

A SHOT TO THE GUT

FADE IN:

INT. HIGH END APARTMENT - MORNING

The sun beams through white silk drapes and onto the spacious canvas of a hard wood floor.

No furniture. An empty room.

IN THE KITCHEN

...sits a coffee pot and one lone mug. And nothing else.

A perfectly manicured hand branding an expensive Cartier wrist watch reaches for the pot.

The hand belongs to STEPHEN FITZWALTER, early thirties, modestly handsome with a closely trimmed beard and the slicked back hair of a hot shot day trader.

On a marble island countertop rests a framed photo of him and an attractive young woman posed on the grass.

Stephen stares at it with a sense of regret.

He places the picture in a cardboard box filled with similar photos.

EXT. APARTMENT BALCONY - MORNING

A hilltop view of Los Angeles. Stephen leans on a rail and stares out at the awesome sight.

Stephen rests his mug on the rail and carefully removes his Cartier watch. With elbows down, he uses both hands to rub and caress the surface.

He flips it over. To My Love Forever.

Stephen reaches the watch back - ready to throw it over the ravine --

-- but refrains.

Irritated, he grabs his mug, chucks his coffee over the side and ducks back in.

EXT. APARTMENT PARKING LOT - MORNING

Under a protective enclosure sits a vintage 1978 Silver Anniversary Edition Corvette Stingray.

Stephen pops the trunk and loads the very last of his cardboard boxes.

He huffs with irritation and shuts the trunk.

He walks out from under the canopy and stares up at his fancy building in all of its yuppie splendor.

A devlish grin forms as he firmly gives it the finger.

STEPHEN

Have a nice life, scumbags!

EXT. ROUTE 66 - DUSK

The Corvette Stingray zooms along the narrow stretch with nothing but green sagebrush and white desert sand dotting both sides of the flat terrain.

It zips past a lone road sign: TOLERANCE, NM, 15 MILES

INT. CORVETTE - DUSK

Stephen flips through nothing but Spanish speaking channels and gets nowhere fast.

STEPHEN

Kidding me.

He finally stops on an eighties station blasting Billy Idol's "Hot in the City" coming in as clear as day and without the usual static.

STEPHEN

Hot-in-the-ci-taayyy!

RADIO DJ (V.O.)

And that's Billy Idol with Hot in the City, coming in at number twenty three this week on Billboard's Hot One Hundred.

STEPHEN

Oh, come on! Play some music!

Stephen scans some more channels. It stops on yet another eighties classic pumping through the speakers as clear as the day it was recorded.

DARYL HALL (V.O.)

I see you. You see me. Whatchin you blowin' the lines when you're making a scene...Oh, girl...

The radio skips to the next channel.

MEN AT WORK (V.O.)

Who Could It Be Now?

Stephen grins. The radio skips to another channel.

STEVE MILLER (V.O.)
I heat up. I can't cool down. You
got me spinning. Round and round.

STEPHEN
I've died and gone to eighties
heaven.

STEVE MILLER (V.O.)
Round and round and round it goes.
Where it stops... nobody knows.

A car passes and spotlights --

A pair of yellow stickers with the number 78 taped to the
outside glass.

Stephen spots it. Startled and shocked, he cuts the wheel
hard, coasting over the asphalt and ending on a soft
shoulder.

Utterly flabbergasted, he stares at the yellow numbers while
trying to catch his breath.

STEVE MILLER (V.O.)
Abra...Abra-cadabra. I wanna reach
out and grab you...

EXT. CORVETTE - NIGHT

Stephen steps out and stares at his windshield. The yellow
stickers taped to the glass: '78 As if the vehicle was
recently purchased from a used car lot.

He reaches out his hand. About to touch the stickers.

STEVE MILLER (V.O.)
Abra...Abra-cadabra...

And before he can reach them...

...the song abruptly ends. Followed by the engine and
headlights cutting off without warning.

He spins in a frantic circle. Taking inventory of his
whereabouts.

With his back turned, an unusually bright set of HIGH BEAMS
spotlight the back of Stephen's frame.

He turns -- squints at the blinding light. Scared to death,
he slowly moves for his car, and with careful reluctance,
peers inside.

No one there. He dares to crawl back in.

INT. CORVETTE - NIGHT

The number 78 now gone. Stephen gently caresses the inside of the windshield. Not one trace or outline of a sticker. He sucks in a deep breath followed by a long exhale.

He cranks the engine. Nothing but Spanish gibberish blasting from a staticky radio station.

EXT. ROUTE 66 - NIGHT

Within a matter of seconds, the Corvette is nothing but an indistinguishable FLICKER OF WHITE LIGHT on what seems an endless stretch of road.

INT. CORVETTE - NIGHT

Stephen grows weary of the Spanish station and angrily switches off the radio.

STEPHEN

Wake up! Wake up!

Stephen passes a BLACK CHEVY NOVA on the side of the road with the left rear wheel removed and on a jack.

He checks the rearview mirror. The CAR IS GONE.

He fails to notice...

A MAN standing dead center of the road. He is in an untucked fleece and dirty jeans.

Stephen faces forward and is less than half a second from running the man down.

He CUTS A HARD RIGHT --

EXT. ROUTE 66 - NIGHT

The Corvette careens out of control, spinning in and out of the soft shoulder.

INT. CORVETTE - NIGHT

Stephen's eyes wide and tense as he's about to destroy a road sign: TOLERANCE, 10 MILES

He CUTS A HARD LEFT --

-- dodging the sign and drifting onto the highway.

As the dust clears, he checks his rearview mirror.

No one there. He stares ahead.

A BRIGHT SET OF HIGH BEAMS barrel toward Stephen's bumper at an unsafe speed.

STEPHEN

Where the hell did you come from?!

The car HONKS. Over and over.

Stephen HITS THE GAS.

He looks ahead and spots the tall and bright lights of A VERY LARGE GAS STATION.

And here come the HIGH BEAMS on Stephen's tail.

The car once again HONKS like crazy.

And Steven once again HITS THE GAS.

But the car doesn't let up and RAMS HIS BUMPER.

Stephen CUTS A HARD RIGHT into the busy lot of the multi-pump gas station.

EXT. RACETRACK GAS STATION - NIGHT

Stephen comes to a SCREECHING HALT seconds before running over a gas pump and scares the absolute hell out of everyone watching.

After a few moments, he steps out and slowly drags his feet toward the door. He checks across the lot and spots --

A BLACK NOVA with smoke pouring from the exhaust.

Stephen stands in the center of the lot and throws his best tough guy gaze at the phantom driver.

HONK!

Stephen turns and faces a pair of headlights. He continues toward the door as the car passes.

INT. RACETRACK GAS STATION - NIGHT

Stephen steps to the front counter, carelessly tosses down his keys next to the register.

This catches the attention of A CLERK sitting on a roller cart, packing away cartons of cigarettes.

The Clerk stands.

CLERK

Yeah?

STEPHEN

Is there a motel anywhere near here?

CLERK

Yeah. Well. No.

Stephen shuts his eyes to this. More bad news.

CLERK

We're about eight miles outside of Tolerance. Which technically don't have a motel with it being remodeled and all. But there is a place about forty miles West of here. It's real nice. I know the owners.

STEPHEN

No. See. I don't wanna go West. I just came from there.

CLERK

Well. Gee. I couldn't really tell you then. You gotta van or a truck or somethin'?

Stephen rubs his sore temples.

STEPHEN

No, I don't have a truck or a van.

The Clerk stares out the window and spots his shiny and restored Corvette at the pump.

CLERK

Whoa. That your Vette, man? Badass.

STEPHEN

Yeah. Listen. What's the next town after Tolerance?

CLERK

You ain't checked Travelocity or nothin like that?

STEPHEN

I can't get a signal. How am I gonna check Travelocity?

The Clerk gives him a dumb look and nods with understanding.

CLERK

Good point. Well, there's Truth or
Consequences. But you're looking
at another hundred fifty mile.

Stephen huffs out loud and heads for the back of the store.

The Clerk spots his keys next to the register. He snags
them up just as --

Stephen opens a men's room door and dips inside.

INT. RACETRACK MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Stephen walks in. All alone. He heads for an open stall
and locks himself inside.

IN THE STALL

Stephen unzips and takes a seat. He pulls out his smart
phone and hits the CHROME APP.

He is immediately taken to a webpage where an old newspaper
headline fills the screen: TOLERANCE MAN CARJACKED, SHOT
AND LEFT FOR DEAD

STEPHEN

A signal. It's a miracle.

Under the headline are various still shots of a BLACK CHEVY
NOVA on the side of the highway.

All taken by the police and news media.

Stephen clicks on an image as it blows up FULL SCREEN.

He swipes left and spots the bloody body of JAMES JEBB "JJ"
BERRY laying dead and sprawled out on the front seats of
the Black Chevy Nova.

EXT. ROUTE 66 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

JJ stands in the middle of the road. In a fleece shirt and
dirty jeans.

INT. RACETRACK MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Stephen sees the same fleece shirt and jeans on the man in
the picture. Only this time his clothes and arms are
caked with coagulated blood.

He hears the clacking of thick heels hitting the tile floor and turns his attention to a pair of feet stopping in front of the stall door.

STEPHEN

Hello?

No answer. The feet don't move.

And before he knows what's happening, his smart phone has disappeared from his hand.

Stephen checks around the bowl. Nothing on the immediate floor or anywhere near him.

The feet enter the stall next to him.

Totally freaked out, Stephen throws on his trousers, zips up and hurries out.

INT. JJ'S AUTO WRECKAGE - DAY

Stephen steps out of the bathroom and back onto the main floors of the convenience store. The place is nothing like he remembered.

And the sunlight of a hot summer's day pour through the windows like laser beams.

Over the speakers, another eighties classic grabs Stephen's attention.

TONI BASIL (V.O.)

Hey, Mickey, you're so fine!

You're so fine, you blow my mind!

Hey, Mickey!

Stephen spots what looks like a mobile ice cream cart on the floor near the restrooms.

He opens a sliding glass door as thick white fog from the cooler hits his face.

He reaches inside and pulls out a sixteen ounce long neck Coca-Cola from a foregone era.

FRED (O.S.)

You fall in, JJ?

Stephen peeks around an endcap and checks the front end counter and register.

A real country boy clerk named FRED peruses Mad magazine and pops some gum from the comfort of his stool.

FRED

You was in there forever.

STEPHEN

Excuse me?

FRED

Excuse me is right. Wanna keep
that door closed back there?

Stephen turns, faces the restroom door. It's a single door
unisex restroom with one bowl.

He shuts it. As he turns back, he spots what looks like
movie posters hanging in the corner of the store.
Gremlins. Ghostbusters. A Nightmare on Elm Street.

A couple of shelves full of old VHS movies with an orange
star banner overhead: ALL RENTALS \$1.50

FRED

By the way, we're already three
hundred something in the hole on
those damn video tapes. Told you
it was a bad idea renting tapes to
transients.

Fred's attention drawn to the parking lot.

FRED

We got company, JJ. Get back on
the clock.

Stephen steps closer to the front windows and spots his
CORVETTE STINGRAY near the front and with the engine
running and both doors swung open.

The NUMBER 78 on the windshield.

He fails to notice --

THREE PUNK ROCKERS WITH MOHAWKS rushing the front door with
sawed off shotguns and pistols.

MOHAWK #1

Heads up! Cash on the counter!

He slaps the countertop -- WHAP!

Fred nervously fumbles with the regisiter and snags up the
loose cash. He checks with Stephen.

FRED

(to Stephen)

Thanks for your help, old partner.

The three mohawks turn and face --

Stephen standing next to a sunglass rack.

MOHAWK #2

Oh he can't help you. He's already
dead.

MOHAWK #3

Aint that right, JJ?

Stephen slowly backs up. He turns to a small mirror on a
sunglass rack and catches a glimpse of a different man's
face staring back at him.

He turns side to side, rubs his face as the reflection
mimics his every move.

The three mohawks laugh.

Stephen looks down. His lower shirt is dripping blood all
over the tile.

He faces a FULL LENGTH MIRROR hanging on a back wall and the
image of JAMES JJ BERRY glances back with a fresh gunshot
wound to the belly.

JJ desperately reaches out to Stephen from inside the
mirror. He moves closer and closer.

JJ

Help...meeee...

Stephen steps closer...

JJ's arm reaches through the glass like liquid metal.

Stephen grabs his hand.

EXT. ROUTE 66 - DAY (FLASHBACK)

All three mohawks stand before a very confused Stephen not
sure of his whereabouts. He spots his Corvette parked
behind the three punks.

He looks behind him. A Black Chevy Nova with the left rear
wheel gone and sitting on a jack.

As he turns back --

MOHAWK #1 shoots him in the stomach with his thirty eight
special.

Stephen tumbles back...

INT. JJ'S AUTO WRECKAGE - DAY

Stephen tumbles and knocks over a postcard rack on his way
to the floor.

INT. RACETRACK GAS STATION - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Stephen looks up. He's back to where he started as the busy Racetrack is full of customers with a long line waiting at the front end.

A WOMAN hovers over him.

WOMAN

Are you okay?

Stephen stands, brushes himself off.

STEPHEN

I'm fine, thank you.

EXT. JJ'S AUTO WRECKAGE - NIGHT

As Stephen steps outside, he finds the lot completely void of cars and people.

He turns, faces the store. The building is long abandoned with dirt and mud covering shattered windows. An old sign above a drive-in garage reads: JJ'S AUTO WRECKAGE AND DAIRY MARKET.

INT. JJ'S AUTO WRECKAGE - NIGHT

Stephen steps back inside and finds the front counter area abandoned with rows of empty shelves hanging on the back wall.

A FLICKERING WHITE LIGHT draws his attention toward the center of the room.

A WOMAN and her TWO KIDS sit on a beat up couch and watch an older model television. All three are sad.

The refrigeration units that used to line these walls with cold beers and sodas now sit empty.

Stephen spots a couple of framed pictures hanging on a mostly desolate wall.

He gets a closer look but the room is much too dark. So he snags both images and walks them into the BEAMING LIGHT of the television set.

On one of the pictures stands JJ with his wife and kids.

On the other picture is JJ standing next to his other pride and joy: A 1978 Anniversary Edition Corvette Stingray. The number '78 still taped to the windshield.

EXT. JJ'S AUTO WRECKAGE - NIGHT

Stephen steps outside just as JJ comes racing to the front in his Corvette Stingray.

JJ crawls out. All eyes on the front of this dilapidated and abandoned garage. A true hopelessness about him.

STEPHEN

I don't know how this works. If you're supposed to hear me or not. But I know you're hurting. You're having trouble letting go of some things. I get it.

JJ ignores him. He simply walks the lot in front of the old garage and reminisces.

STEPHEN

None of what happened to you makes sense. That's what makes this all the more harder. But like the man says. Life goes on. Even if that life doesn't include us anymore. But it's okay to let go now. Because they have.

JJ cracks a hopeful smile, walks to his Corvette, darts out of the lot and vanishes into the night. Stephen watches and grins with accomplishment.

EXT. RACETRACK GAS STATION - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Stephen standing dead center of the lot and blocking a line of traffic attempting to leave.

He hurries under the store's awning just as the woman from inside steps through the electric doors with a bag full of goodies.

Stephen pulls out his wallet. He stares at a professional portrait of him and his ex.

The woman spots him, smiles and approaches.

WOMAN

You sure you're okay?

STEPHEN

No. But I will be.

He pulls out the photo and dumps it in a trash bin.

FADE OUT.

