

ABSOLUTION

Written by
Vladimir Jovanovski

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Contact: vjcinend@yahoo.com

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FADE IN:

Darkness. Rubber wheels SQUEAK - pacing FOOTSTEPS follow.

The absence of light subdues to a flash. Momentarily. The blackness makes a comeback. Light again triumphs but victory's short-lived.

Darkness - light - darkness... neon lights between polystyrene squares. One, another, a third.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD/ STREET - NIGHT

Star freckled sky. Scattered clouds. The moon fights for visibility.

Residential homes flank a desolate street. Sprinklers water pristine lawns.

STAN MALONE (58) stands on the sidewalk. A formidable, rugged man. The type you wouldn't ask for directions. He holds a grocery-filled plastic bag, eyes glued to a homogeneous house on his right.

IN THE HOUSE WINDOW

TODD (38) walks into his living room. Handsome and wholesome in appearance. He sits in front of the TV, oblivious to his spectator outside.

ON THE STREET

Stan stares, disdain etched on his face. Eyes blink - focus broken.

He ambles down the street, right foot dragging. A limp.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ HALLWAY - LATER

Front door unlocks. Stan enters his abode - void of people and minimalistic in furniture. Breathing echoes.

KITCHEN - LATER

Rhythmic THUDS. Oil CRACKLES. A knife descends in succession. Vinegar covers a salad in a plastic container. Mushrooms fry in a pan.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Stan sits in a comfy chair. Juicebox gripped tight, straw sticking out. He sips and changes the channel. BEEP, BEEP -- the oven calls.

HALLWAY - LATER

Basement door opens. Stan walks down carrying a bag.

BATHROOM - LATER

A showerhead sprays a butchered body. Asymmetric wounds on pale skin.

The flowing water stops. Stan steps out to a mirror, where a bottle of alcohol, a handful of cotton and a unopened razor await. In the looking glass - stoic Stan, eyes vacant of any semblance of emotion.

He places his foot on the toilet, revealing his scar-rich thigh. Ripping the razor open, he glides it across, adding a fresh slash. Dead expression remains a constant.

He bites down on a towel, lavishly pouring alcohol on a lump of cotton. Hesitates, then presses it down on the open wound. Teeth embed in the fabric as the hellish stinging begins.

BEDROOM - LATER

Stan sets his modest bed in his modest room. Eyes inadvertently drawn to the window on his right. In it - an attractive woman undresses in her own.

He closes the shutters. Disinterested, he kneels by the bed. Elbow on bedspread, hand on knee.

STAN

I... I, helped Anna Rose today.
Helped the old hog move that
shitty cupboard of hers. Bitch
probably has no use for the damn
thing. Still, did it. I was
gonna... ah, don't matter since I
never went.

(looks up)

Man told me, patience is an innate
quality of faith. Sixteen years,
to the day. Sure you keep count.
So do I. Dunno why, or why I still
do this, but, I do...

(with a sour smile)

and I yap about doing it. Pardon's
supposed to be your best virtue. Yet
both seem incapable of it. That and
a good night's sleep.

(touches the mattress)

Sailing, with a spring in my back.
Every night, before I doze, I wish,
I stay asleep.

Or put my shoes on the next morning
walk down the street and... ahh...
fuck you.

Stan rises. Gaze forward to a photo on the wall. In the frame - a younger version of himself, arm over a woman's shoulder (LISA). They stand together, radiant, youthful, happy.

His eyes shut, emotions transparent through his rough exterior.

CROWD (V.O.)
(silently)
Man-gler... Man-gler...
(building)
Mangler... MANGLER... MANGLER!

He lays on the bed. Over the set sheets. Almost fetal.

CROWD (V.O.)
MANGLER! MANGLER! MANGLER! MANGLER!

Eyes squeezed, letting no tear escape. They OPEN --

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE AREA - DAY

Stan stands behind a large curtain. HEADSET GUY cues him in.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA (REC CENTER) - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC hits! Stan exits to a ramp. Waits... weak pyro fires. A crowd of five hundred erupts. Building's half-full, sections tapered off.

Halfheartedly Stan walks the aisle to the ring. Guardrails on both sides. Fans extended over trying to touch hands with Stan "The Mangler" Malone. He obliges a few. Climbs into the ring, where he disguises his apathy with cordial waves.

LATER

BAM! A head smashes a turnbuckle. TOMMY TEXAS (24) and SLICK EDDIE (28) are amidst battle. A REF (31) circles them.

Tommy hits Eddie with an exaggerated uppercut. Eddie bounces off the corner and returns fire. They exchange blows in the middle.

Stan patrols the outside ring area. Indifferent but observant.

Eddie decks Tommy. Who falls back making contact with the Ref. Both flop like they've been mowed down by gunfire.

Eddie flips off the crowd and slides out of the ring... grabs a chair, folds it and tries to slide back in, when... halfway through, Stan pulls him back out by his ankle.

Eddie now face to face with Stan. Terrified, he turns to run but is tripped. Stands and eats a punch that renders him touring the cosmos.

Stan grabs the now groggy Eddie and slides him back in the ring.

Tommy miraculously rises at that very moment. Stan joins them inside the square circle as Tommy kicks Eddie in the head. Timber - Eddie falls. Tommy covers him. Stan strains, counts one, two... three.

Stan lifts Tommy's arm in triumph. Camera flashes flood the arena.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE AREA - LATER

Stan in a corner. Light's dim, place is spacious and there's a sense of camaraderie in the air. Wrestlers, valets, refs and crew socialize. Stan sips from his juicebox, looking on from a distance.

A VALET (21) approaches Stan. She stops before him, blushing.

VALET

Cheeks are a bright red, aren't they? Krissy Lynn.

(she shakes his hand)

Great having you on the show. Mmm, I... I hated your guts when I was nine.

STAN

I enjoyed spending your parents' money.

She walks away, high school giddy.

Tommy towels off as he nears Stan, who sees him coming. His grunt is met by --

TOMMY

Sir, awesome job out there. I think we did pretty good. It's an honor for me to say that I worked with you in any capacity. My uncle worked you back in 83, in Charlotte. Told me you were a mechanic. Snug as hell but that you got heat like nobodies business. Counting my blessing you weren't putting hands on me in there tonight.

(no response)

Sure popped that crowd.

(no response)

Am I bothering you?

STAN
No. I like compliments.

TOMMY
Don't seem overly enthused to reply.

STAN
Was waiting to see if you had any more left.

TOMMY
Done. Don't wanna come off as too much of a kiss ass. Any thoughts on the match?

STAN
(takes a sip)
It... was fine.

TOMMY
Fine's a passing grade. Any specifics? Things I should work on?

STAN
(hesitant)
Oversold some of those holds.

TOMMY
Ha-ha, yeah. I'm working on accentuating certain stuff. Get the people into it. Lighten things up.

STAN
Were they sad?
(off his blank look)
The people? Didn't notice they needed any picking up.

TOMMY
A laugh and a smile makes everything better, right?

STAN
Even wakes?

TOMMY
Ha! You're twisting it around --

STAN
Am I? Maybe I should've added a grin. Make it better.
(looks around)
This conversation has already gone longer than I'd like it to. If you plan on talking, grab that chair.

Stan points to a steel chair. Tommy brings it over. Stan sits.

STAN

Back isn't what it used to be.

(Tommy nods)

Show like this, on average, I get three to four strapping young men such as yourself walk up and ask about their match. Which they should. More times than not it spirals, because my pride just can't let it be.

TOMMY

What is it so conflicted about?

STAN

Oodles. Why do you think those people out there came here for? So you can make them laugh?

TOMMY

Like to think they came to have fun.

STAN

I saw an Improv a mile back. I bet they have funnier motherfuckers than you there. Those guys pay the bills with jokes and... fun.

TOMMY

Yeah, but... it's over. The people liked it.

STAN

Listen, kid. Funny is funny, but funny don't make money, here. You're what 6,3", 240 pounds? And you wanna make people laugh? You own a mirror?

TOMMY

Yes, sir.

STAN

How about you look at it once in a while, develop some narcissistic tendencies. I ain't no homo but that mug of yours ain't half-bad. You can't teach or earn that. When you've hit jackpot on the genetic lottery, should up the sights.

Keep the "ha-ha" in the back pocket, work on what counts in main events, character.

TOMMY
Insinuating I'm short?

STAN
Would you be flip-flopping in a half-full Rec Center if you weren't?

TOMMY
What would you recommend?

STAN
It ain't science. There's tried-and-true tested formulas. Endgame's to make the react. You draw on primal emotions: jealousy, envy, hate. Have the guys wanna be in your shoes and the girls in your bed. Now, bend over in excruciating pain. Grunt, scream. Sell them on the decent man's suffering. Stick to being the pretty boy that gets roughed up. Use it, while you can.
(beat)
You got good fire, liked the comeback.

TOMMY
Appreciate the honesty. I'll work on what you said. Try and impress you next time.

STAN
Fuck impressing me, impress those pockets with a lack of space. I don't give a shit.

Tommy bitterly nods and moves away, deflated. Few feet behind, stands Eddie. Waiting for his moment.

EDDIE
Sir? Wanted to ask if you could throw some notes out, about my match?

Stan bites his lip.

EXT. WRESTLING ARENA/ PARKING LOT - LATER

Stan walks to a parked Honda Civic.

Three musclehead wrestlers inside. One in the driver's seat, two in the back. Shotgun reserved for Stan. Trunk pops open.

INT. HONDA CIVIC - LATER

Everyone's tranquil, silent. Stan looks out at the passing scenery.

EXT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY - LATER

The Honda stops at a curve. Stan steps out, trunk pops open - he removes a gym bag and waves "bye" to the guys inside.

Strolls to the hangar-like facility ahead. A large sign over its entrance - "*APWA Wrestling Academy*".

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS

Stan enters greeted by the sight of two dozen wrestlers doing push-ups, pull-ups, squats and a cacophony of chatter and loud bangs. Three wrestling rings fill the place out. In them - others practice moves.

Stan walks past his pupils, all of which acknowledge his presence.

He nears CHRISTIAN COLOSSUS (55). A grey giant. Seven feet tall with a cinder block for a head. He sits on a bench, scribbling in a notebook.

CHRIS
(writing)

You win?

STAN

Nahh.

CHRIS
No belt?
(looks up)
Screwed you, huh?

STAN

Fuckers were more crooked than
your teeth.

LARRY (48) sweeps the floor close by. Short, round, cutesy.

Stan scans the academy, corner to corner.

LARRY

It ain't even dusk and cheap shots
are a flying.

CHRIS

You ain't got a worry, they'll
have to be crawling to make
contact with your head.

LARRY

(stops sweeping)

I'm all smiles if they've found a home with you.

(to Stan)

You insult him and he takes it out on me. Having lackeys must be wonderful.

STAN

I'll sit you down and tell you all about it someday. On account that'll be the closest you'll get to experiencing it.

LARRY

Hey, hey, I don't want no part of this. Focus back on his body issues, please.

Larry gets back to work.

STAN

What's there to say...

(looks at a ring)

It's shit.

Chris gets up.

CHRIS

You never were no renaissance painting either. Best Larry was, was a scribble over a public bathroom glory hole.

Larry smirks, shakes his head. Chris stands next to Stan. Both have eyes on a ring.

CHRIS

Pipe burst in the back. Plumbers just left.

STAN

How much did they take us for?

CHRIS

Four hundred.

STAN

Boys pay up?

CHRIS

Yeah. Office called. Duke's doing the show tomorrow.

Stan turns to Chris.

STAN
Could have used his name on the poster.

CHRIS
Cost us tickets. Also, some kid's driving down. They want you to use your skills of perception and assess him. Impart wisdom on the poor colt and tell'em what you think.

Stan rests his bag, next to the bench.

STAN
You look him up?

CHRIS
Saw a bit of tape. Kid's good. Green, but there's potential for a different green.

Stan walks to his office several feet forward.

STAN
That your evaluation?

CHRIS
Yup.

STAN
Better keep it to yourself. Don't see anyone calling up asking for it.

Stan unlocks the office door - goes in.

CHRIS.
Hey, don't take it out on me. You'll go over next time. I didn't book it.

The door's slams shut.

IN THE RING - LATER

Stan's on the ring apron, leaning on the ropes, watching a match in progress. Two rookies lock up. Technique's sloppy and unconvincing.

STAN
(coaching)
Push... push... push.

The wrestlers move around locked in a war for position.

STAN
Don't give in, fight it. Tug, pull.

Push his chest with your forearm.
 (to everyone)
 The lock-up sets the tone of the
 match. Tenacity, resolve, power.
 (to the two in the ring)
 Move your feet. Don't stand still!
 Get him in the corner... GET HIM
IN THE FUCKIN' CORNER!

LATER

Two different wrestlers are in the ring. One receives a body slam. The other grabs him by the hair pulling him up. Stan slaps the turnbuckle - immediately freezing them in fear.

STAN
 Ain't I a fuckin' broken record?!
 Why did you pick him up for?!
 (no response)
 You got him down, why the fuck
 would you help him up?
 (they all stare blankly)
 I see any of you fuckers do that
 shit again, I'll crucify you under
 that sign out there. It's a
 regulated contest. You're supposed
 to try to win! Fuckin' do it!
 (beat)
PIN HIM!

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY/ STAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Stan sits behind his desk, tapping his pencil. Two YOUNG MEN (19) sit across.

STAN
 You two know how to eat right?
 Nutritional values, protein,
 sodium, crap like that?
 (they nod)
 You know, I ain't here to discourage
 people. I need money. But, few make
 it in this business. It's not
 ballet. You're gonna spend years
 getting your noses broken and bodies
 bruised for 20 bucks a pop in an
 empty bingo hall somewhere. It ain't
 glamorous work. Looking at you two,
 you don't exactly scream "life of
 the party". Probably stay at that
 level until you need new hips. Which
 you won't be able to afford. Have
 you considered selling insurance?

LATER

Stan does paperwork at his desk. Alone.

Door opens - Chris sticks his head in. Gloves on, he holds up a syringe between two fingers.

CHRIS
Trash, locker cage.

Stan sighs. He lifts an envelope.

STAN
Fuck's this?

CHRIS
What?

STAN
FedEx bill.

CHRIS
It was important.

Stan rises.

STAN
Keeping me fiscally stable and
happy... is too.

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY/ LOCKER CAGE - LATER

Stan unlocks a locker - Chris looks through an opened one behind it. Stan opens a new one - Chris looks through the previous. He extends his hand inside - removes a vial. Holds it up for Stan.

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY/ STAN'S OFFICE - LATER

JOHNNY (22) and Stan sit, desk between them.

JOHNNY
Aren't we in developmental? I'm
trying to develop a physique.

STAN
Shooting up at the workplace and
wit ain't helping your case.

JOHNNY
Look, I'm not getting any
definition. So, I got some help.
Your office is a sanctuary of
honesty, let's be frank.

We both know aesthetics go a long way. It don't matter I can wrestle guys out of their jockstraps, I need to look a certain way. I need a boost.

STAN

They'll test you If I send you up. Then it'll be my head on the guillotine and yours in the basket.

JOHNNY

Once there I'll just charm them with my personality.

STAN

If you had any confidence in that you wouldn't be sticking needles in your ass.

(beat)

Clean out your locker. Come back in a year, clean. If you still want to do this.

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY - LATER

Stan, stack of letters in hand struggles to lock his office door. Eventually does and sees Chris and Larry conversing further down.

LARRY

(waves him over)

Stan.

He joins them.

LARRY

Whatcha you think?

Larry points to TOJI (23) on a bench. Japanese, short and muscular. Along side him sits MAGNIFICO (27), an Antonio Banderas clone. They appear to be in the middle of a very animated conversation.

CHRIS

What do you think they're talking about?

STAN

Is it considered talking if they don't understand what the other is saying?

CHRIS
Comprehension's a requirement?
Something has to have gotten
through, they are at it every day.

LARRY
Maybe they're just incredibly
persistent.

Beat.

STAN
Women.

LARRY
You think?

STAN
Gotta be, women.

Stan departs, Chris follows suit just as... Toji makes a big breast
gesture to Magnifico. Who excitedly nods. Larry catches it.

LARRY
(excited)
Hey, hey, look!

No one does, they're too far away. Larry yelps in frustration.

CHRIS
(to Stan)
You coming to watch the PPV tonight?

Stan flicks through his letters to the back door. Chris goes around
closing all the windows.

STAN
Sure.

CHRIS
Be on time. Sonny's up first. He'll
expect us watching. You know he's
gonna call tomorrow.

STAN
Yeah. You drop off my laundry?

Stan locks the back door.

CHRIS
To my dismay. Should really pay me
more. There's nothing in my
contract about handling hazardous
material.

STAN
 If your wife can handle your
 breath out of love, you can handle
 my undies for a paycheck.

CHRIS
 I dunno, like me, she's been
 complaining. Don't forget, 7:40!

INT. SOUP KITCHEN/ HALLWAY - LATER

Stan puts on an apron in a long empty hallway. A hairnet follows.

INT. SOUP KITCHEN/ SERVING AREA - LATER

He stands behind a table servicing a long line. Forcefully polite and affable. Leaning over, filling their plates.

LATER

KERRY (43) mature, alluring, comes up to Stan scraping away a pot.

KERRY
 Watch out, don't overexert
 yourself. We don't want our best
 volunteer not being able to
 volunteer.

STAN
 I'm more worried about making this
 soup saltier than it needs to be.

KERRY
 I honestly don't think you can
 make it any worse.

STAN
 Don't say that. You cooked it.

KERRY
 That's how I know.

Kerry looks on at Stan washing the pot. A glimpse of affection.

KERRY
 I'm gonna throw out a disclaimer.
 (Stan stops working)
 I haven't done this before, but
 it's the 21st century and I've
 heard girls do it all the time.
 I'm no girl but I would imagine it
 applies for women of all ages.
 Wanna grab dinner with me sometime?

Beat.

STAN

A pause's an indicator of uncertainty, tongue's failed me and created one. I... dunno what to say.

KERRY

Yes, no. Pick one.

STAN

I ain't the social type. I --

KERRY

We don't have to go out. I could cook up something at my house. At least you'd know what you're getting yourself into. Think of some fake flattery at home, then put it to use in mine.

STAN

You think I'd put up a fake front?

KERRY

I think I'd like you either way.

STAN

You're too nice, Kerry. Got a good heart from what I can tell. This is coming from mine. You can do better. Trust me.

(beat)

Gonna go help Tim, avoid the awkwardness that's brewed. Sorry.

He leaves, avoiding eye contact, leaving Kerry rejected and confused.

LATER

Stan cleans another pot. He scrubs, wipes his brow and scrubs again.

EXT. SOUP KITCHEN/ ALLEY - LATER

Stan leans against the building, eyes to the sky, caressing his chin, touching his lower lip. His act interrupted by a HOMELESS MAN (51) exiting the premises.

HOMELESS MAN

Heeey, Champ. Taking in some air, huh? I feel you, sure as shit stinks in there.

(Stan looks at him)

Foods great though, don't get me wrong. Just, most of us sleep in cardboard beds. Hygiene ain't exactly a priority, feel me?

(beat)

Could you help a brother out?

STAN

With what?

HOMELESS MAN

Shower. Toothpaste. So I can smell nice and fresh, like you.

STAN

How's that gonna do you any good?

HOMELESS MAN

Hey, man, why would you say a thing like that? You don't know me. I'm gonna see my daughter this week. It does a world of good. You spare a few bucks it'll spare me some embarrassment.

STAN

You can't wash that off.

HOMELESS MAN

Ohhh, that's some cruel shit right there. I can't believe I was a fan.

Stan heads back inside.

STAN

I don't believe it either.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - DUSK

Stan walks the sidewalk of an urban neighborhood. A line of drab, plain buildings parallel each other. The wind picks up chasing off those few people about. Stan's jacket flails.

He stops before an electrical pole. On it - a flyer: "*HELP FIND SARAH. MISSING SINCE DECEMBER 3rd OF LAST YEAR*". A photo of a thirteen year old girl below. Sarah - cute, blonde, innocent, joyful.

Stan stares at her image - blinks and continues down the street.

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Casually dressed staff navigates around wooden furniture in the half-full establishment.

Sports memorabilia and flat screen TVs hang on walls. At the center table - Stan, Chris, JOHN (49) and BRIAN (51). TV glare bouncing off their attentive faces. All drinking beer except Stan.

ON THE TV

A wrestler shoots his foe into the ropes, waits for him to ricochet and executes a hip toss. The wrestler taking the move doesn't do so smoothly --

CHRIS (O.S.)

Jesus Christ!

IN THE BAR

BRIAN

That ring's tricky. The extra step fucks with your timing.

JOHN

It's just old fashion stage fright. Probably puked out his intestines before hitting the ring. I was so nervous when I debuted in Georgia, I took like twenty shits before I went out --

CHRIS

And you still were the shits.

They chuckle.

BRIAN

Kev called a month back. Said the agents were very complimentary of "our kid". Was a good reflection. Was broken in right, he said.

Another bad fall on the TV.

CHRIS

He's gonna get his neck broken if he doesn't watch it.

JOHN

You watch. He's gonna get punched once now, take a knee, do his bobblehead routine and rally back.

ON THE TV - as advertised, the described scenario plays out.

JOHN

He kept doing that spot here, no matter how many times I told him that shtick died in the 80s, along with hair metal and Lee Marvin.

BRIAN

Well, that's not a good reflection.

CHRIS

It's cancer to my eyes and poison to my soul. I would potato the fuck out of whoever tried to get cute with me like that.

JOHN

Not all of us had the benefit of being born a giant.

CHRIS

Or nearly as handsome. Look at that! Babyface punching and kicking.
(slaps the table)
Motherfucker!

BRIAN

It's baffling that your intensity hasn't wavered a hair through out the eons.

CHRIS

It's shit like that that'll kill the business and put both our kids in community college.

BRIAN

Mine has shit grades anyway.

JOHN

Conform. Things evolve, same rules don't apply like they did in our day --

ON THE TV - A wrestler pushes the ref aside.

STAN

Seems they don't apply at all.

BRIAN

Refs are furniture.

JOHN

People are deluding themselves with this cyclical BS. Shit's on life support, prognosis - grim.

CHRIS
 Hopefully we won't live long
 enough to see the plug get pulled.

BRIAN
 Speak for yourself. I'm looking to
 make it out of the decade.

JOHN
 With your blood pressure?
 (chugs his beer)
 They're diluting, diluted shit. Death
 by repetition.

STAN
 So much a man can do between four
 posts and some rope.

CHRIS
 Attention spans ain't what they
 use to be. We're out of our depth.

JOHN
 Liked ours better.

Stan rises from the table.

STAN
 To remain youthful, change.

CHRIS
 Why'd you got all erect for?

BRAIN
 Power move. He stands over us
 spewing nonsense.

JOHN
 (empties his bottle)
 This is finished. Anyone wanna bet
 on the finish? Honest Abe says
 Sonny's shoulders kiss canvas for
 the bell. Clean, other guy's finish.

Stan looks at the bar area.

BRIAN
 No way. They just brought him up.

STAN
 Brawl to the outside, double DQ.
 (they give him a look)
 Got a text.

They watch the TV. Stan throws money on the table, turns to go --

CHRIS

What, leaving? PPV just started!

The BARTENDER (61) signals Stan.

STAN

Well, I just left. Tell him I said
he did good.

BRIAN

(to Stan)

Don't forget to tip your hooker.
They live off your kindness and love.

JOHN

Careful she don't tip you crabs or
something.

STAN

Nahh, your mother's clean.

Stan goes to the bar. The guys look at the TV, where the wrestlers
leave the ring in a heated brawl. Go into the crowd, punching away.

The Bartender meets Stan at the bar with a bag of pre-packed food.

BARTENDER

There you go, Stan. Patty added a
few sweet baked potatoes.

STAN

Tell her, my stomach is an admirer
of her generosity. Don't let the
geriatrics get too carried away.

BRATENDER

Don't make promises I can't keep.

STAN

Smart man.

Stan pulls the front door open, gestures "bye" and...

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - CONTINUOUS

...steps out to the sidewalk.

He walks with his bag, steam dancing up from it. The wind gets brash
forcing him to pop his collar.

He ambles past an alleyway. Takes a few steps after it, when --

GIRL (O.S.)

AHHHHH!

Full stop. Alert, Stan listens, focused... hears nothing.

He takes a step, brushing it off as if it were imagined, when --

GIRL (O.S.)
Helppppp.

Full stop, again. He turns and walks back to the alley. Looks inside.

It's dark. He squints letting his eyes adjust. Slowly stepping inside, gauging the situation, making out what's what.

ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Three silhouettes become visible. One holds another down, while a third stands near.

As Stan approaches the shapes become clear. A man (THUG #1) presses down on a woman's head. Her cheek flat on the concrete, restrained.

Another man (THUG #2) is standing over them, seemingly entertained by the ordeal. He picks up on Stan moving closer, turns and is startled by his presence... quickly settling down.

THUG #2
The fuck are you?

STAN
What's going on here?

Thug #1 puts his hand over the girl's mouth.

THUG #1
(to Stan)
Mind your business, gramps. Scram.

Thug #2 flashes a switchblade knife.

THUG #2
Curiosity killed the cat. Don't
let it get you too.

Stan looks at the girl. Young, barely twenty, held down with tearful, scared eyes. Crying but unable to cry out.

Thug #2 takes a step toward Stan.

THUG #2
Nothing there?
(no response)
Old people.

He confidently marches up to Stan. Who doesn't flinch, not an ounce of fear. As Thug #2 reaches his target he receives the prize of being hit over the head with Stan's bag of hot food. He yowls.

Thug #1 releases the girl, stands, rushes in and swings at Stan... who ducks and retaliates with a headbutt - laying his attacker out.

Beat. Stan stares at the petrified girl, lost in thought, when --

A knife enters his shoulder from behind. He takes a knee, reaches back and grabs the hand holding it. Extends his other one behind his back in search of the Thug's face.

His fingers find it, they go around his skull for a good grip. After it's established, his thumb digs into his eye, gouging it out.

Thug #2 SCREAMS, and SCREAMS. Stan releases his grip and Thug #2 passes out in a puddle. Stan removes the knife from his shoulder and chucks it. He stands up, when...

Thug #1 hits him from behind - Stan falls face-first, instantly rolling over on his back. Thug #1 picks up the knife.

While down Stan kicks Thug #1's knee, hard. He drops next to Stan, slashing his stomach across. A large flesh wound, not deep.

He tries again, but Stan grabs his arm, squeezes, squeezes harder. The knife drops. Stan breaks his wrist and mounts him.

Thug #1 yells out in pain with Stan sitting on his chest, blood dripping from Stan's stomach onto Thug #1's face.

Stan shuts him up with a punch - KO's him, clean.

He stands, shirt now crimson. Eyes to the frighten, traumatised girl. He towers over her, looking down. A savoir.

A spark appears in the girl's eye.

STAN

It's... okay.

Stan swoops her in his arms. She lets him. He carries her out of the alley. His blood stains her clothing.

DOWNTOWN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Stan exits, girl cradled in his arms. She looks into his faint eyes, they're dimming, looking back.

STAN

You're safe.

They both look ahead. Stan's strength begins to fade. Every step's more labored than the previous.

His vision gets blurry, tries to maintain balance, although begins to sway. A bright light ahead keeps him focused. It grows stronger. Intensifies.

Everything is silent.

He drops to both knees. Tries to look at the girl in his arms. She's nothing more than an outline. His look moves up - a dot, it grows bigger - a shape of a man, with wings, descends.

Stan smiles, comforted... DARKNESS.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

An eyelid moves up. Stops at half-open, enough to see medical equipment around a simple bed. IV attached to an arm, Stan's arm.

His eyelid flutters, he strains and blacks out again.

LATER

Stan's eyes open. Almost full now. Groggy, he scans his surroundings. A plain hospital room. Bad lighting and green tiling.

Few feet away, a POLICE OFFICER (31) talks to a NURSE (40).

They see him awake.

NURSE

He's waking up.

(walks over)

Don't try to talk.

(he tries to stand)

No, no, no, don't get up. It's alright.

POLICE OFFICER

Rest easy, Mr. Malone. They've got you covered.

Monitors beep. Pulse rises. Stan frowns.

NURSE

No, no, calm down. It's okay, you're in the hospital. You're safe. You're fine.

(looks him in the eye)

Look at me. If you don't calm down I'll have to give you a shot.

There's no reason not to be calm, everything's good... it's good.

(he relaxes)

See? Everything's okay... o-kay.

Beat. Stan's breathing and heart-rate come under control.

STAN

What --

NURSE

Sshhh. Quiet. Please, quiet, still.

(to the Officer)

I'll get the doctor. You stay with him.

She leaves. The Officer stands next to the bed, fidgety.

POLICE OFFICER

They don't want you straining yourself. So, talking might not be wise. Just nod or blink or something.

(Stan reluctantly nods)

I dunno if you should drink water but if you'd like, I'll go ask if I can get you some?

STAN

What... happened?

POLICE OFFICER

You lost a lot of blood. That fella got you good. They patched you up, though. It's a very brave thing you did.

DOCTOR ALVAREZ (48) walks in. Distinguished, calculated. The Nurse by his side.

DR.ALVAREZ

(to the Officer)

He speaks?

POLICE OFFICER

Was, just now.

DR.ALVAREZ

How are you feeling, Mr.Malone?

STAN

How long was I out?

DR.ALVAREZ

Three - four hours. You lost a lot of blood, went into hypovolemic shock. But, they got you here on time, at the blood station and we filled you back up.

STAN

The girl?

POLICE OFFICER
 She's here, they've got her in
 another room. Don't worry, she's
 fine. Few scratches, that's all.

DR.ALVAREZ
 Should consider yourself lucky,
 nothing vital was hit. You're
 surprisingly durable for someone
 your age. Carried her over 200
 feet before you blacked out. Quite
 the feat.

POLICE OFFICER
 Woman spotted you from her
 apartment window. Called it in.

Stan nods. Looks at the IV lines going into his arm.

STAN
 I'm... good?

DR.ALVAREZ
 Sans two new scars, but, other
 than that should be okay.

He nods again.

STAN
 I, I'm... gonna go. Home.

Stan pulls the sheets off --

DR.ALVAREZ
 Wohhh! No. In a couple a days,
 perhaps. Now, I need you to rest up.
 (Stan stops)
 It's quite the ordeal you went
 through. In a week I'll remove
 those stitches and bar any
 physical activity you should be as
 good as new. But, your place is
 here now.

STAN
 I... don't agree.

Stan rips the IV from his arm, removes the sensors of his chest.

DR.ALVAREZ
 Mr. Malone!

He sits on the bed, holding his vein.

STAN

Yeah.

DR.ALVAREZ

I'm sorry. We can't allow you to leave.

STAN

(stands)

No one asked you to allow anything.

DR.ALVAREZ

It's not advisable. Please.

STAN

I'm responsible for me. Don't see anyone stopping me.

DR.ALVAREZ

Officer?

Stan turns to the Police Officer.

STAN

Officer?

The Police Officer dumbfounded, shrugs. Stan trudges to the door, hospital gown on.

INT. WALMART/ MEAT SECTION - MIDNIGHT

Stan, hospital gown still on pushes a cart between shelves. Stops.

A security guard watches him from far away.

CLOTHES SECTION - LATER

Stan grabs a pair of jeans of a hanger, checks the size and puts them on.

CHECKOUT COUNTER - LATER

Dressed in Walmart clothes Stan faces a freckled female CASHIER (19). Who stares at him from the register, bewildered.

CASHIER

I'm gonna have to ask my boss.

(into the mic)

Mr. Lansdale, please come to register seven.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE - LATER

Stan walks to his home through his unkempt lawn, a bag of groceries dangles of his finger.

On the porch next door sits HENRY (66). Frail, pale and scrawny. Nasal prongs lead to an oxygen tank by his side.

HENRY
Partying it up?

STAN
At the place you most frequent.

HENRY
Rick's strip joint?

STAN
St. Helena's.
(stops)
What are you doing out?

HENRY
I wasn't feeling good in. You?

STAN
I'm not feeling good out, so I'm going in.

HENRY
Contrarian!

STAN
(climbs his porch)
I'll tell you about it in the morning.

HENRY
There's a reason to get up tomorrow.

Stan unlocks his door and disappears inside.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ KITCHEN - LATER

A blade chops up vegetables with vicious and unmatched precision. Oil pours on lettuce. A salad is expertly seasoned.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE/ FRONT YARD - LATER

Stan takes out the trash, dumping it in a bin on the street.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ HALLWAY - LATER

He goes down the basement steps, carrying a plastic bag.

LATER

He comes up the basement steps, stick and plywood in hand.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

On the floor Stan constructs a sign. Nailing the stick of wood to the 3 x 3 feet plywood board. Dips a worn brush in a can of paint.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE/ FRONT YARD - LATER

Front door's pushed open. Stan exits like a bat out of hell, homemade sign gripped tight. A second later it's spiked in the tall grass of his lawn. Reads: "*PRIVATE PROPERTY - I OWN FOUR GUNS!*".

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ BATHROOM - LATER

Stan shirtless, removes the patch covering his shoulder wound. Studies the stitches. Places his fingers over them measuring the distance to his heart. Done. Covers it back up.

Touches his stomach - the slash. Bumps palpable over the gauze wrapped around his torso.

BEDROOM - LATER

Stan paces in the middle, nervous.

STAN

(to himself)

Six, six, six, six, six... six.

(stops)

Couldn't lead his hand down a bit?

That, that, me bleeding into a gutter, middle of an empty street isn't enough for you? Dying, dead, pool of my own blood, out for everyone to see. Crimson, public. It, it was perfect. I played my part.

(falls to his knees)

Did you fear I'd come out a martyr? Couldn't spare me a shred of decency? Thought only cowards couldn't forgive?

(crying)

What do you want? It was perfect, it'll never be... better.

He lies on the floor, sobbing, trying to get his composure --

DANG! A sound comes in from outside. Stan jumps up and goes to a window. Wiping the tears away he looks out...

Todd's in his driveway, experiencing car trouble. The hood of his car is lifted, half his body underneath it. He pulls out and slams it down. Enters and ignites the engine.

He drives off.

Stan thinks, decides and leaves the room.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD/ STREET - CONTINUOUS

Stan's look sweeps the neighbourhood from one end of the street to the other. Every home passes a visual inspection, all lights off.

He focuses in on Todd's. A crowbar hangs of his hand, by his leg.

He saunter down the street, casually, no haste. Crowbar pressed up against his body. Eyes to one periphery, then the other. Nonchalantly he makes his way up Todd's steps.

TODD'S PORCH

He kneels before the front door, using the crowbar to force the door open. It pops on the first try. Surprised, he enters.

INT. TODD'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stan stands in the doorway. It's dark, all lights are off. He calmly navigates through the dully decorated abode.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Stan enters - empty.

DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stan enters - desolate.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stan walks forward - pushing doors open with his crowbar, throwing looks inside.

He pushes down on a door handle using the crowbar and nudges the door...

BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

...to slowly enter. As he does... A POODLE jumps out - Stan, startled instinctively kicks the dog. It barks and lunges at him again.

Stan gives it a second kick. Steps out of the room...

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...and closes the door. The dog BARKS behind it.

Panicked, Stan brainstorms. Dog BARKS. He bites down on his lip, reopens the door and clubs the dog dead. Exhales, stares at the bloody mess.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ KITCHEN - MORNING

White shirt, black pants. Stan scrambles eggs in a bowl. Fries them in a pan, adds salt.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE/ FRONT YARD - LATER

Stan walks down from his porch, plastic container in hand. He heads over to Henry's house. A squad car's parked across the street. Doesn't escape him.

Henry sits calm on his porch. Sees Stan approaching.

HENRY

Hurry up. I woke early for this.

STAN

My pace is not dependent on your impatience.

HENRY'S PORCH - CONTINUOUS

HENRY

That sounded almost literary. You read that in a book? I got a quote of my own. Beware of a man carrying gifts.

Stan climbs the porch.

STAN

So I should take this next door?

HENRY

I said beware, not reject.
(takes the container)
I've got my eye on you.

Stan takes a seat next to Henry. Looks at the police across.

STAN

What's with the bacon and ham?

HENRY

(opens the container)
Damn, I feel healthier just by
looking at it.
(looks at the salad inside)
It's sarcasm in a box. This here
green delight. Sliced, diced,
garnished to perfection. I look at
it most morning...
(points to Stan's lawn)
Then at that. How can the same
person be responsible for both?

STAN

It's all natural.

HENRY

And against neighborhood code.

STAN

You're the only one that's bitched.

HENRY

Would you bitch to you?
(starts eating)
There ain't an abundance of slop
over there. House was broken into,
three, yesterday. Cops made their
rounds, yours was on the way but I
persuaded them out of it. Even
explained that sign is all in good
fun. Had me puzzled with that...
til I caught the news.
(serious)
Heroic stunt you pulled.

STAN

How much airtime was it worth?

HENRY

Whole segment. Surprised there weren't any newsmen knee-deep in your jungle, mic half-down your throat. Not that you'd allow an interview.

STAN

This is a privilege. They say what happened to those boys?

Henry stops eating. Closes the container. Wipes his mouth.

HENRY

One is a cyclops, the other's dicklicker is on vacation. They'll live, in shame, mangled by a fake old man. Who, I've got to say, seems pretty mobile for someone that's been stabbed twice.

STAN

Yeah.

(beat)

About... the compromised residence. Notice anything noteworthy about your new neighbor?

HENRY

Besides the 50s haircut?

(Stan nods)

Home at about eight, lights go off after ten. Surface-wise, boring and plain. Why the interest?

STAN

I dunno --

HENRY

Oh, interest in an answer predates any question. Its *raison d'être*.

STAN

And you're calling me out on my literary prowess?

HENRY

Did say prowess.

STAN

Seems off for some reason. How 'bout you? How you feeling?

HENRY

I'm on a slide. Better ain't a possibility. A matter of time. Always is, just mine's soon.
(looks down the street)
There's David.

A beat-up pickup drives down. Parks in Henry's driveway. DAVID (27) steps out. Tall and muscular, farm boy looks.

DAVID

Morning, gentlemen.

David unloads a mower from the back of his worn truck.

HENRY

Morning, young man. You ready to bring my yard near perfection?

DAVID

Perfection's a state of mind. All I know is that I'm gonna do my best, Mr. Spencer.

HENRY

That's the mind-set. Ever consider taking up the challenge to your right?

DAVID

It's frightening, but in life one has to risk to achieve greatness.

HENRY

(to Stan)

Boy's sharper than those blades he's working with.

(to David)

Hop over here and have a beer. An engine needs to be oiled before it runs.

DAVID

Won't argue with my elders, even if it's a bit early.

David jumps up on the porch and gets handed a beer. Henry opens one for himself.

STAN

Thirst knows nothing of time.

Henry and David cling bottles and get to drinking.

HENRY
How many yards do you do around
here David?

DAVID
Twelve I reckon.

HENRY
(points to Todd's house)
How about that one?

DAVID
Yeah. Mr. Samuel, I think. Todd.

HENRY
What can you tell us about the man?

DAVID
I look like a snitch, Mr. Spencer?
Why the interest?

HENRY
First, you look very striking.
Second, let's say the two of us
have a certain suspicion and we're
polling character witnesses?

DAVID
That why the police's over there?

HENRY
The two are not connect.

DAVID
(lifts up the bottle)
Do owe you. Not much to tell.
Pays on time, keeps to himself.
Smiles.

A news van comes down the street.

HENRY
Whoop... cavalry.
(to Stan)
Go out the back. We'll entertain.

STAN
(to David)
Don't let him overwork you.

Stan taps Henry on the back and goes into the house.

HENRY
 (to David)
 Put the beverage down, time to earn
 your pay. Ignore all distractions.

DAVID
 You the man, mister S.

David hops down on the lawn. Starts the mower.

The van parks. A female NEWS REPORTER (32) and CAMERAMAN (43) jump out. They rush to Stan's door. Knock - no answer.

David mows Henry's yard, loudly, intentionally playing with the throttle.

The Reporter comes into Henry's yard.

NEWS REPORTER
 (over the noise)
 You're his neighbor, right?

Henry plays deaf.

NEWS REPORTER
 (to David)
 Could you please stop for a second.

David pays her no attention.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - LATER

Stan walks past lamp posts. A bright blue sky weighs down over his head. Sun's shining. People stroll, traffic, commotion.

He goes by a store window, catching a glimpse of his reflection - stops for a better look. Studies his weary face, sour look. A sadness about him.

EXT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY/ PARKING LOT - LATER

Stan walks to his school. A vintage black Ford Mustang is parked near the entrance. He eyeballs it, and...

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY - DAY

...enters. Full house. Everyone ceases all activity when they register his presence. He's frozen stiff by the attention. All eyes on him. A slow clap begins, picking up momentum.

Stan grows uncomfortable. The adulation increases. He cuts it off with a throat-slash gesture. They take note. Begin to die down.

STAN

Yeah, yeah, cut the shit.

Silence. Tension. Toji leans on the ring ropes from inside one.

TOJI

(broken English)

Stan - da... Man. Number... one.

LARRY

Man's right, numero uno. Boys are even more scared of you now.

WRESTLER #1

Yeah, now we know you can actually still deliver on all those threats.

WRESTLER #2

Not that we didn't before.

WRESTLER #3

Just more compelling now.

They chuckle.

STAN

Okay, you did your little thing, got your jokes in, now, get busy. I want, I need to hear that plywood creak before I step into that office over there.

WRESTLER #1

Don't be your masochistic-self. You deserve a pop.

MAGNIFICO

(broken English)

You, Magnifico! Not me.

WRESTLER #4

You're an inspiration, damn it! The reason for our smiles.

Wrestler #4 smiles, ear to ear. The clap begins again. It builds.

STAN

Instead of marking out for me why don't you learn how to make people do it for you and make some money while you're at it?

They stop.

WRESTLER #3

That's why we're here, but your stingy ass is holding out on all the secrets.

STAN

I'll share my fist with your face if you don't get back to work.

Chris walks up from the locker cage.

CHRIS

Work's a verb they've barely used. In conversation and in life.

WRESTLER #2

Hey, I bust my ass.

CHRIS

You look like you don't know a guy named Jim, let alone go to one.

WRESTLER #2

Sexual encounters are my workout.

The wrestlers laugh.

CHRIS

And a strain on your finances.

They laugh even harder.

STAN

You're not here to drill jokes, you're here to be less pathetic than yesterday. And you Toji, you coy little sum-a-bitch. You might be kayfabling these idiots, but I've seen your routine before, you cross-eyed fuck! I'm gonna get your chink ass.

Toji smiles, does a cartwheel in the ring. Stan walks away to his office, Chris and Larry by his side.

CHRIS

Bask in the moment. This is the babyface run you never had. Soak it in.

LARRY

We heard you fucked up those boys good. Guess they had it coming by what they said.

CHRIS
 Few journalists called, one even
 dropped by. Said he'd be back in a
 few --

STAN
 Tell him to fuck off.

CHRIS
 I did. I'll have to tell him
 again. That kid drove up.
 (Stan stops)
 He's inside.

STAN
 What's his name?

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY/ STAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Stan enters. WADE CARTER (26) sits at his desk. Blue eyes, strong
 jaw, puts movie stars to shame. He stands.

WADE
 Sir, Wade Carter. It's an honor.

STAN
 Is it?

They shake hands. Stan doesn't release his grip.

WADE
 For me, yes, it is.

STAN
 You implying you're the only one?

WADE
 For whom it's an honor?

STAN
 You have trouble following context?

WADE
 Sir, it's been a long drive, could
 you fuck with me a little later?

Stan nods and lets go.

STAN
 How long have you been waiting?

Stan sits.

WADE
About, over an hour.

STAN
Patient man.

WADE
They say it's a virtue of the
successful.

STAN
Sounds true enough. That your
Mustang out there?

WADE
Yes, sir.

STAN
I couldn't tell what to fault for
the short-term myopia, the sun or
it bouncing off your hood?
(Wade smiles)
How much you put in her?

WADE
Too ashamed to share. Let's just
say I'm almost as dedicated to her
as I am to this business.

STAN
Should go a long way then. Know
why you're here?

WADE
I've heard stories.

STAN
What kind and who from?

WADE
Afraid I can't divulge that.
Little birdies do say guys like me
come here and you tell the office
if I'm ready to go up there.

STAN
And?

WADE
Out of risk of sounding insecure,
too modest, overly confident or
borderline cocky, I'll just reply,
yes.

STAN
Sometimes it's not what you say
but how you say, what you say.

WADE
(super affirmative)
Yesss.

STAN
Who trains smart Alec's like you?

WADE
Elegant Charlie Easton, down in Tampa.

STAN
I knew Charlie. He was a good
hand. Didn't amount to much but
I'm sure he made a fine teacher.

WADE
He got me in this chair with you on
the other side, awaiting judgement.

STAN
That he did. We'll hold the applause
since he isn't here to hear it.

(short beat)
I don't follow indie bullshit.
Mostly because the majority of
people there are just that. Two
minutes ago you were a fictitious
entity. Never seen a match, never
heard a promo. You might set the
world on fire, tomorrow or two years
down the line. I've got to make a
call tomorrow. It ain't ideal but
I'll do as told. We're doing a show
tonight, you wanna work?

WADE
I'll repeat the previous answer
with added enthusiasm. Yes.

Stan stands.

STAN
How about buying me lunch?

WADE
Word of the day.
(stands up)
And I ain't even hungry.

Stan goes to the door.

STAN
 Good man. There's some flattery to
 feed your ego.
 (holds the door open)
 Those things are always hungry.

INT. MUSTANG - LATER

Stan and Wade sit in the parked vehicle in a restaurant lot. Stan extends a twenty dollar bill over to Wade.

STAN
 Two green spring salads and a
 classic juice shake.

WADE
 I got it.

STAN
 You're in my town. Take my money
 and shut up.
 (Wade snatches the bill)
 And hurry up... I get lonely.

Wade smiles, nods.

EXT. RESTAURANT/ PARKING LOT - LATER

A happy family goes to their car. Stan looks on from a distance, mesmerized by the joy and bond between them. They laugh and get in.

Wade walks up behind him, with lunch.

WADE
 They didn't have the classic. I
 got you a wild forest one. Hope
 you don't turn berry blue on me.

STAN
 (takes his order)
 I'll live.

He rests the salads on the hood of Wade's Mustang.

STAN
 I'm gonna spread out my food on
 your hood. Feel free to verbally
 spread your discontent.

Wade waves it off, chomps on his burger. Stan mashes up his salad. They face nature, woods, beyond the asphalt under their feet. Both stare ahead at it while they eat.

STAN

I had a piece a shit Mustang my first two years in.

(taps the hood)

Best thing I ever used that rust bucket for was heating stale food on its engine. Ever been out here?

WADE

Not this far south.

STAN

How long you've been at it?

WADE

Year six is up in December.

Stan points to Wade's knee, it sticks out of his shorts. A large scar.

STAN

Football career didn't pan out?

WADE

Went down the toilet first year in. You played?

STAN

High school. Didn't get far. Wasn't what you'd call athletically gifted.

WADE

I was what they called "a highly touted prospect". One USA Today journalist said I was an NFL lock. First year in I slipped during practice, and... a pre-planned future was foiled by a plant a third of an inch tall about the same shade as the one in your mouth. Some said freak accident, I blamed the weather.

STAN

Sad life tales ain't gonna buy you sympathy. We all got 'em. How 'bout family? Girlfriend, wife?

(Wade shakes his head)

Get one. Grow some roots. Life on the road ain't what it used to be, but you need something to come back to.

WADE

Thanks. Encouraged by the advice. It suggests readiness to render a positive review.

STAN

Don't get too excited. Tradition obligates me to dish out wisdom to those with a deficit.

WADE

You always talk like this?

STAN

Professional deformation.

WADE

More so the tone. It's very assertive. Undermining.

STAN

Helps weed out those with a lack of desire and those with it, to prove me wrong. Itch to stick it to someone is a powerful tool. Especially an older know-it-all. Youth usually doesn't listen. When, some things you got to live to learn. Youth's an excuse for ignorance, which leads to arrogance, which blinds. In time, everyone comes around. Hopefully not to late.

WADE

Okaaay. Thanks for grouping me into the stupidity of my generation, and the impromptu speech.

STAN

You're welcome. I'm gonna need you to drop me off at the hospital after lunch's concluded. That a problem?

WADE

Not if you show me the way.

STAN

I will. But Main Street Armory tonight is a solo adventure.

Wade nods. They eat.

INT. HOSPITAL/ RECEPTION AREA - LATER

Stan approaches the reception desk. NURSE #2 (55) is on staff there.

STAN
You have my clothes.

NURSE #2
Excuse me?

STAN
Excused. My clothes, apparel. It's here.

NURSE #2
(bit snarky)
Since when?

STAN
Yesterday.

NURSE #2
How did they get here?

STAN
Someone stripped me. For all I know it was you? Did you get a good look? Were you satisfied?

She makes a face.

INT. HOSPITAL/ OFFICE - LATER

A sterile room, scarcely decorated, enclosed by white walls.

Stan sits at a desk, white cardboard box in his lap. Dr. Alvarez chucks a wallet in front of him and takes a seat.

DR.ALVAREZ
Held onto it, so we'd have this conversation.

STAN
Ain't that unethical? Holding my wallet hostage?

DR.ALVAREZ
It'd be more irresponsible if I let you slip by without us talking.

STAN
I guess it's super important then.

DR.ALVAREZ

I've met you twice now, Mr. Malone. Both times briefly, but your dry sense of humor hasn't escaped me. You're satirical and seemingly very stubborn. A colleague of mine in the psychology department of this hospital might say those are characteristics of an insecure man, and are defensive mechanisms --

STAN

To my face?

DR.ALVAREZ

Probably, since that's his job.

STAN

Is it yours to meddle in his?

DR.ALVAREZ

No, but as limitedly versed as I am in his I can still tell when someone is trying to steer the conversation. He'd say maybe that's a ploy of someone who's paranoid about others getting a deeper insight.

STAN

He's very observant.

DR.ALVAREZ

Like I said, it's his job to notice these things. What I noticed were your scars. I assume some of them were acquired in your line of work, but others... there are different reasons and forms of self-harm. I don't think I'm going out on a limb when I say you're not the attention seeking kind.

(beat)

Depression is a serious thing --

STAN

I ain't depressed.

DR.ALVAREZ

Denial is a stage --

STAN

I'm sure it is, but I can't deny something that doesn't exist.

DR.ALVAREZ

I don't know what the problem is --

STAN

I'm uncomfortable.

DR.ALVAREZ

And confrontational. What about?
In life? With what in particular?

STAN

In life, particularly with this
conversation.

DR.ALVAREZ

I'm not a professional when it
comes to these matters --

STAN

Why did you start talking then?

DR.ALVAREZ

I wanted to tell you that it's my
opinion that you need talk to
someone that is. I understand that
suppressing pain might be second
nature, gutting through's a daily
grind, but sometimes --

STAN

Reason is a wonderful thing. But
just because one thing usually
leads to another, doesn't mean it
pans out the same way every time.
All you're doing is assuming about
shit you know nothing about. Even
if you did know me, you wouldn't
like me enough to offer up advice.

DR.ALVAREZ

Now you're the one that's assuming.

STAN

Trust me. I don't like me.

(beat)

I'd suggest you tune up your
judgement. Who you focus your
efforts on. So they don't go in
vain, for your sake.

Stan stands.

DR. ALVAREZ

(extends a pamphlet)

At least take this pamphlet. You don't have to read it. Just keep it around, a reminder that there's help, if... you decide. It's there.

Stan grabs it and walks out.

Door open - Alvarez sees Stan squash it and throw in the hallway bin.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET #2 - LATER

Stan stands at an intersection, box to his chest. A group of people on the other side. Light turns green - people move - Stan doesn't.

He stares at a group of children with backpacks crossing. Observing their innocence as they make their way to him... eventually passing him by. He smiles, looks up at the light - red again.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA (MAIN STREET ARMORY)/ ENTRANCE AREA - LATER

People fussing around, getting ready, palpable pressure.

Stan comes in, transfixed, gaze aimlessly wandering. Larry walks up, folding chairs under his armpits.

Stan sees him, eyes immediately turn razor sharp, inspector mode.

LARRY

You're late.

STAN

I decide what I am.

LARRY

At least the attitude's a constant.

STAN

(points)

What's the merch table doing there?

LARRY

I can't put it where you said. It semi-blocks the exit. It's against the fire code.

STAN

Christ, how long have you been doing this? You wanna put it there?

LARRY

I don't wanna. We're already packing too many people in. If a Fire marshal drops by he'll turn Shakespeare and write us up a stack. Now you're giving me grief and Chris has me scattering for chairs on the count of your recent rise to stardom.

STAN

Good. We'll have something to pay the fine with. That and the merchandise we're going to sell... over there.

Stan goes to walk away.

LARRY

Chris said at least two news trucks are coming. They called to ask about parking reservations. Can you believe that?

Stan's too far away to respond.

LARRY

(to himself)

Guess you can. Prick.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Stan peers on at the improvised arena. The crew's setting up the ring. Others set chairs, adjust lighting, position cameras. A contingent of wrestlers sit in a stand. Relaxed, conversing.

Stan focuses on the black drapes that fall from the ceiling, covering every wall, except one part of one. An eyesore of nonconformity.

TINA (24), lovable and bubbly steps up to Stan. Appearing nervous, wearing spandex that looks to be on fire. An inferno painted on it.

TINA

Getting a little antsy, coach.

STAN

Family coming?

TINA

Whole batch. Even the new boyfriend's driving down. Thirty miles, actually.

STAN
That's dedication. Guess the
ticker will be dancing up a storm
in two venues tonight.

Tina shyly grins.

STAN
(points to her tights)
Like the flames.
(she happily smiles)
Let's go beautify the pack, things
are looking dire.

Tina and Stan climb to the wrestler-filled stand together.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ STAND - LATER

Several rows of scattered wrestlers. The whole roster.

Chris and Stan chatter to the side, away from the rest. Which watch
as Chris explains something to Stan, who gives a final nod and they
both go to join the group.

Stan takes a seat a row behind Chris, who holds court, pad in hand.
He looks up at the roster, who eagerly look back.

CHRIS
Alright girls and...
(points to the actual girls)
Ladies. We have our ducks in a
row? We ready to let it go and put
on a show?

ROSTER
(lackadaisical)
Yeaaaahhh.

Chris turns to Stan than back at the roster.

CHRIS
Seen more enthusiasm at a funeral.
Seeing as most of your careers are
dead on arrival, atmosphere's fitting.

ROSTER
Booooooo.

CHRIS
Beautiful. Tonight's festivities
will consist of an eight match card
brought to you by the man to my
left.

Your life coach and the man responsible for molding you into something more than the curtain jerkers that you are. We have a treat tonight. His lordship, Ben "The Duke" English will be arriving shortly and will be working as a special and surprise attraction. Which means, one is the odd man out. Not the Duke's fault, so no heat on him. Sadly, for you, that'll be you Perry. Again. You're working backstage. Good news is you still get paid like everyone else.

WRESTLER #3

He gets paid for not bumping?!

CHRIS

And he didn't have to orally pleasure anyone to be in that spot. Call it fate, call it coincidence, call it later, cause I have the floor.

(Wrestler #3 scowls)

I'll run down the card, then you're free to go stretch, rub oil on each other or the hell it is that you people do to psych yourself's up. Erick, Kyle and Victor, you hold tight. We need one-on-ones. Okay! First match up, Gregg and Rick. Six minutes.

STAN'S FACE - attentive, vigilant. Studying his students.

CHRIS (O.S.)

Gregg's going over. Finish's up to you. Wow us. Oscar and Owen are up second. Twelve. Milk it at the start, brawl in the crowd for a few...

LATER

The stand is empty. Everyone's gone except... Chris and Stan, who talk to VICTOR (29). Both standing a row down from where he sits. He nods, nods, stands and walks away.

It's KYLE's (24) turn. Suave, athletic. He takes Victor's seat.

CHRIS

Hey, Kyle. We're not gonna drag this out. We got some bad news.

KYLE

How bad?

CHRIS

That's a matter of subjectivity. But, blood tests came back. You tested positive for Hep-B.

KYLE

I have hepatitis?!

CHRIS

That's what the piece of paper in my office says. I, we, as in both of us, would advice you to go take another test, just so you're a 100%. But as of right now we can't use you. Actually, we're gonna have to let you go.

STAN

You're a hard worker, Kyle, and you're a good one. Shit happens.

KYLE

(tense)

How did I get it? We don't blade, nobody juiced in a match with me?

CHRIS

Might have nothing to do with work.

KYLE

Do Victor and Erick have it?

STAN

They're a smoke screen. We're working the boys, sending them home for two weeks then bringing them back.

CHRIS

I know guys that have had it. You can beat it in under a year. Most people don't even know it's in their system. Get medication if you need to, six to eight months get tested. If you're clean, send us the results and we'll talk.

STAN

You can watch the show. We'll send the three of you home.

Tell anyone that asks that you had a family issue, that's why you're not coming back. Who you choose to tell and what, that's your business.

KYLE

Can I have a copy of the test?

CHRIS

Already have one in my drawer.

KYLE

So, that's it? Can I go?

(Stan nods)

Will you guys shake my hand?

CHRIS

Sure.

They shake hands. Kyle heart-broken.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE AREA - LATER

Stan exits from the ramp area. PERRY (26), stocky, pale, runs up.

PERRY

Boss, a word?

(Stan stops)

You guys phasing me out? Haven't had a match in three shows.

STAN

Noticed? Was beginning to think you're a little slow.

PERRY

Any reason why?

STAN

Several, but at 58 I have to use my time sensibly. Desire and work ethic will only get you so far, that much should be obvious by now.

PERRY

You kill me.

STAN

Sugarcoating wasn't gonna help.

(Perry looks crushed)

If you love this shit, there are other things you can do. Truck, help write the show, edit. Heck, you might even make a fine ref.

PERRY

I don't wanna ref.

STAN

Well, good for you, but reality doesn't compromise with people's desires. You'd still be part of the show. If you're decent I'll try to get you a job up at the main show.

PERRY

You'd do that?

STAN

I can give you that much. You work two matches tonight. Suit up.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - LATER

Larry fiddles with a fuse box. Stan comes up behind him.

STAN

You take care of Earl?

LARRY

Earl?

STAN

The custodian! Fuck's wrong with you today. Find him, invite him to eat our food, invite his family to come down and eat it too. Lease is coming up. Pamper the motherfucker, needs to put a word in with the owner.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA - LATER

Stan stands with an EMPLOY (32), next to the ring.

STAN

What's not like the other?

Stan points to the missing black drape in the corner of the arena.

EMPLOY

We ran out of black. Only had white and yellow at the store. Didn't wanna get another color cause you specified.

STAN

Why did we run out?

EMPLOY

A few were ripped. I, I messed up.

STAN

How's Jimmy supposed to bounce lights off that corner. You know how that will look on tape?

EMPLOY

I fucked up. Should I make calls?

STAN

Why is that even a question?!

LATER

Stan with two fans. Arms around their shoulders, slight hint of a smirk. - SNAP! Camera flashes - he flinches and squints.

FAN #1

Thanks, Mangler.

A middle-aged woman gestures for a photo. Stan waves her over.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ HALLWAY - LATER

Stan walks down. The DUKE's talking to Chris, drinking from a thermos. DUKE's (38) muscular, battle scars on his forehead, looking shopworn.

STAN

Ben. How the hell are you?

They shake hands.

DUKE

Wheels are still on, rolling along. Can't say the same 'bout the car. Damn tire blew. That's why I'm late. And it wasn't a rental. I'm in the hole doing this show. Better feel appreciated.

CHRIS

We got you your own wardrobe. Not the best thing for morale, but, you've earned it.

DUKE

How are you, Stan?

STAN

I wanna complain, but since you wanna be pampered, I'll cut you some slack.

CHRIS
I get the blunt end of that.

DUKE
You look like you do.
(to Stan)
Boys say "Hi".

STAN
Hmm. How's the shoulder?

DUKE
Good, rehabbed it. They've been holding me off TV, working house shows. Easing me in. Then, Wednesday I get a call, I'm supposed to come down and work for you. First I thought you asked, now Chris tells me that ain't so.

STAN
Glad to have you either way.

CHRIS
I was telling Duke, we put him in with Ian.

STAN
British kid. Less personality than a dead horse but handles himself in the ring. Should be an easy night.

DUKE
Telling you up front, not bumping more than three times on a show like this. No offence.

CHRIS
Three's generous.

STAN
I've got to go, feel free to talk about me behind my back.

CHRIS
Don't need permission, been doing it for years.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ PROMO AREA - LATER

AJ (27) stands in front of a green screen. Fit, tattooed. Larry in a sports jacket holds up a mic to his face. AJ looks into the camera.

AJ

Blackjack, you have no idea about the emotions that are surging through my body. When we meet in that ring tonight, there will be violent thoughts in my mind instructing these hands to paint a violent masterpiece with you as my subject. Murder will be my intent. I will kill you --

LARRY

Wait, wait. What?! Kill! You're threatening to kill?

AJ

(confused)

Yeah.

LARRY

How many people have you killed? What happens when you don't? When he shows up on the next show?!

AJ

I... try again?

LARRY

Jesus!

Larry spots Stan going by.

LARRY

Stan! Come here for a sec.

(Stan walks over)

We have a dangerous greenhorn here, planning on a rampage. Talking about murder and everything. Please, educate the young man. My voice is gonna go in five minutes if I keep yelling.

STAN

That would be a gift to mankind.

(to AJ)

Who you wrestling?

AJ

Blackjack, Blackjack Harley.

STAN

What's the beef?

AJ

Dunno, just don't like him I guess.

LARRY

But that's reason enough to kill him?

STAN

(to the cameraman)

Pauly, chest up. I snap, start zooming.

PAULY (O.S.)

Got it.

STAN

(to AJ)

Watch this twice over then redo it. It'll look like shit but let's hope it'll be better than what you got. Don't look at the camera, look through it.

(looks into the camera)

Start lax, build intensity.

Stan puts on a evil grin. His whole demeanor changes.

STAN

Blackjack Harley. In the game that comprises your redneck, hillbilly name the sum of numbers equaling 21 signifies victory. Triumph. But that's a card game, boy. My game takes place between those ropes, and like in yours it's one against the other. Difference being I only need to get to three to win. I only need to get the ref to slap his palm on that mat a third time to taste the sweet satisfaction of victory. One... two... three. Getting him there won't prove to be an arduous task, because even at one you'll have already quit.

(snaps his fingers)

The pain you'll feel today may be temporary, but in that space of time you'll be experiencing the greatest suffering known to man, and even though you know it won't last forever, I'll make sure it damn well feels like it will.

So when the ref counts one, thoughts of resistance will be nonexistent, not because of lack of consciousness or mobility, but because of fear. Knowing that the third time he hits that canvas will signal a way out. Salvation out of the fear of what I might do next if you do resist. You'll be laying there, not only physically broken and barely able to move, but not wanting to. Having mentally checked out since the moment you felt what the word dominance means.

(beat)

Blackjack, I'll see you in the ring... boy.

Stan steps away. Pauly gives a thumbs up from behind the camera.

LARRY

Ohhh, got goosebumps.

AJ

I dunno if I can remember all that.

STAN

Well, Mickey D's is always hiring.

Stan leaves.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE AREA - LATER

TAMMY (31) perky and busty stands in front of Stan. She puts a set of car keys in his front shirt pocket.

TAMMY

Here are the keys to the Prius. He knows his medication. He'll be fine but you can check up on him once or twice a day. I know you do. Tank's full, feel free to use it up. I'll be back on Tuesday. I'll call him at eight PM every day, you have my number, call at even the slightest hint of worry.

STAN

Have a safe trip.

TAMMY

You're a dear.

Tammy gives Stan a hug and walks off.

Stan pulls the curtain from behind the ramp. Looks on at people filing in. Locates Henry sitting in the crowd, alone, in a wheelchair.

LATER

Stan peeks through the curtain, again. The arena's now packed. A diverse crowd. Everyone's seated, waiting.

An announcer enters the ring to a mild reaction... POW! --

Stan violently turns as the lights go out. The crowd gasps. People scramble. Stan frowns with steaming anger. A crew member plays with the fuse box, and... the lights come back on.

Stan quickly pulls back the curtain - crowd cheers. The announcer plays it off like it was part of the show.

Perry steps up to Stan. Who takes note of his striped uniform.

PERRY

Gotta say, don't look half-bad.
Added an armband as an extra touch.

STAN

So?

PERRY

Yeah. Invisible until it's time to be seen. Create the impression of a legitimate contest, don't get intimidate, don't shake hands with the crowd.

STAN

Most important?

PERRY

Ahhh, work in a horseshoe line at the hard camera. So I don't get in the shot --

Chris grabs Stan shoulder from behind. Stan turns.

CHRIS

(cupping a cell phone)
Mr. Stevens. Couldn't reach you on your cell.

Stan takes the phone from Chris and gives Perry a fist bump as he exits to the ramp. He takes a few steps down a hallway.

STAN
 (into the receiver)
 Mr. Stevens, how are you?

MR. STEVENS (V.O.)
 I'm well, Stan. Thanks for asking.
 Question of the day is however,
 how are you?

STAN
 About the same as last week and
 the one before.

MR. STEVENS (V.O.)
 I couldn't reach you on your phone
 so I called Christian's. I read,
 we all read what happened.

STAN
 Cut myself worse shaving.

MR. STEVENS (V.O.)
 Don't doubt it. I wanna say, we're
 proud of you up here. You made us
 look good. Got our name in
 mainstream press, in a positive
 light no less.

STAN
 Glad you could steal some of my
 shine. Two people getting praise
 is better than one.

Stan opens a door, goes in...

CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

...a tight broom closet.

MR. STEVENS (V.O.)
 How's everything down there?

STAN
 Fine. Show just got going. Your
 boy's up sixth. I put him with one
 of our mid-level guys. See if he
 can carry him.

MR. STEVENS (V.O.)
 I don't question your methods.
 (short beat)

Stan, you know we talked about this three years ago and I don't want to sound like we're trying to piggyback on this incident, cause for this, we're not. You still firm on not going in? We have a good class this year. I get a lot of shit for you not being in. You'd ease some of my burden.

STAN

I wouldn't get my hopes up about unloading that part, sir.

MR. STEVENS (V.O.)

Well, shit. Compromise? You show up on TV next week, we book you for a three - four week run. We do, do a tad of piggybacking and both reap some benefits.

STAN

I'm sure you don't hear a lot of noes, Mr. Stevens, but I guess that's why God put me on this earth, to remind you that, that answer does exist.

MR. STEVENS (V.O.)

Can't hate a man for sticking to his guns. I always liked you, Stan. That's why I'll give you this call again in a couple of years.

STAN

I'll be sure to pick up and say no, again.

MR. STEVENS (V.O.)

You take care, so you do.

Stan hangs up. Looks at the wall inches from his face. Reaches into his pocket and takes out a unopened razor. Rips it open, breaks it to pieces. Takes one and slowly pushes it under his thumb's fingernail.

He tenses up in pain but doesn't stop nor lets out a sound.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ HALLWAY - LATER

Stan exits to Larry standing with two cops.

LARRY

The officers wanted to know if they could get a picture?

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE AREA - LATER

Stan watches the show from behind the curtain.

LATER

Stan stands with a pack of wrestlers gathered around SALLY (21). Who sits on a chair, nervous. Tina stands over her.

TINA

(to Stan)

She's hyperventilating.

WRESTLER #2

Jitters got to her.

SALLY

I dunno if I can go out, coach.

Stan kneels next to her, takes a pack of gum.

STAN

Put this in your mouth. Don't worry, it ain't a roofie. Gum.

She takes it. Places it in her mouth.

STAN

Chew once, take a breath. Chew once, take a breath.

(she does)

I don't care if you mess up. Those people don't care either. Nothing horrible is gonna happen out there. Worse thing you can do is stay back here. Cause that way, nothing happens at all. Then the next event turns into an event. She's scared too, got each other and the rest of us back here.

(to a passing wrestler)

Dustin. What are?

DUSTIN

(stops)

We? As a group?

(confused)

Fraternity of misfits?

Sally smiles.

LATER

Stan stares at the crowd, surveying their reactions to the wrestlers in the ring. What action gets what kind of response.

Two wrestlers come through the curtain. Stan blocks their path.

STAN

How many chlotheslines you hit him with?

WRESTLER #6

I dunno, seven?

STAN

They were seven. And he got up all seven times. So what does that make you? A big, fat, giant pussy, with big, fat, weak pussy arms.

(to the other one)

And you, Einstein. You got a learning disability? You fall for the same move he got you with six times before? It's good Chris wasn't around, cause he'd bury you neck deep and kick a field goal.

They walk off. Wade walks in - colorful jacket, flashy neon tights on.

WADE

I feel overdressed. Nobody told me it's modest Friday. Everyone's... plain.

STAN

See you're not afflicted by that condition.

WADE

Ain't the point to get all eyes on you?

STAN

Might even blind a few.

WADE

No love?

STAN

Didn't have time to change after your gay-rights march? You've got the right idea. It's a start.

WADE

Now I just have to dazzle you with my in-ring work. They told me I go on after you.

Stan nods and looks back through the curtain. The announcer takes the ring.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, this is usually a time reserved for intermission but instead I wouldn't recommend you do anything other than stay glued to your seats for the most anticipated moment of the night. Let us all rise and give a big hand for a man that's synonymous with our town. The man of the hour, part of wrestling royalty. He may hail out of Seattle, Washington but we've claimed him as our own. Give it up for our adopted son, Stan, THE MANGLER, Malone.

The wrestlers clap. Stan glowers, exits to...

WRESTLING ARENA - CONTINUOUS

...the ramp. The crowd goes berserk at his entrance.

He waves, fake smiles, touches a few hands before going to the ring.

IN THE RING

The spotlight hits him, he squints, semi-blind shakes hands with the announcer. Who pulls him in close...

ANNOUNCER

(whispers)

Chris's idea, don't get hot at me.

Stan shrugs, not following. He grabs a mic. The crowd quiets.

STAN

Thank you. Thank you for the smiles, howls and whistles.

CROWD

MANGLER! MANGLER! MANGLER! MANGLER!

He waits for them to die down... they do.

STAN

I don't think that word has ever been spoken with such warmth.

(crowd laughs)

I dunno what I'm supposed to say up here. Which is weird cause I made a career out of it. I was told most of you bought tickets today, so I assume you expect something.

Not sure I can deliver, hope it at least sounds genuine.

(beat)

I get asked for pictures, I sign autographs and have nice words slung my way. Recently I've got a few I'm not accustomed to. Some have great meaning, bestow noble qualities, of which I'm not worthy of. It's human nature to inflate things, make grand tales, in a way we're all storytellers. Makes life more interesting. Reality embellished for the sake of provoking emotion, entertainment. That's what we do in here.

Stan looks out at the people. At individual faces.

STAN

I'm not any of the words used to depict me. No more braver and deserving of admiration than most. That's not a show of modesty, because I ain't even humble. Everyone needs help and everyone's been helped. My turn came, so is the merry-go-round of life --

Stan picks out Todd in the crowd, sitting by himself. He pauses for a second, swallows hard.

He looks away in an attempt to get his train of thought back on track.

STAN

My father use to tell me, "an example is the best tool to teach, an extreme one is even better". Be great or horrible, either case the world will see something good of you, even if it's in the bad. Perspective and context will help people decide, which extreme I was. And hopefully learn that you don't have to be great to do good. We are made kind, so be kind. Life's unpredictable, take care of each other and... god bless.

The crowd cheers. Stan get eyes back on Todd. Who golf claps.

ANNOUNCER

I dunno about you folks, but that delivered big time in my book.

(the cheers grow)
 To make this occasion even more special than it is, a certain someone would like to thank the Mangler in person. Please, put your hands together as we welcome to the ring, William Wyman. Father of Katie Wyman.

(music hits)
 Katie couldn't be here to show her appreciation but her father didn't want to pass up the opportunity. Please clap as he's about to enter the ring and shake hands with the man who pried his daughter from the clutches of evil.

Stan's nostrils flare.

JOHN WYMAN (54) ducks under the middle rope and gets in the ring. He waves to the crowd. Turns to Stan - they face off.

Stan glares at the Announcer. Who shrugs "wasn't my idea". Attention shifted to John as Stan extends his hand. John looks at it. Grabs it and... pulls Stan in for a hug.

Pushes him back, raising his arm as they do a 360 turn in the center of the ring.

CROWD
 MANGLER! MANGLER! MANGLER! MANGLER!

Stan waits for Todd to come into view. He does. Still there, clapping.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Stan storms in. Marches up to Larry, veins popping.

STAN
 Where is he?

LARRY
 (nods)
 Yeah.

He gives him a dead eyed look. Larry leaves on a manhunt.

Stan looks through the curtain - Todd's talking to a child. Maybe seven years old. Eyes turn blood red and almost pop out.

Chris arrives with Larry. Stan turns to face them.

CHRIS
 Look, I know you're gonna be hot.

SMACK! Stan clocks him, clean. Chris falls. Looks up from the floor.

STAN

You might wanna cool down before thinking 'bout getting up. You're a huge hunk of shit but I'm fuckin' livid.

(beat)

Fuck's wrong with you, setting me up like that?

CHRIS

It got a reaction. That shit will play on news stations around the country. You weren't gonna agree to it.

STAN

Cause I don't like yoak in my eye! It was the cheapest fuckin' pop in history.

CHRIS

Sorry... for now, but you'll thank me later. Couldn't slip up the photo op, shit's current. We need to milk the exposure.

Stan looks back through the curtain - Todd's not in his seat. Eyes go around and further down - sees a figure of a man and child leaving.

He hastily flees the area to a side hallway.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ HALLWAY #2 - CONTINUOUS

Stan walks forward. Right foot dragging, as always. Trying to pick up steam but is unable. Tina steps out.

TINA

(excited)

Coach --

Stan waves her off, continues down.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ HALLWAY #3 - CONTINUOUS

He exits to a concession stand and a sea of people. Throws his look ahead... making out what he thinks might be Todd's head. Gives chase, when... A fan steps in front of him.

FAN #3

Mangler! Photo?

Stan tries to dodge him, but is unsuccessful.

FAN #3
Come on, quick one.

Stan grabs the fan's phone from his hand, squeezes it, crushing it.

STAN
With what?

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ ENTRANCE AREA - CONTINUOUS

Stan scans... no Todd. Does a spin, looking every which way.

EXT. WRESTLING ARENA/ PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Stan's eyes sweep the parking lot from the entrance stairs. He notices two cars leaving, one after the other. His sight isn't good enough to tell what kind they are.

He takes out the keys Tammy gave him. Goes down the stairs scanning the lot for a Prius. Sees one - almost runs to it, unstably.

Fans YELL out at him. Tuned out, Stan reaches the car. Tries to unlock it... no dice.

Frustrated, angry, he lifts his head and scans again... spots another one. Goes to it, same pace as before. Reaches it - tries to unlock it... works this time. Gets in.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

A white Prius speeds through traffic. Way above the limit. Red light at an intersection. Prius comes to a halt.

INT. PRIUS - CONTINUOUS

Stan taps the steering wheel. Light turns green... he speeds away, turning a corner and... SHHHHH... screeches to a STOP! - A woman stands an inch from his fender. A statue.

Her fist comes down on the hood. DANG! She eyeballs Stan and walks away, distressed.

WOMAN
Idiot.

The car moves forward - stops at another light.

Waiting, Stan turns his head left. In the car window - a woman in the car next to him, same as him, waiting on the light. Blonde, 30s.

She smiles at someone and leans back... revealing a child in the passenger seat. The one that spoke to Todd in the arena.

The son and mother share a smile. Stan lets out a sigh of relief.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD/ STREET - LATER

The Prius drives up to Todd's house. Lights off, stops in the street.

INSIDE THE PRIUS

Stan placid, coolheaded, looks to the living room window.

IN THE WINDOW

Todd eats a TV dinner in front of his TV. Feet up, relaxed.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ ENTRANCE AREA - LATER

Few people left. Stan walks, head down, trying to be inconspicuous.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - LATER

He sees Chris, Larry and IAN (28) arguing down the hallway. As he nears the conversation becomes audible.

IAN

I couldn't do it on the fly, he wouldn't listen. He was still calling spots.

CHRIS

Which you heard fine?

IAN

What was I --

STAN

What happened?

Chris sees Stan. Calms.

CHRIS

Duke got busted open, hardway.

STAN

Bad?

CHRIS

B... bad.

LARRY

It was an accident. Duke went for a spear in the corner, Ian moved... he had a lot of momentum. Was... spraying red for a while.

IAN

He called the spot. Walked me through it in the back, laid out the whole match.

STAN

How is he?

LARRY

Seemed like he was on a different astral plane there from a while.

CHRIS

He's in there, icing his head, waiting on the doctor to stitch him.

STAN

Why's he waiting?

CHRIS

Fucker went home early. We're trying to reach him.

STAN

Don't. I'll take care of him. You wait here.

(to Larry)

You help the ring crew.

LARRY

Can't I stay with Chris? I wanna --

Stan ignores him, already halfway down the hallway.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ OFFICE - LATER

A hand reaches in a closet. Takes out a first aid kit.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ DRESSING ROOM - LATER

Stan enters. Closes the door. Duke inside - icing his head, eyes shut.

DUKE

Took you long enough.

Stan's face stiffens, worried over Duke's state.

STAN

(southern accent)

Ahh, almost caused a twenty car pile-up. Fuckers were flying down that highway, it was a god damn mechanical stampede.

DUKE

Let's get to business, doc. I need pound a few beers and get a counter buzz going to the one in my head.

STAN

(in his normal voice)

Yeah, that's what you need.

DUKE

(removes the ice pack)

Stan?

STAN

At your service, me monarch.

(sits next to Duke)

How you feeling?

DUKE

Almost burst the ole nogging, watermelon style.

STAN

Doesn't seem structurally compromised.

(studies it)

Nice gash. Reminds me of an Asian girl I dated.

DUKE

You make her bleed like this? Been waiting on that bastard for an hour. The fuck's he comin'? This shit better not get infected. I can't eat antibiotics.

Stan gets up, opens the first aid kit.

STAN

It won't. I'm filling in, Dr. M. Spent four years in Puerto Rico. Rather die than end up in a hospital down there, which would probably yield the same result. This is gonna sting.

(pours alcohol on the cut)

You want me to numb you?

DUKE

Nahh, I'm all man.

STAN

I'm stocked up on cosmetic string,
even have the angles of entry
down. Keep you handsome.

(stitches up the wound)

How many somas you down?

DUKE

Some new muscle relaxant, and two
vicodins.

STAN

No coffee in that thermos, huh?
Blacked out?

(Duke nods)

What's this, concussion number --

DUKE

I'll run the ropes if you want.

STAN

Maybe, it's enough?

DUKE

Enough what?

STAN

Work. So many bumps a man can take.

DUKE

Nahh, hell no. I haven't been on TV
in five months, they're bringing me
back in a few weeks. I'll work a
mid-card program, get some TV time.

STAN

Chuck emailed yesterday. They
offered to let me book you. Next
three months.

(stops stitching)

You're 38, Ben. There was a small
window 'bout five years ago that
they might have done something
with you. You've got sixteen years
in, losing brain cells by the
month. Don't wanna see you pumping
gas at some wayward station
telling me the same story three
times over in one conversation.

DUKE

How 'bout you remove your collar,
stop preaching, put that dress
back on and get back to sewing?

STAN

(continues working)
Anyone told you you're starting to
talk funny? You can't be driving
around bumping three nights a week.

DUKE

Don't... get the words out as fast
sometimes.

STAN

How about I put a call in, you
help me out? There's a spare room
at the gym. Weather's bearable,
beer's cheap and you get a promise
that I won't ride you too hard.

DUKE

Come on, Stan. No one retires from
this crap. I can't call it quits
after a decade and a half in a
fuckin' closet.

STAN

What's the other option? Working
the same shows next year with less
sense?

Stan cuts the string. Wipes it wound. Puts a patch on.

STAN

All done.

DUKE

Alright, Stan. Call.

STAN

I'm gonna have Chris drive you to
the hospital. Have you checked
out. Stay put.

DUKE

(teary eyed)
Room's two by two. Ain't got space
to move.

Stan opens the door, behind him Duke weeps.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA/ BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stan walks up to Chris.

STAN

Give him ten, then drive him to the hospital. Get them to run a CAT scan, all that other bullshit.

(hands over his credit card)

Don't tell anyone.

(he goes to leave - stops)

On the drive, mention we talked about booking him for a three month run. Office sent word.

CHRIS

Did we?

STAN

Yeah, we did.

Ian stands alone, twitchy. Stan joins him.

IAN

So?

STAN

He'll pull through.

IAN

I told him to roll me up. He has a concussion, doesn't he? We wrestled for like six minutes after that. I feel like shit.

STAN

It's done. You didn't do anything wrong.

IAN

I shouldn't have kicked out on the next cover.

STAN

He's got seniority, he leads. Learn from him. Something goes down, stay down. No amount of money is worth getting your brain scrambled, there's life after this shit.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Stands are bare, seats empty, with the exception of Henry. Who patiently waits. Stan climbs up to him.

HENRY

Thought you forgot about me.

STAN

You're memorable enough.

HENRY

Good show. Especially liked when the half-naked men hugged. Not enough oil though, I needed to see more slippery action.

STAN

I'm sure you're well educated in that.

Stan pushes Henry's wheelchair out of the arena as Wade runs down the ramp and to them.

WADE

Sir! I looked for you, did you catch my match?

STAN

(stops)

I... saw enough.

WADE

Was it enough?

STAN

I think, I'll think about it tomorrow.

Stan wheels Henry to an exit.

WADE

You're keeping me in suspense.

STAN

This is rasslin', we're all about cliffhangers.

HENRY

I saw the whole deal, kid. You've got charisma, which counts for a lot when you're in a speedo in front of a bunch of strangers. Seen a lot of semi-naked bland young men in my day. I can pick the ones that stick out. No pun intended.

WADE

(as they disappear)

Thanks.

INT. PRIUS - LATER

Stan drives. Henry in the passenger seat, looking a bit unnerved.

HENRY

I've... made a decision.

STAN

Good. We are what we decide. What did you put your foot down on?

HENRY

Asking you a question.

Stan looks at Henry. Then back at the road.

STAN

What are you, the high school cheerleader? You teasing me? Ohh, please, Henry, tell me, what is this grand question?

HENRY

You ever get tired of it?

STAN

What?

HENRY

The sarcasm and wisecracks?

STAN

They say it's a defense mechanism. Your question?

HENRY

I'm building up to it.

STAN

Got me all hyped now. Come out with it, I'm on my toes.

HENRY

I'm gonna ask you to take me to church, tomorrow.

STAN

Just did. Why did you need to contemplate over it?

HENRY

Cause I assume, pretty sure, you're gonna say no. I figure, make it more dramatic.

Hint that it might be important to me. Subtle pressure.

STAN

That's not a very honest approach. I don't go to church.

HENRY

Noticed. Aren't you born-again?
(Stan nods)
Ain't church a requisite?

STAN

Not a fan of middle men. Shit's between me and him, no need to get a third party involved. Why do you want me to go to church with you?

HENRY

I don't want you to come with. I want you to take me. Drop me off, pick me up, type of deal. I've got some things I need to get off my chest.

STAN

Friends and family don't cut it?

HENRY

Daughter's out of town and you've proven that you don't have much past jokes. I need comfort.

(serious)

End draws near, man gets desperate. Guilt, regret, weigh a man down.

STAN

Alright. Managed to make it seem important.

HENRY

Thank you.

(beat)

You know, I wasn't kidding about the slippery action.

(Stan gives him a look)

I've had many a careers. Some that haunt me. One I'm not particularly proud off involved... dirty movies?

STAN

Porn?! You did gay porn?! What did they shoot that thing with, a telescope?

HENRY

No, not porn! Especially not the gay variety. Erotica. Classy porn. Directing. I... pressured a lot of girls into doing things they didn't wanna do. Some guys too. I --

STAN

Okay, okay, how 'bout you save it for tomorrow. I don't wanna listen to you pressuring young men into doing your roofing let alone this.

HENRY

Nine?

STAN

Sure.

(long beat)

How do you direct porn? Do you like tell'em when to moan? Establish a thrusting tempo?

HENRY

It's an art in of itself.

Stan smiles.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE/ DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stan opens the Prius's passenger door. Helps Henry out and leads him inside his home.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE/ PORCH - LATER

Stan climbs his steps to a surprise - a large stack of letters and packages block the entryway to his domain.

He stares at the pile with hate boiling.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ KITCHEN - LATER

A knife goes in an apple and around it. It's peeled masterfully. DING! Stan takes out a pan from the oven, placing a stack of unopened letters in its place.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE/ BACKYARD - LATER

Packages stick out of a can. Lighter fluid is richly poured over them. Stan throws a match. He's inside the house before the blaze begins.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - LATER

Stan sits on the floor, looking through a white cardboard box. Removes his cell phone from it. TV's on in the background.

He relocates to the sofa. Powers up the phone. Channel surfs: Movie - Music - News story - Hunting show - Movie - Infomercial - News story... stops. It's about him. Curious, he watches.

RINGTONE! Phone is ON - clasp in his hand.

ON THE TV

A Female reporter stands on the street. His house in the background.

FEMALE REPORTER

An unassuming home stands behind me. One of many in this peaceful suburban neighborhood. If you're new to the area you'd be hard-pressed to find anything exceptional about it... except for the person that resides in it. One would be surprised to know that this house is the dwelling of a local celebrity around these parts. Retired wrestling champion and now sure to be local legend, Stan "The Mangler" Malone.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Stan's furious. He looks at his phone. Missed calls, messages...

FEMALE NEWSREPORTOR (O.S.)

Fans of wrestling may remember Malone for his 30 year career wrestling through the Carolinas. For the unmatched intensity and brutality he brought to the ring. But now...

...upon messages. He looks up at the TV.

FEMALE NEWSREPORTOR

People also know him as a caring neighbor, a person who'll risk life and limb for the good of his fellow man. In this case, woman...

Stan jumps up and punts the TV - sparks fly. Foot sinks deep into the device - he removes it, carefully. Winded, he stands in the center of the room breathing heavy. Silence... broken by a fit of rage. Stan goes berserk pulverizing what little furniture he has.

Stops. Silence again. Breathing heavy again --

His phone RINGS - still in his hand. He screens it - *UNKNOWN NUMBER*. Hesitant, he composes himself and picks up.

LISA (V.O.)
Stan? Stan, that you?

STAN
(into the receiver)
Yeah.

LISA (V.O.)
It's really you isn't it? Can you recognize my voice?

STAN
Yeah, Liz.

LISA (V.O.)
Liz. I had this number written down, hadn't called it in years. Was sure no one would pick up.
(beat)
It's been a long time, Stanny.

STAN
Yeah.

LISA (V.O.)
You probably know what made me dial. I wanted to know if you're okay, they said on the news that you were released with --

STAN
I'm good.

LISA (V.O.)
You sound winded.

Stan sits on the floor.

STAN
Yeah, I'm that too.

LISA (V.O.)
(a giggle)
You're in a bad mood. Sorry for chuckling. You were always brief when you'd get rustled. Lots of "Yeahs". I didn't know I missed it, until now. I don't know what's got you down but if you want to talk about it, now, you can.

(Stan breathes into the phone)
 I, I also wanted to thank you. I realized today when I saw your photo on the TV that I never did... for leaving. I'm happy. I wasn't then, but in time I realized you were right. I have a little boy, Pete. He just turned eight. You were right...

(starts crying)
 I love being a mom. Thanks for proving that to me. I loved you, you know. I would have stayed --

STAN

I know.

LISA (V.O.)

I --

STAN

I've gotta go, Lisa. Thanks for your concern.

Stan hangs up. He wipes tears. Stands and marches out of the room.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A drawer's violently pulled open. A large knife removed.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE/ FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Stan darts out his house down the steps, knife in hand.

TODD'S LAWN - CONTINUOUS

He nears the house, gripping the blade tight. Goes through the lawn to the living room window - looks inside... no one there. Lights off.

Takes a detour. Opens the fence door leading to the backyard.

BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

He grabs the back door handle - conveniently enough it's unlocked.

INT. TODD'S HOUSE/ HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stan moves inside and down the unlit hallway through the dark house.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stan peeks in - no one there.

A NOISE comes down from upstairs. He rushes up the staircase.

UPPER FLOOR/ HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Much like a prowler Stan creeps to the half-opened door. Light emanates from it. SOUNDS accompany the visual.

He slowly advances, reaching it... looks in...

IN THE BEDROOM

A sight of two people in the heat of passion. Todd turns over a redheaded woman in his bed. They makes love amongst white linen. Lost in lust for one another.

Stan's eyes are visible in the doorway. Cat-like. Watching. Staring. They blink and... vanish.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ KITCHEN - MORNING

A pancake flips in a pan.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

The room's almost empty and spotless. The sofa, the lone survivor.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE/ PORCH - LATER

Stan exits onto his porch. Something incredible graces his eyes - his freshly mowed lawn. A thing of beauty. Uniformity, conformity with the rest of peaceful suburbia.

A sheet of paper taped over his sign reads: "CHALLENGE CONQUERED".

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE/ PORCH - LATER

Knuckles touch wood, TAP! TAP! - no answer. Again - same result. Stan thinks. Opens the front door and...

INT. HENRY'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...sneaks inside to discover Henry melted in a chair. Snazzy suit on, looking half-dead and barely breathing.

HENRY

I heard you. Couldn't be bothered to stand.

STAN

Can you?

HENRY

With a little help.

STAN

We can go tomorrow.

HENRY

Might prove overly optimistic.

Henry struggles to rise. Stan lifts him up and guides him through the door. Oxygen tank wheeling along.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE/ DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

They patiently move to the Prius.

INT. PRIUS - LATER

Stan drives. Lost in thought. Henry's gaze directed to the window, appearing equally lost and three times as brittle.

LATER

Stan parks in the church lot. Takes a good look at Henry.

STAN

I'll walk you in.

HENRY

No.

STAN

You ain't no mule. Come on.

HENRY

No. I don't want this to come off as a ruse to get you in there. I don't got a lot of friends, don't wanna leave the impression I'm mocking one of my few.

STAN

I know you better than that. You ain't that clever.

EXT. CHURCH/ PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Henry's assisted out of the car. Stan hooks his arm and helps him up the church steps. He holds the door for Henry as they...

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

...enter to a full house ahead. The church's packed. Over a hundred people inside. A eulogy's taking place. It briefly pauses - most turn to see Stan and Henry hand in hand near the aisle.

STAN
(under breath)
Shit.

HENRY
Mmm.

Stan pulls Henry to a bench. The eulogy continues. They sit.

STAN
Gotta wait it out.

HENRY
Mmm.

The various murals above captivate Stan. They seem powerful, judgemental. Like they're looking down on him. He switches to Henry, who's looking frail and sleepy. His head leaning.

Stan playfully nudges him. Giving him a jolt.

STAN
Don't dare drool on me.

Henry shoots him an affectionate look.

A priest talks at the alter. Another one sits up front, SEERY (42). Sharp features, wise eyes. He casts a look over his shoulder at Stan.

LATER

Eulogy over. The attendants stand. Some file out, others chat.

STAN
Can you stand?

Henry nods and they rise. Begin their walk to a confessional booth.

Stan spots Seery spotting them. On a intentional collision course.

HENRY
How do we get some service?

STAN
They'll find us. I'm a celebrity.

Seery reaches them.

SEERY

Hello. Am I safe to assume that you two gentlemen were not here for the ceremony that took place?

STAN

Why'd you be safe to assume that?

SEERY

A suit is generally the norm.

HENRY

I need someone to absolve me.

SEERY

We usually do that on Saturdays?

STAN

What about exceptions?

SEERY

(looks at Stan)

Yes. We do those too. Wait here.

Seery goes to another priest on his right. Henry watches them talk then looks at the confession booth ahead.

HENRY

Still's a fancy outhouse.

(Stan nods)

I can reach it.

Henry lets go of Stan, slowly making his journey to his destination. A priest waits for him there. He enters, the priest follows suit.

The statue of Christ captivates Stan, he notices the tears in his eyes. The murals tower over. He grows uncomfortable --

KID (O.S.)

You're sweating.

Stan looks down, a six year old boy stands next to him.

KID

Are you hot or tired?

STAN

Neither.

KID

Hmm. Grandma sent me over.

(points to his grandma)

Said I should come talk to you.

STAN

Why?

KID

She says that you're a real-life hero. Are you really?

STAN

No.

KID

Why she say it then?

STAN

She's old. They get confused.

KID

That sucks. I wanted to meet a hero. Never met one.

STAN

You're young, give it time.

The GRANDMOTHER (68) joins Stan and the Kid.

GRANDMOTHER

I didn't know you were a member of this parish.

STAN

Here with a friend.

KID

(to his Grandmother)
He says he isn't a hero.

GRANDMOTHER

Those kind of people don't boast.

KID

(to Stan)
You should know what you are.

Stan smirks.

GRANDMOTHER

I prayed for you yesterday. I'll continue to do so.

(to the Kid)

Come on, John, let's not bother the nice man. We said, Hi. Wave bye.

KID

Bye, nice man.

Stan reciprocates a wave. The Kid and Grandma leave.

Seery returns.

SEERY

Your friend's set. If you plan on waiting, seats are abundant. Everyone's heading to the funeral.

STAN

You're not?

Stan sits. Seery sits near.

SEERY

Wasn't familiar with the deceased. Holding the fort, so to speak.

(beat)

I'm not adept enough to skillfully transition to this, so I'll just flat out say it. I've been wanting to meet you for an awful long time now.

STAN

Since I beat Showtime Jackson or when I won the belt in St. Louis?

SEERY

(smiles)

No, not really a wrestling fan. More so of you.

STAN

Everyone's these days.

SEERY

With good reason. But, my fandom goes back a decade, fueled by a story I heard from a certain Father Gale. Do you remember him?

STAN

You all dress alike. What fantastic tale did this Gale spin?

SEERY

One of altruism that I'm quite fond of and tell often. May I?

(Stan shrugs)

It's set fourteen years ago, when he had just gotten to town from Denver. Second night here he was woken by a call at about three AM. His sister was in the hospital a state down.

Some sort of heart condition. It was pouring outside. No cabs, no buses. Desperate and delirious he went out into the street, hoping to hitch a ride. On the count of the weather there were no cars. But, there was a man, on a bench near the school, alone, soaking wet. Worried, the Father walked over and asked the man if he's alright, does he need help. Man replied, "fine". Father asks, "what are you doing out?" Man salty fires back with "what are you?". So, the Father shares his predicament, there, in the rain. After all is said. The mysterious man hands over a set of keys and says: "There are three ten dollar bills in the glovebox, registration's there too". He points to a blue chevy. "Don't bring it back". He gets up and walks away, in the rain. Father drives to the hospital. Sister's fine.

(beat)

I still talk to him, Father Gale.
Often. Still has that car.

STAN

Some great people out there.

SEERY

Doesn't sound familiar?

(Stan shakes his head)

I hear confession, people talk to me, in and out of that booth.
You're a reoccurring theme. One --

STAN

What do you want? You fake sack of shit, seems like you're transitioning to something just fine.

SEERY

I was gonna ask if you'd be willing to come to mass on Sunday. I think it'll make a lot of people feel good to know, what I know.

STAN

And what is that exactly?

SEERY

That you're one of them. A Christian. People need role-models.

Especially in small communities
it's important to know there are
extraordinary people amongst your
own. Someone to inspire, to aspire
to be like --

STAN

Like him?

Stan points to the figure of Jesus at the altar.

SEERY

Yes.

STAN

Amidst stories about charitable
Georges ever ponder the
selfishness of human nature? That
people usually have an endgame?
Maybe it's to offset something
they've done. That a role model?
Someone that does good to get
something out of it?

SEERY

Everything we do is selfish in
some sense. Everyone sins, makes
mistakes. It is through faith --

STAN

You know why I don't come here?
Cause I have an authority issue and
I can't bare listen to some pissant
like you talk to me about faith,
life and hear him fallback on the
same three arguments that line his
back pocket. I've got 20 years on
you and four times the life
experience. Been around the country
forty times over and circled the
globe five. Sinned in every place
the sun has shined. And I'm gonna
get advice from someone that's
memorised a 900 page book, tell me
what I did was wrong and how I
should bring balance to the cosmos?

SEERY

It's not me, it's --

STAN

Fuck him. What good are you both? If
I'm weak, he made me like that.

So, he's gonna punish me and you'll sit there knowing nothing 'bout anything and judge me, tell me what to do.

(stands)

I should know who I am, what I'm guilty of, what I should do. The fuck's someone else to have a say.

EXT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Stan storms out. He stops amongst the people leaving. Eyes wander the horizon. They focus in on a newsstand. He goes to it. Climbs down buys something then returns to the steps.

He sits on the forth row. A pack of smokes clutched in his hand. He removes the wrap and takes one out. Lights it.

Elbows on his knees in front of his face, he smokes and observes the street ahead. People walk - some alone, others with a certain someone, third with their phones. From the elderly to children.

CLING - CLING - CLING! Henry comes up from behind. Oxygen tank bouncing off each row of steps as he comes down. Sits next to Stan.

STAN

(looks over at Henry)

That was quick.

HENRY

Only had one thing on the docket.

STAN

Must've gotten a simple answer.

(Henry nods)

Worth the trip?

HENRY

Since I made it, sure.

(gestures at the smoke)

Care to share?

(Stan shoots him a look)

Won't kill me, got way too much competition.

A cigarette changes hands. Flame from Stan's lighter ignites it.

STAN

Receipt?

Henry generously inhales, fills his lungs and generously exhales.

HENRY

Blow them away like smoke. Let wicked melt before God like wax to a fire. He wants me to suffer, won't let me end my misery and that of those dear.

STAN

He'll melt you for that alright.

HENRY

Just need to stick it out some more and eternal bliss awaits. Till then, wallow in self-pity.

STAN

That comes naturally.

HENRY

I deserve it.

STAN

We all do.

(beat)

I tried it once.

HENRY

Suicide?

(Stan nods)

How'd you fuck that up?

STAN

Maid found me. Thought I took enough for a one-way trip. All I remember are those neon lights in the hospital they wheeled me in. They thought I took that shit to mask the pain, but I wanted to be fucked up, cause I was. Pain I could always take. Addiction was my anchor.

HENRY

That when the big man stepped in?

STAN

Played make-believe most of my life. What's the last third?

HENRY

Parents made me. Grew out of it in my teens, grew back into it in old age. Found some solace.

STAN

Tried to convince myself I did.
 (lifts up the cigarette)
 Quit trying. I too made a decision.
 Gotta accept who you are. Make
 decisions and follow through.
 (Henry nods)
 You came to confess, and you heard mine.

HENRY

Hope you got more out of it than I?

STAN

You... did the job.

HENRY

Go home, as a reward?

Stan puts his palms on his knees, lifts up and offers a hand to Henry.

EXT. HENRY'S HOUSE/ DRIVEWAY - LATER

Stan exits the Prius, goes around, gets the door for Henry.

HENRY

I can manage. I'm better.

Henry steps out.

STAN

Can you make it up?
 (Henry nods)
 I'm gonna use the car to do some
 shopping, that okay?

HENRY

Help yourself.

STAN

I'll stop by in a few to see if
 you've croaked.

Henry nods, walks in the house. Stan gets in the car and drives off.

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY/ STAN'S OFFICE - LATER

Stan sits at his desk, taking a good look at the walls that confine him. Colorful wrestling posters and photos depict a long career.

He pulls open the top desk drawer.

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY/ KITCHEN - LATER

Stan under the kitchen sink, turns a valve. Gets out, opens the fridge and cleans it out.

INT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY - LATER

Stan stands before the bathroom door. Wary of his surroundings, checks to see if eyes are on him. None. The academy's almost empty.

He locks the door and walks away with two plastic bags, scanning the spacious area. Targets a water bottle on a bench. Picks it up.

Walks to the ring. Three wrestlers training inside. Toji is one.

STAN

OK. Break.

(they stop)

Fridge is on the fritz again. Gotta eat this shit before it turns rancid. What are you fellas craving?

WRESTLER #1

What you got?

Stan opens both bags.

STAN

I got everything from energy drinks to energy bars and all things inbetween.

WRESTLER #2

We look like we're low?

STAN

Energy's the ability to do work. Could always use more. Unless you have a heart condition.

WRESTLER #1

I'll have a drink.

WRESTLER #2

Throw me one.

STAN

Toji?

TOJI

I... l-like... d-d-ink.

Stan throws canned beverages to Wrestler #1 and #2.

STAN

Swig on those bad boys. I wanna see you sweat that shit out.

(to Toji)

You haven't even broken one. What are you conserving energy for? The bar? Later? Here's a bar so you'll have energy for that other one, later.

Stan throws an energy bar at Toji. The two other wrestlers finish their drinks and rest them on the canvas.

STAN

Drink up, eat up, fuel up and get back to the grind. I have to service what's left, in food to mammals.

Stan slowly departs, carrying off the bags. His face fights off a smile that begs to form.

The three wrestler in the ring behind him chatter -- AAAAAAA! - Stan turns. Toji hops around in the ring, screaming.

STAN

What's the matter?!

Toji lunges at one of the cans on the canvas - empty. Then the other - empty. He slides out of the ring and runs to the bathroom.

Tries to open the door - can't. Runs to the kitchen.

WRESTLER #2

What's wrong with him?

STAN

He's a little hot. Don't worry, he'll be back in two seconds. One, two...

Toji sprints back.

STAN

What's the trouble, Toji? Looking for something? You need anything?

TOJI

Hot! So, h-h-ot! Wa-ter.

Toji dives for Stan's bag - Stan moves it - Toji falls on the floor.

STAN

You want what?

TOJI

Wa-er.

Stan steps on his chest.

STAN
Full sentence. English.

TOJI
(reluctant)
I want some fuckin' water!

STAN
See. All you had to do is ask.

He drops both bags besides Toji's head.

Throws the keys to Wrestler #1.

STAN
Unlock the bathroom.
(to Toji)
Got some ice cream in there. Lick
that up.

Stan goes to leave through the entrance. Chris appears, cuts him off.

CHRIS
What was that about?

STAN
Linguistics 101.

CHRIS
He pass?

STAN
Spoke so fast tongue caught on fire.

Stan reaches in his pocket, holds up a check.

STAN
This is for you.

Chris takes it. Looks at it.

CHRIS
Hmm, you ribbing me?
(Stan shakes his head)
Haven't seen this many zeros in a
long time. What did I do?

STAN
You... did good. You've always
done good.

Stan hands over another check.

STAN
Give this to the Hobbit.

Stan leaves. Chris takes another look at the check.

EXT. APWA WRESTLING ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS

Stan walks to the Prius.

Wade's Mustang spurs in and parks in front of the building.

Stan stops, waits for Wade to exit the car. He does.

WADE
Was hoping I'd catch you.

STAN
Ain't Moby Dick.

WADE
Got the call. I debut in three weeks.

STAN
Congratulation.

WADE
Assume you made yours so I'd get mine. Drove over to say thanks.

STAN
Shouldn't thank anyone for things you did good on your own.

WADE
Still.

STAN
Good luck, kid. Sounds cliché, even more so with the "kid" in there, but you're gonna need it. We all do.

Stan opens the Prius door --

WADE
Any tips?
(Stan looks at Wade)
So I maximize my chances without it.

He shuts the door.

STAN
Be still.

Stan goes back into the building. Wade leans on his Mustang. Waiting. Perry's walking up. Looking impressed by the vintage automobile.

PERRY
Bitchin' ride, man!

WADE
Thanks.

Stan exits to Perry head on.

PERRY
Coach. I've got some ideas I wanna run by you.

STAN
(walks past him)
Contain them. Slow them down and walk'em by me tomorrow.

Perry nods and enters the building.

Stan reaches Wade. He extends a hardcover thick dictionary.

STAN
Plane literature. Help with the vocabulary. Being somewhat of a wordsmith helps. Helped me.

WADE
(takes the book)
Nice.

Stan opens the Prius door again.

STAN
Get the people, Mr. Carter. Elicit emotion and they can't deny you.

He gets in and slam it shut.

INT. PRIUS - LATER

Stan at a light. It turns green - he drives. Out the window he sees graffiti on a building - "MANGLER COUNTRY, BEWARE!".

INT. WALMART/ HOME IMPROVEMENT DEPARTMENT - LATER

Stan pushes a cart. Stops in front of a shelf with ropes.

FOOD SECTION - LATER

Display case - cakes inside. Stan's reflection in the glass moves as he studies each one, leaning in for a better look.

CLOTHING DEPARTMENT - LATER

Stan pushes the cart, sizing up different clothes. He makes a turn toward the female section.

GROCERY SECTION - LATER

Stan loads oranges in his cart --

TODD (O.S.)

Excuse me.

Stan turns to... Todd in front of him with a cart of his own.

His knees almost give up, restraining emotions to remain stoic.

TODD

Hi. This is probably an inappropriate place for an introduction and will likely make for an awkward one. We've seen each other around, yet never had the pleasure. Saw you in the food section and thought that should change. So, Todd Samuel.

Todd's reached out hand floats in the air awaiting a grip and a shake. Stan hesitates for a second, eventually indulging in pleasantries.

STAN

Stan, Stan Malone.

TODD

Ohh, I've heard all about you.

STAN

All good I suppose?

TODD

Let's say certain people wasted no time offering up warnings.

STAN

Anything concrete?

TODD

(smiles)

Not much past "stay away".

STAN

But you held out as much as you could?

TODD

I'm thickheaded. It's a curse. Anyway, I just wanted to relieve some tension, being so close yet never acknowledging one another. I thought I'd say Hi and leave you to your shopping.

STAN

Appreciate it. The Hi and leaving me to my shopping. I'll leave you to yours, tension free.

Todd nods and pushes his cart away.

EXT. WALMART/ PARKING LOT - LATER

Stan packs the Prius's trunk. He lifts his head above it and spots Todd further down the lot, under the hood of his car.

Stan stares. Todd picks up on his prying eyes. He acknowledges the stare by putting his arms on his hips and shrugging with a smile. Then ducks under the hood again.

Stan slams the trunk and goes down the lot to help.

STAN

Trouble?

TODD

It won't start.

STAN

You know what you're doing?

TODD

Not really. But it's what people do, isn't it? Hoping something super obvious strikes me.

STAN

Or you can fiddle, do more damage.

TODD

That's a possibility. Am I right in assuming that you possess the knowledge to offer a helping hand?

STAN

Let's find out.

Stan plunges under the hood.

TODD
Appreciate you taking a look.

STAN (O.S.)
A look's only wasted time. Got that.

TODD
That's the most important commodity,
time.

Stan's head comes up.

STAN
You have a broken timing belt.

TODD
Dunno what a timing belt is, but a
broken one doesn't sound good.

STAN
You'll need to get the car towed,
and it replaced.
(Todd groans)
I can offer up a ride.

TODD
Wouldn't mind one home.

STAN
Lucky. It's on the way.

INT. PRIUS - LATER

Stan drives, eyes ahead, anxious. Todd in the passenger seat.

TODD
I haven't noticed this car in your
driveway.

STAN
It's not mine.
(long beat)
Heard you got burglarized.

TODD
Yeah, that was fun.

STAN
Two decades I've lived in that
house. First I've ever heard of a
burglary in the neighborhood. They
do any damage?

TODD

Ah, busted up some stuff. Nothing too drastic. Except my dog. They killed her.

STAN

That's... pretty drastic. I'm sorry.

TODD

Thanks.

STAN

Never saw her.

TODD

The dog? I kept her inside. Walked her nights when I could. Let her wander around and in the backyard. She was blind, and old.

STAN

Had a German Shepherd once. Took fourteen years for that thing to die. Know how attached you can get to those things.

TODD

Mine was a poodle. Missy. Mom gave her to me. Bit strange, giving a grown ass man a poodle. I had to walk the thing. But, what can you do?

STAN

Afraid people think you're queer?

TODD

Not homophobic or anything, but that's kind of the first thing that pops to mind. That or pity. Because they assume you're pussywhipped to the ninth degree. Probably kids, probably killed her to shut her up. She could get loud. Probably did.

STAN

Are you gonna get a new one?

TODD

Nahh. I can't take care of a dog. Don't have the desire nor the time. Already feel bad about what I did to this one.

STAN
Man has to be aware of his shortcomings.

TODD
If only we always were.

EXT. TODD'S HOUSE/ DRIVEWAY - LATER

Prius pulls in. Todd steps out. Leans in the car window.

TODD
Thanks for the lift.
(Stan nods)
Know, if you're free sometime and
catch me home, don't be scared to
drop by. I got a good supply of beer.

STAN
Don't drink.

TODD
I'm sure we can find something.

STAN
Opportunities might prove scarce.
Plan on moving. Soon.

TODD
Mmm. Happy that I at least got to
say hello.

STAN
Same. Hope you fix your car.

Todd walks to his home.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ BATHROOM - LATER

Wet hair, naked, Stan shaves in the mirror. Blade glides across his foamy cheek.

BEDROOM - LATER

Stan cleans out his closet. He puts championship belts in a box. Takes out large trophies.

LATER

An arm slides in a white sleeve. Creaseless trousers are already on. Stan adds a blue tie and steps in front of a mirror... frowns at his handsome self.

KITCHEN - LATER

Stan migrates a chocolate cake from a box to the table.

DING! A glistening chicken exits the oven.

LATER

Stan eats at the table. Half-carved up carcass next to his plate.

RING! He screens his cell... "LARRY". Ignores it. Cleans his plate.

LATER

Stan stands on a chair. Hammer clasped between fingers and above his head, beating a hole in the ceiling. Pauses - WHACK!

LATER

Stan, still on the chair ties a rope around an exposed pipe. He pulls down on it, once, twice. It's nicely fasten.

Takes a neck measurement, ties a noose accordingly.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Stan watches the news on TV. Straw going from a juicebox to his mouth. He sips, sips... pauses - crushes the cardboard container. Releases it from his squeeze - it drops to the floor. He looks at it. Beat.

Turns the TV off, goes to stand -- BANG! - A LOUD SOUND RINGS OUT.

Stan darts to the front door. Unlocks it and steps out.

EXT. STAN'S HOUSE/ PORCH - CONTINUOUS

He searches for a disturbance from his doorway - locating a small crowd at Todd's lawn. He climbs down to inspect further.

TODD'S LAWN - CONTINUOUS

As Stan nears the scene he's able to make out five, maybe six people on the lawn. One laying in the grass... Todd. Down, shot.

He pushes down on his right thigh as blood gushes out. David stands over him, gun pointed at his head. Henry's behind him. Two other neighbors to the side at a safer distance.

Tears flow from David's eyes. Todd yelps, scared out his mind and in pain. Face cut up and bruised. Remnants of a recent beating.

Stan closes in... reaches the five. Henry sees him advancing.

HENRY

(to David)

David, don't panic. Stan's coming around your right.

David turns with the gun now pointed at Stan.

STAN

It's just me, David.

(beat)

You're shakin' something fierce, young man.

HENRY

He's right. Take the gun off him. Look at him, he's like never before. Dapper, clean shaven. It'd be a damn shame.

STAN

It would.

DAVID

I don't wanna hurt you, Mr. Malone.

David points the gun at Todd again.

DAVID

I wanna kill him!

STAN

Why did he earn that fate?

HENRY

There's no need for that now, Stan's here. He'll take care of everything. You just put the gun down and calm down. Two downs. Gun and calm. Stan knows all about taking care of bad men.

STAN

David. Put it down.

DAVID

You don't even know why I have it up.

STAN

I don't. But I know few good things ever came of it.

DAVID

You don't know!

STAN

I don't. Why don't you tell me.

DAVID

They'll tell you, you'll read about it in the paper, see it on TV. All I need to do is grow some balls and pull this trigger!

STAN

No! I wanna hear it from you! Firsthand. From your mouth, so nothing gets muddled. This is serious stuff. I wanna know why you wanna do what you wanna do, before you do it and not have a shadow of a doubt why you chose to. I want that, David. Can you do that for me? Please.

David cries, the gun shakes in his hand - FIRES! Misses Todd. Hits the driveway asphalt behind him. Everyone recoils from the shot.

Neighbors step out, look on from their porches/lawns.

HENRY

David look, there are people out. Kids live here. Look at your hand. You're not in control of that weapon. Be reasonable. You might hurt somebody.

STAN

Just lower it a bit. At the ground. We're all too far away, if you want to do something we can't reach you before you do.

David lowers his gun.

DAVID

You were right, Mr. Malone.

STAN

I often am. Be specific, 'bout what?

DAVID

This piece of shit! You and Mr. Spencer were right. I tried to look him up. My cousin's a badge. There's no Todd Samuel in the area. But... there's a Todd Samuel Finston. Sex offender.

(beat)

Three boys. Eleven, twelve, fourteen. This motherfucker, this faggot only did four years for that. Four fuckin' years?!

HENRY

It's not your call, David. We've got to let the authorities take care of this, him.

DAVID

You don't understand, I've seen him! I've seen him! Two days ago at the park, he... he said "Hi" to me. I've seen him there before.

(breaks down)

No one believed my brother. No one! He slept, bunk below mine. One day I woke up, I looked down... he hanged himself from my bed. He was so light I didn't even notice.

STAN

David. I'm sorry. I'm sorry about your brother, but you can't shoot him.

DAVID

Why the fuck not?!

STAN

Not because of him. You. It'll ruin you. Then people like him will have claimed another life... yours.

DAVID

But if I don't, he'll touch some kid. Better me and him go together.

STAN

Give me the gun David. You can't try and execute him on his lawn.

DAVID

Yes I can!

HENRY

He'll pay for what he's done, you already put a down payment in his thigh. He'll pay the rest himself and burn in hell.

STAN

Why do you want to let him claim your future? You can have a life.

If you don't drop that gun it more or less ends here. A chance at a good one. Why? Over that one time you lost your cool, let emotions control you and let you decide who lives and dies. Can't beat hate with hate.

HENRY

We'll turn him in.

DAVID

For what? He hasn't done anything! I'm the one that shot him, I'll go to jail.

Stan walks over to Todd. David points the gun at Stan as he does.

TODD

(to Stan)

Help. Help me, he's crazy.

He kneels by Todd. Looks at his face, eyes that plead for mercy. Stan shows him none... as he proceeds to punch him, again and again. Face, face, body.

The four close-by onlookers are horrified. Todd passes out.

Stan lifts his bloodied fists at David.

STAN

I'll take the fall. They won't do shit to me. I'm a hero. Everyone here will say I did it. No one will know, you'll just be an onlooker like everyone else.

(to the crowd of three)

Right?

David looks at them for confirmation. They all nod.

DAVID

There are too many people around!

STAN

They're too far away. No one can tell what's really going on. Only the five of us have to have our stories straight.

DAVID

(points at Todd)

Him. He'll tell.

STAN

No, he won't. I promise. I'll make him tell it was me. I'll tell him that you'll go. Won't ever see him again. He'll be too scared to say otherwise.

Stan slaps Todd back to consciousness. Now slaps the fear in him.

STAN

Who did this to you? Who? WHO DID IT?

TODD

You. You, you did.

STAN

(to David)

See? Throw me the gun. I need to put my fingerprints on it and it'll be over.

(David thinks)

Come on! The police are coming. You need to wipe that blood of your knuckles. Do it. You need to go on with your life. They won't do anything to me, not when they find out who he is. They'll thank me, David. They'll thank me for what you did.

Stan rises. David stares as he walks to him.

STAN

They'll... thank me.

David hands over the gun, crying.

STAN

Thank... you.

Stan turns to the group.

STAN

Who's responsible?

NEIGHBOUR #1

You.

NEIGHBOUR #2

You, Stan.

STAN

(to David)

It's over. It's over.

Stan hugs David. Who cries on his shoulder. He pulls him away, looks him straight in the eye, and... decks him on the chin.

David goes down. Stan lifts up the gun, flashing it for all the neighborhood to see.

He looks at Todd's face - unrecognizable, swollen - BAM! BAM! - puts two slugs in his forehead. David jumps up in shock.

STAN

Everyone saw me do it.

Stan turns to David. Grabs his neck.

STAN

All of them. All me.

He lets go. Does a final reconnaissance of the area... only to see Henry on the grass. Down. Passed out. Almost blue.

He dashes over to his lifeless body. Shakes it.

STAN

Henry, Henry!

Checks his pulse. Then his breath.

STAN

He's not breathing.

He clumsily attempts CPR. Looks to the two neighbors.

STAN

Know how to do this shit right?
(Neighbor #1 raises his hand)
Fuckin' take over.

Neighbor #1 kneels to help. Neighbor #2 gets on his phone.

NEIGHBOUR #2

(into the receiver)

911!

Stan kisses his fingers and runs them over Henry's forehead.

People flock to the scene. Stan looks at Henry... then at David and limps back to his house, bringing the gun with him.

The whole neighborhood is out now. Drawing close. Witnessing him fleeing the crime scene.

INT. STAN'S HOUSE/ HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stan comes through the open front door. The noose in the kitchen is in view. Chair under it, ready.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Breathing heavy, gun still held tight, Stan takes out a rectangle box from next to the couch. Removes a girl's dress from it. A beautiful blue one. He rests it over the couch and leaves the room.

Comes back with a chocolate cake. Puts it on the floor.

Exits the room once again.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The basement door is open.

The sound of a lock being turned is audible. FOOTSTEPS. CRACK! - glass breaking is heard.

STAN (O.S.)

Shit!

FOOTSTEPS.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stan re-enters. Bleeding from his elbow.

STAN

(to someone O.S)

Come on. Don't be scared. Please...
don't be.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He returns to the open basement door.

IN THE DOORWAY

A small foot appears. A girl steps out. SARAH (14). She stands timid in the doorway, looking on at the sharply dressed Stan. Hands behind her back.

STAN

It's okay. Come on. You're going
home. Give me your hand.

Stan offers up his hand. She ponders, then accepts and enters the living room.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

They walk in together. Slowly.

POLICE SIRENS come in from the street.

STAN

I want you to see something --

She stops. Stan turns to her - his expression goes blank. Her's tenses up, she grimaces, it grows into an ugly scowl.

Stan looks down - a piece of glass sticks out of his belly. Sarah's hand bleeds as she grips it firmly, nudging it deeper.

She pulls it out. Only to put it back in. Stabbing him, viciously. Never breaking eye contact.

Stan takes a knee. Now eye level with the girl. They look into each other's. She cries.

He lifts his hand - her immediate reaction is to stab him, again.

She twists the object inside his stomach, making him grit his teeth as he places his palm on her cheek. Then runs it over her hair.

STAN

It's... alright. Don't cry.

(she does)

No, no, no. It's okay. Didn't do anything wrong. Not... a thing.

(pets her)

You're... perfect.

Sarah crying stabs him again and again, in a fury.

Finished, she drops the piece of glass. A tear slides off Stan's chin.

STAN

It's alright. Thank... you.

Thank...

He drops. Spread out on the floor, almost smiling, facing the ceiling.

Sarah steps over his body. His pool of blood grows.

She sees the dress and cake. But it's the front door that has her attention. Red and blue lights enter from it.

She takes a few steps toward it. Stops in the doorway, and... EXITS.

FADE OUT.

THE END.