along the beaten ground.

Hunter marches to Daryl and PLANTS A FOOT across his face.  
Then...

THE GUN COCKS.

Daryl tenses. His eyes curdle, pungent in anticipation.  
Slowly, Daryl turns his head and the whites of his eyes  
collide with Hunter's and...

BAM!

Daryl's head snaps against the cement. Blood splashes onto  
the sidewalk, bathing the ground in red. Daryl's eyes hold  
wide on the cloudy haze of the morning as --

TIRES STREAK across the pavement, peeling fast away.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Anne lingers into the deserted room. She takes in the  
emptiness when her eyes catch sight of the stack of papers on  
the desk. Anne grasps the pile and eyes the cover.

INSERT - SCREENPLAY TITLE PAGE

"PROMISE, TEXAS

BY JACKSON SLADE"

Anne moves to the bed and sits. She opens the screenplay and thumbs the pages.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - MEANWHILE

Jackson eyes the town flashing by.

PETER

You know once you make it big, you can't forget about us.

JACKSON

If I make it.

PETER

I have no doubt you'll succeed in anything you do. You've always worked hard for what you wanted. Just don't forget the people that helped you along the way.

With the admiration of a three year old, Jackson looks to Peter.

PETER

Remember who was always there for you when it really counted. That's what's important in life, the people you share it with. Nothing else comes close to that.

The Mountaineer approaches a red light and rolls to a halt. In the distance, an ECHOING SOUND GROWS --

SIRENS BLAST AND LIGHTS FLARE

as a police car flies through the intersection.

INT. JACKSON'S BEDROOM - MEANWHILE

Anne flaps the script closed, tucks it firmly under her arm and exits the room.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - MEANWHILE

Hunter stands over AJ'S TOMBSTONE, Terry's .22 firmly in hand.



SIRENS ring out in the distance, growing nearer.

Hunter eyes the tombstone, then...

COCKS THE GUN

Hunter's eyes widen and...

BAM

as the SCREEN FILLS RED.

I/E. JACKSON'S CAR - MEANWHILE

The stoplight flips green and Jackson turns back to the window. Peter eases on the gas and passes a street sign --

"NOW LEAVING ALLEN, TEXAS"

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Outside, light rain drips. Inside, the dim light of the laptop gleams. The icon flashes on the monitor and we now see the young man from the beginning as Jackson. He types:

JACKSON (V.O.)

"I once had a good friend of mine tell me, that as you sit in the theatre watching the story unfold, you are overcome by this trance of emotions."

I/E. ANNE'S CAR - MEANWHILE

Anne drives. The script rests in the seat beside her.

INTERCUT - JACKSON TYPING AND ANNE DRIVING

JACKSON (V.O.)

"And when the movie finally comes to an end, you sit back and realize that all the pain and anger and hurt you just saw wasn't a movie at all..."

EXT. PROMISE'S HOUSE - MEANWHILE

The mailbox opens and Anne's hand slides the script inside.

JACKSON (V.O.)  
"...but rather it was your life...  
and there is nothing you can do to  
change it."

The DOORBELL RINGS. Jackson snaps the laptop closed and wanders out the bedroom.

INT. JACKSON'S APARTMENT/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUE

Jackson moves to the front door. He opens it and spots a brown envelope settled on the doorstep. Jackson bends down and picks up the package, noticing the return address - "Allen, Texas".

Jackson tears open the seal and pulls...

A picture of a smiling baby boy.

Jackson eyes the photo, searching it. Then, he reaches back into the envelope and pulls out...

INSERT - A LETTER

"I named him Andrew James.

- Promise"

b Jackson lifts the photo to his eyes and examines his son.

A tear wrings loose from Jackson's eye and trickles down his cheek. Then, a smile steals across his face and an --

-- EXPLOSION BURSTS, as FIREWORKS ERUPT painting the canvas of the night sky.

Jackson doesn't even turn to look. Instead, his smile grows, shining brighter than the lights overhead.

The reflection of the sky casts a masking flush against Jackson's face --

-- spiraling into the night, as the FIREWORKS POUND high above.

FADE OUT.